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**The Boy Land Boomer Dick  
Arbuckle's Adventures in  
Oklahoma**

Ralph Bonehill

# Imprint

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**"The youth had to cling fast around his neck to save himself a lot of broken bones"**



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

*"The youth had to cling fast around his neck to save himself a lot of broken bones"*

*"The next instant the boy was hurled headlong into the boiling and foaming current"*

*"Dick had let fly the jagged stone, taking him directly in the forehead and keeling him over like a tenpin"*

*"In a second more the two men were in a hand-to-hand encounter"*



## **PREFACE.**

"The Boy Land Boomer" relates the adventures of a lad who, with his father, joins a number of daring men in an attempt to occupy the rich farming lands of Oklahoma before the time when that section of our country was thrown open to settlement under the homestead act.

Oklahoma consists of a tract of land which formerly formed a portion of the Indian Territory. This region was much in dispute as early as 1884 and 1885, when Captain "Oklahoma" Payne and Captain Couch did their best to force an entrance for the boomers under them. Boomers remained in the neighborhood for years, and another attempt was made to settle Oklahoma in 1886, and up to 1889, when, on April 22, the land was thrown open to settlement by a proclamation of the President. The mad rush to gain the best claims followed, and some of these scenes are related in the present volume.

The boomers, who numbered thousands, had among them several daring and well-known leaders, but not one was better known or more daring than the leader who is known in these pages as Pawnee Brown. This man was not alone a great Indian scout and hunter, but also one who had lived much among the Indians, could speak their language, and who had on several occasions acted as interpreter for the Government. He was well beloved by his followers, who relied upon his judgment in all things.

To some it may seem that the scenes in this book are overdrawn. Such, however, is not the fact. There was much of roughness in those days, and the author has continually found it necessary to tone down rather than to exaggerate in penning these scenes from real life.

CAPTAIN RALPH BONEHILL.



# THE BOY LAND BOOMER

## CHAPTER I.

### DICK ARBUCKLE'S DISCOVERY.

"Father!"

The call came from a boy of sixteen, a bright, manly chap, who had just awakened from an unusually sound sleep in the rear end of a monstrous boomer's wagon.

The scene was upon the outskirts of Arkansas City, situated near the southern boundary line of Kansas and not many miles from the Oklahoma portion of the Indian Territory.

For weeks the city had been filling up with boomers on their way to pre-empt land within the confines of Oklahoma as soon as it became possible to do so.

The land in Oklahoma had for years been in dispute. Pioneers claimed the right to go in and stake out homesteads, but the soldiers of our government would not allow them to do so.

The secret of the matter was that the cattle kings of that section controlled everything, and as the grazing land of the territory was worth hundreds of thousands of dollars to them they fought desperately to keep the pioneers out, delaying, in every manner possible, legislation which tended to make the section an absolutely free one to would-be settlers.

But now the pioneers, or boomers as they were commonly called, were tired of waiting for the passage of a law which they knew must come sooner or later, and they intended to go ahead without legal authority.

It was a dark, tempestuous night, with the wind blowing fiercely and the rain coming down at irregular intervals. On the grassy plain were huddled the wagons, animals and trappings of over two hundred boomers. Here and there flared up the remains of a campfire,

but the wind was blowing too strongly for these to be replenished, and the men had followed their wives and children into the big, canvas-covered wagons, to make themselves as comfortable as the crowded space permitted.

It was the rattle of the rain on the canvas covering of the wagon which had aroused the boy.

"I say father!" he repeated. "Father!"

Again there was no reply, and, kicking aside the blanket with which he had been covered, Dick Arbuckle clambered over some boxes piled high in the center of the vehicle to where he had left his parent resting less than three hours before.

"Gone!" cried the lad in astonishment. "What can this mean? What could take him outside in such a storm as this? Father!"

He now crawled to the opening at the front of the wagon and called at the top of his voice. Only the shrieking of the wind answered him. A dozen times he cried out, then paused to strike a somewhat damp match and light a smoky lantern hanging to the front ashen bow of the turn-out's covering. Holding the light over his head he peered forth into the inky darkness surrounding the boomer's temporary camp.

"Not a soul in sight," he mused. "It must be about midnight. Can something have happened to father? He said he felt rather strange in his head when he went to bed. If only Jack Rasco would come back."

From the front end of the wagon Dick Arbuckle shifted back to the rear. Here the same dreary outlook of storm, mud and flapping canvases presented itself. Not so much as a stray dog was in sight, and the nearest wagon was twenty feet away.

"I must find out where he is. Something is wrong, I feel certain of it."

Thus muttering to himself the youth hunted up his overcoat and hat, put them on, and, lantern in hand, swung himself into the sea of half-submerged prairie grass, and stalked over to the other wagon just mentioned.

"Mike Delaney!" he cried, kicking on the wagon wheel with the toe of his boot; "Mike Delaney, have you seen my father anywhere?"

"Sure, an' Moike Delaney is not here, Dick Arbuckle," came in a female voice. "He's gone off wid Pawnee Brown, and there's no tellin' whin he'll be back. Is yer father gone?"

"Yes, and I don't know where," and now Dick stepped closer, as the round and freckled face of Rosy Delaney peered forth from a hole in the canvas end. "He went to bed when I did, and now he's missing."

"Saints preserve us! Mebbe the Injuns scalped him now, Dick!" came in a voice full of terror.

"There are no Indians around here, Mrs. Delaney," answered the youth, half inclined to laugh. "But he's missing, and it's mighty strange, to say the least."

"He was sick, too, wasn't he?"

"Father hasn't been real well for a year. He left New York very largely in the hope that this climate would do him some good."

"Moike was sayin' his head troubles him a good bit."

"So it does, and that's why I am so worried. When he gets those awful pains he is apt to walk away and keep right on without knowing where he is going."

"Poor mon! Oi wisht Oi could help yez. Mebbe Moike will be back soon. Ain't Jack Rasco about?"

"No, he is off with Pawnee Brown, too. Rasco and Brown have been looking over the trails leading to Oklahoma. They are bound to outwit the United States cavalry, for the boomers have more right to that land than the cattle kings, and right is always might in the end."

"Especially wid Pawnee on the end o' it, Dick. He's a great mon, is Pawnee, only it do be afther givin' me the shivers to hear him spake the Pawnee language loike he was a rale Injun. Such a foine scout as he is has no roight to spake such a dirty tongue. How illegant it would be now if he could spake rale Oirish."

"His knowledge of the Indian tongue has helped both him and our government a good deal, Mrs. Delaney. But I mustn't stop here talking. If my father— —"

A wild, unearthly shriek cut short further talk upon Dick Arbuckle's part. It came from the darkness back of the camp and caused Mrs. Delaney to draw back and tumble to the bottom of her house on wheels in terror.

"It's the Banshee— —" she began, when Dick interrupted her.

"It's Pumpkin Bill. I'd know his voice a mile off," he declared. "Somebody ought to send him back to where he belongs. Creation, what a racket!"

Nearer and nearer came the voice, rising and falling with the wind. The shrill shrieking penetrated to every wagon, and head after head was thrust out of the canvases to see what it meant. In another minute Pumpkin Bill, the dunce of the boomer's camp, "a nobody from nowhar," to use Cal Clemmer's words, came rushing along, hatless and with his wild eyes fairly starting from their sockets.

"Save me! a ghost!" he yelled, swinging his hands over his head. "A ghost full of blood! Oh, oh! I'm a dead boy! I know I am! Stop him from following me!"

"Pumpkin!" ejaculated Dick, striding up and catching the fleeing lad by the arm. "Hold on; what's this racket about?"

The dunce paused, then stood stock still, his mouth opening to its widest extent. He was far from bright, and it took him several seconds to put into words what was passing in his mind.

"About, about?" he repeated. "Dick Arbuckle! Oh, dear me! I've seen your father's ghost!"

"Pumpkin!"

"Yes, I did. Hope to die if I didn't. I was just coming to camp from town. Some men kept me, and made me sing and dance for them— you know how I can sing—tra-la-la-da-do-da-bum! They promised me a dollar, but didn't give it to me. I was running to get out of the wet when I plumped into something fearful—a ghost! Your father, covered with blood, and groaning and moaning, 'Robbed, robbed;

almost murdered!" That's what the ghost said, and he caught me by the hand. See, the blood is there yet, even though I did try to wash it off in the rain. Oh, Dick, what does it mean?"

"It means something awful has happened, Pumpkin, if your story is true — —"

"Hope to die if it ain't," and the dunce crossed his heart several times. Suddenly, to keep up his courage, he burst into a wild snatch of song:

"A big baboon  
Glared at the moon,  
And sang la-la-la-dum!  
'Come down to me  
And I will be  
Your lardy-dardy — —"

"Stop it, Pumpkin," interrupted Dick. "Come along with me."

"To where?"

"To where you saw my father."

"Not for a million dollars—not for a million million!" cried the half-witted boy. "It wasn't your father; it was a ghost, all covered with blood!" and he shrank back under the Delaney wagon.

"It was my father, Pumpkin; I am sure of it. He is missing, and something has happened to him. Perhaps he fell and hurt himself. Come on."

The dunce stopped short and stared.

"Missing, is he? Then it wasn't a ghost. La-la-dum! What a joke. Will you go along, too?"

"Of course."

"And take a pistol?"

"Yes."

"Poor mon, Oi thrust he is not very much hurted," broke in Rosy Delaney, who had been a close listener to the foregoing. "If he is,

Dick Arbuckle, bring him here, an' it's Rosy Delaney will nurse him wid th' best of care."

As has been said, many had heard Pumpkin Bill's wild cries, but now that he had quieted down these boomers returned to their couches, grumbling that the half-witted lad should thus be allowed to disturb their rest.

In a minute Dick Arbuckle and Pumpkin were hurrying along the road the dunce had previously traveled. The rain was letting up a bit, and the smoky lantern lit up the surroundings for a circle thirty feet in diameter.

"Here is where I met him," said Pumpkin, coming to a halt near the edge of a small stream. "There's the hat he knocked off my head." He picked it up. "Oh, dear me! covered with blood! Did you ever see the like?"

Dick was more disturbed than ever.

"Which way did he go?"

"I don't know."

"Didn't you notice at all, Pumpkin? Try to think."

"Nary a notice. I ran, that's all. It looked like a bloody ghost. I'll dream about it, I know I will."

To this Dick did not answer. Getting down on his knees in the wet he examined the trail by the lantern's rays. The footsteps which he thought must be those of his father led around a bend in the stream and up a series of rocks covered with moss and dirt. With his heart thumping violently under his jacket he followed the footprints until the very summit of the rocks was gained. Then he let out a groan of anguish.

And not without cause. Beyond the summit was a dark opening fifteen feet wide, a hundred or more feet long and of unfathomable depth. The footprints ended at the very edge of this yawning abyss.

## CHAPTER II.

### DICK ON A RUNAWAY.

"If he fell down here he is dead beyond all doubt!"

Such were Dick Arbuckle's words as he tried in vain to pierce the gloom of the abyss by flashing around the smoky lantern.

"Gosh! I reckon you're right," answered Pumpkin in an awe-struck whisper. "It must be a thousand feet to the bottom of that hole!"

"If I had a rope I might lower myself," went on the youth, with quiet determination. "But without a rope— —"

A pounding of hoof-strokes on the grassy trail below the rocks caused him to stop and listen attentively.

"Somebody is coming. I'll see if I can get help!" he cried, and ran down to the trail, swinging his lantern over his head as he went. In ten seconds a horseman burst into view, riding a beautiful racing steed. The newcomer was a well-known leader of the land boomers, who rejoiced in the name of Pawnee Brown.

"Ai! Pawnee Brown!" cried Dick, and at once the leader of the land boomers came to a halt.

"What is it, Arbuckle?" he asked kindly.

"My father is missing, and I have every reason to fear that he has tumbled into an opening at the summit of yonder rocks."

"That's bad, lad. Missing? Since when?"

Dick's story was soon told, and Pawnee Brown at once agreed to go up to the opening and see if anything could be done. "It's the Devil's Chimney," he explained. "If he went over into it I'm afraid he's a goner."

A lariat hung from the pommel of the scout's saddle, and this he took in hand as he dismounted. Soon he stood by the edge of the black opening, while Dick again waved the lantern.

"You and the dunce can lower me by the lariat. I don't believe the opening is more than fifty feet deep," said Pawnee Brown.

The lariat was quickly adjusted around the edge of a smooth rock, and with his foot in a noose and the lantern in hand, the scout was lowered into the depths of the opening.

Down and down he went, the light finding nothing but bare, rocky wall to fall upon. Presently the lowering process ceased.

"We have reached the end of the lariat," called out Dick.

Hardly had he spoken when a fearful thing happened. There was a snap and a whirr, and Dick and Pumpkin went flat on their backs, while ten feet of the lariat whirled loosely over their heads.

The improvised rope had broken.

"Gone!" gasped Dick. "Merciful heavens!"

He scrambled up and looked over the edge of the opening. The lantern had been dashed into a thousand pieces, and all was dark below.

"Pawnee Brown!" he cried, and Pumpkin joined in with a cry which was fairly a shriek.

The opening remained as silent as a tomb. Again and again both called out. Then Dick turned to his companion.

"This is awful, Pumpkin. Something must be done. I shall mount his mare and ride back to camp and get help. For all I know to the contrary both my father and Pawnee Brown are lying dead below."

"I shan't stay here alone," shivered the half-witted boy. Then, before Dick could stop him, he set off at the top of his speed, yelling discordantly as he went.

"Poor fool, he might have ridden with me," thought Dick.

He was already rushing down to the trail. Now he remembered that he had heard a strange noise down where Pawnee Brown's beautiful mare, Bonnie Bird, had been tethered—a noise reaching him just before the lariat had parted. What could that mean?

He reached the clump of trees where Bonnie Bird should have been. The mare was gone!

"Broken away!" he groaned. "Was ever such luck before! Everything is going wrong tonight! Poor father; poor Pawnee Brown! I must leg it to camp just as Pumpkin is doing. Hullo!"

He had started to run, but now he pulled up short. Grazing in the wet grass not a dozen steps away was a bay horse, full and round, a perfect beast. At first Dick Arbuckle thought he must be dreaming. He ran up rubbing his eyes. No, it was no dream; the horse was as real as a horse could be. He was bridled, but instead of a saddle wore only a patch of a blanket.

"It's a Godsend," he murmured. "I don't know whom you belong to, old boy, but you've got to carry me back to camp, and that, too, at a licking gait, you understand?"

The horse pricked up his ears and gave a snort. In a trice Dick was on his back and urging him around in the proper direction. He was a New York boy, not much used to riding, and the management of such a beast as this one did not come easy. The horse arose upon his forelegs and nearly pitched Dick over his head, and the youth had to cling fast around his neck to save himself a lot of broken bones.

"Whoa, there! Gee Christopher, what a tartar! Whoa, I say! If only I had a whip!" he panted, as the horse began to move around on a pivot. "Now, why can't you act nice, when I'm in such dire need of your services? If you don't stop—Whoa! whoa!"

For the horse had suddenly stopped pivoting and started off like a streak, not up or down the trail, but across a stretch of prairie grass. On and on he went, the bit between his teeth and gaining speed at every step. In vain Dick yelled at him, kicked him and banged him on the head. It was of no use, and he had to cling on for dear life.

"I might as well let him go and jump for it," he thought at last, when nearly a mile had been covered. "It's just as useless to try to stop him as it would be to stop a limited express. If I jump off—but I won't, now!"

For the prairie had been left behind, and the bay was tearing along a rocky trail leading to goodness knew where, so Dick thought. A jump now would mean broken bones, perhaps death.

He clung tighter than ever, and tried to calm the horse by speaking gently to him.

At first the beast would not listen, but finally, when several miles had been covered he slackened up, and at last dropped into a walk. He was covered with foam, and now he was quite willing to be led.

"You old reprobate!" muttered Dick, as he tightened his hold on the reins. "Now where in the name of creation have you brought me to, and how am I to find my way back to camp from here?"

Sitting upright once again, the youth tried to pierce the darkness. The rain had stopped, only a few scattering drops falling upon himself and the steaming animal, but the darkness was as great as ever.

On two sides of him were forest lands, on the third a slope of rocks and on the fourth a stretch of dwarf grass. The trail, if such it could be called, ran along the edge of the timber. Should he follow this? He moved along slowly, wondering whether he was right or wrong.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

It was a military challenge, coming out of the darkness. Dick stopped the horse, and presently made out the form of a man on horseback, a cavalryman.

"I'm a friend who has lost the way," began the youth, when the cavalryman let out a cry of surprise.

"Tucker's horse, hang me if it isn't! Boy, where did you get that nag? Tucker, Ross, come here! I've collared one of the horse-thieves!"

In a moment more there came the clatter of horses' hoofs through the timber, and Dick found himself surrounded by three big and decidedly ugly-looking United States cavalymen—troopers who belonged to a detachment set to guard the Oklahoma territory from invasion.

"A boy and a boomer!" ejaculated the fellow named Tucker. "I saw the kid over near Arkansas City a couple of days ago. And riding Chester, too! Git off that hoss, before I kick you off!"