

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup
Mommsen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer George
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Melville Grimm Jerome Rilke Bebel Proust
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy
Storm Casanova Lessing Tersteegen Gilm Gryphius
Chamberlain Langbein Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates
Brentano Strachwitz Claudius Schiller Bellamy Schilling Kralik Gibbon Tschchow
Katharina II. von Rußland Gerstäcker Raabe Gleim Vulpius
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Morgenstern Goedicke
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Kleist
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Mörike Musil
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus Moltke
Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo
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Nietzsche Nansen Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz Ringelntz
von Ossietzky Marx vom Stein Lawrence Irving
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Comrades of the Saddle The Young Rough Riders of the Plains

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COMRADES OF THE SADDLE

Or

The Young Rough Riders of the Plains

BY

FRANK V. WEBSTER

ILLUSTRATED

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COMRADES OF THE SADDLE

CHAPTER I

AN EXCITING ESCAPE

Twilight was settling on the land. The forms of trees and houses loomed big and black, their sharp outlines suggesting fanciful forms to the minds of two boys hurrying along the road which like a ribbon wound in and out among the low hills surrounding the town of Bramley, in south-western Ohio.

As the darkness increased lights began to twinkle from the windows of the distant farmhouses.

"We're later than usual, Tom," said the larger of the two boys. "I hope we'll get home before father does."

"Then let's hurry. The last time we kept supper waiting he said we'd have to give up playing ball after school if we couldn't get home before meal time."

"And that means that we won't make the team and will only get a chance to substitute," returned the first speaker.

As though such a misfortune were too great to be borne, the two young ball players broke into a dog trot.

The boys were brothers, Tom and Larry Alden. Larry, the larger, was sixteen and Tom was a year younger. Both were healthy and strong and would have been thought older, so large were they.

The only children of Theodore Alden, a wealthy farmer who lived about three miles from Bramley, unlike many brothers, they were chums. They were prime favorites, and their popularity, together with their natural ability and cool-headedness at critical moments, made them leaders in all sports.

As it grew darker and darker, the brothers quickened their pace. Talking was out of the question, so fast were they going. But as they

rounded a turn in the road, which enabled them to see the lights in their home, a quarter of a mile away, Larry gasped:

"There's no light in the dining-room yet. Father hasn't gotten home!"

"Come on then for a final spurt," returned Tom.

Willingly Larry responded, and the boys dashed forward as though they were just starting out instead of ending a two-mile run.

On the right-hand side of the road a fringe of bushes hedged a swamp.

The patter of the boys' feet on the hard clay road was the only sound that broke the stillness.

Their goal, with the bright lights shining from the windows, was only about three hundred yards away when suddenly from the direction of the swamp sounded a sullen snarl.

"Did you hear anything?" asked Larry.

"I thought so."

As though to settle all doubt, the growl rang out again. This time it was nearer and sounded more ominous.

For a moment the boys looked at each other, then, as with one accord, turned their heads and looked in the direction whence the startling noise had come.

Just as they did so there came another howl, and an instant later a big black form, for all the world like a large dog, leaped from the bushes into the road.

"Quick, quick!" cried Larry, seizing his brother's arm and pulling him along, for Tom had slackened his speed, as though fascinated by the sight of the strange animal. "It must be that wolf father read about, the one that got away when the circus train was passing through Husted."

And, Larry was right. The animal was indeed a wolf that had escaped from its cage through the door, the fastener on which had been jarred out of place by the motion of the train, and had leaped to liberty.

The circus people had reported the loss as soon as it had been discovered and it had been duly announced in the papers.

Mr. Alden had read about it, but all had laughed at the thought of a wolf in placid Ohio and dismissed the story as a circus man's joke.

Rejoicing in its freedom, the beast had wandered about till it struck the swamp and now the air brought to its keen nose the scent of the boys passing. Ravenously hungry, the wolf hastened toward the lads.

As it bounded into the road the glare from the lights of the farmhouse momentarily blinded it and it stood blinking.

But only for an instant. Instinctively realizing that it must catch them before they reached the lights, the wolf uttered a savage snarl and bounded forward.

Larry's words to his brother had roused the boy, and together they were racing toward the welcome lights of their home.

But the wolf with its leaps covered three yards to their one, and as the older of the boys looked over his shoulder he saw that the beast was gaining on them.

Fifty yards ahead was the house and thirty yards behind them was the wolf.

Well did the boys know they could not win the race. But they did not lose their heads.

"Father! Harry!" yelled Larry. "Joe! The wolf! the wolf! Get the rifle!"

"The wolf! the wolf!" added Tom. "Shoot the wolf!"

The yells, breaking the stillness of the night, startled Mrs. Alden and the hired men, who were awaiting the coming of Mr. Alden and the boys.

Unable to distinguish the words, the hired men rushed to the door and threw it open. Peering along the path of the light, they saw the forms of the boys.

"Quick! The rifle! The wolf's after us!" shouted Tom.

Fortunately Mr. Alden always kept a loaded rifle on a rack on the kitchen wall with which to shoot foxes that attempted to raid his hen-roost.

Hastily the hired man named Joe sprang for the weapon, seized it and dashed from the door, shouting:

"Where is it? Where is it?"

Before the boys could answer, however, his keen eyes espied the black form.

Joe had often amused himself shooting at a target with Larry and Tom and was able to make four bull's-eyes out of five, but never before had the opportunity to aim at a live mark come to him, and as he raised the rifle his hands trembled.

"Shoot! shoot!" yelled Larry. "No matter if you don't hit it, shoot!"

Bang! went the gun, and as the report of the firearm died away the wolf was seen to stagger and fall. Soon the beast arose again, but by that time the hired man was ready for another shot. This finished the beast, and with a yelp it rolled over and breathed its last.

CHAPTER II

MR. ALDEN BRINGS NEWS

Exhausted by their run and the excitement of their escape, Larry and Tom staggered into the house and dropped into chairs, their mother and the hired men pressing about and plying them with questions. But it was several minutes before the boys recovered their breath sufficiently to speak.

Tom was the first to get over his fright, and, as soon as he could control his voice, gave a vivid account of their attempt to reach home before their father, their hearing the uncanny sound from the swamp, the sudden appearance of the wolf behind them and their desperate race to get to the house before the beast should overtake them.

"It's a good thing I practiced shooting last winter," exclaimed Joe as the story ended. He was proud of what he had accomplished.

"There's father," declared Mrs. Alden as a "whoa!" sounded from the yard.

Quickly Larry picked up a lantern, and, followed by all but his mother, went out to help unhitch the horses and take them into the barn.

"What's been going on?" demanded the farmer as the others joined him. "I heard the rifle shot."

Eagerly they all started to tell.

"Don't all speak at once," interposed Mr. Alden. "You're talking so loud and so fast I can't understand a word. Tom, suppose you explain?"

Excitedly the youngest of the brothers poured forth the tale.

"A wolf in Bramley, eh? Well, well! It's a good thing you boys were so near home. This is sure a great day for happenings. My sons get chased into their own dooryard and I— —"

But as though to arouse their curiosity, the farmer did not finish his sentence.

"You what?" asked Larry.

"Never mind now. Put the horses up. You won't have to feed them; they're too hot. Give them a little hay and then come in to supper."

Knowing it was useless to try to get their father to satisfy their curiosity, for Mr. Alden, though a kindly man, was what his neighbors called "set in his ways," Tom and Larry ran to the barn to open the door, while the hired men followed with the horses.

After rubbing the animals down and giving them some hay, the four returned to the house.

But not until the supper was finished did the farmer deign to impart his news. Then, tilting back in his chair, he looked at his wife and asked:

"How would you like to take the boys to Scotland for the summer, ma?"

"To Scotland?" repeated Mrs. Alden, as though scarcely believing her ears. "Theodore Alden, are you going crazy? What are you talking about?"

"About going to Scotland," answered the farmer, grinning. "And I'm not crazy."

At the mention of the trip, Larry and Tom looked at their parent and then at each other in dismay, for they had planned a different sort of way for spending the summer. But their attention was quickly drawn to their father again.

"I've got to go to Scotland and we might as well all go," he was saying. "The hired men can run the farm for the summer."

Lapsing into silence as he watched the effect of his words, Mr. Alden enjoyed the looks of surprise and curiosity, then continued:

"When I got to Bramley this morning I found a letter from a man named Henry Sargent, a Glasgow lawyer. He said my uncle, Thomas Darwent, had died, leaving me the only heir to his estates. Just

how much money this means I don't know. He said it might be ten thousand pounds."

"Phew! that's fifty thousand dollars," interposed Larry, excitedly.

"Just so," returned his father. "It may be more. I can't make out whether that's the amount of cash or if that's what it will come to when the land and houses are sold."

"You can write and find out," suggested Mrs. Alden.

"I can write, but I doubt if I can find out," chuckled the farmer. "Those lawyer chaps use such high-sounding words, you can't tell what they mean. If Uncle Darwent made me his heir, I'm going to see I get all there is to get. No Scotchman is going to cheat Theodore Alden out of what's his. Soon's I'd made up my mind to that, I drove over to Olmsted and made arrangements to sail from New York on Saturday."

"Saturday? Why that's only three days off!" protested Mrs. Alden.

"Well, it'll only take a night and part of a day to get to New York. That'll give you a day and a half to get ready, ma."

The thought of a trip to Scotland delighted Mrs. Alden, and she immediately began to plan how she could get the boys, her husband and herself ready in such a short space of time.

But Larry and Tom showed no signs of enthusiasm.

Noticing their silence, their father exclaimed:

"Don't you boys want to go? I never knew you so quiet before when a trip was mentioned."

"But the ball game with Husted is on Saturday," said Larry, giving voice to the thought uppermost in his mind. Then, as though he realized that it was foolish to compare a trip to Scotland with a game of baseball, he added: "Besides, Tom and I were planning—that is, we were going to ask you if we couldn't go out to Tolopah and spend the summer with Horace and Bill Wilder on their ranch."

With this announcement of a plan which the brothers had discussed over and over, wondering how they could bring it about, the boys anxiously watched their father's face.

"So that's how the wind blows, eh?" he commented. "Well, ma, what do you say? Shall we take the boys with us or let them go to the ranch?"

With her quiet mother's eye Mrs. Alden caught the appeal on her sons' faces and after a short deliberation replied:

"I think they'd be better off with the Wilders – that is, if they'd like to have the boys visit them."

"Hooray! hooray!" cried the boys together.

"We can telegraph and ask Mr. Wilder tonight," said Larry. "Can we go to Bramley and send the message, father?"

"You can telephone the message to the station and the operator will send it."

And while the boys puzzled over the wording of the telegram, their father re-read his letter from Scotland.

"I've got the telegram ready," Tom exclaimed presently. "Listen." And picking up the piece of paper on which he had been scribbling he read:

"BILL AND HORACE WILDER,

"Tolopah, New Mexico:

"We can leave Saturday to visit you. Do you want us? Answer quick. Father and mother leave Friday for Scotland. We'll have to go, if you don't want us.

"LARRY AND TOM ALDEN."

"You might make it shorter," chuckled the farmer.

"And muddle it all up so they wouldn't understand it any better than you do your lawyer's letter," returned Larry.

"That's a bull's-eye," grinned Joe, whose mind was running to shooting terms.

And as neither their father nor mother interposed any objections, the boys telephoned the message to the operator at Bramley, who promised to send it at once.

CHAPTER III

WORD FROM THE WEST

Anxiously the two brothers waited for some news from the West and in the meantime got ready for the trip to Scotland.

"Oh, I don't want to go to Scotland!" sighed Tom. "I want to go to the ranch."

"Well, we've got to take what comes," answered his brother.

The boys went down to town and said good-by to their school chums. All were sorry they were going away and said they would be missed from the baseball team.

Returning to the farm, their mother met them with a peculiar smile on her face.

"Any news?" they asked eagerly.

"Yes, word came over the telephone a while ago."

"And what is it, ma?"

"The Wilders say to come and — —"

"Hooray!"

"And not to bring a trunk," finished the mother. "The idea of two boys going away all summer without a trunk!"

"Of course we won't need a trunk!" declared Tom. "From the time we reach the ranch till we start for home I don't intend to wear a white shirt or collar."

"When we get out there we can buy some cowboy outfits," said Larry.

"Hooray for Tolopah!"

The receipt of the message, which had been telephoned by the agent at Bramley while the boys were on their way back from the town, was more of a relief than either Larry or Tom was willing to

acknowledge. And they ate their food with greater relish in the certainty that their dream of going to live on a ranch was to come true.

Each was absorbed in his own thoughts when the voice of their father roused them.

"Now that it's decided you are going West," he was saying, "I reckon I'll go over to Olmsted and make sure about our steamer tickets. We won't have any too much time in New York. You boys can go with me if you like."

Glad of the opportunity, the boys finished their dinner quickly and were soon whirling over the hard clay road behind their father's span of spirited horses.

"I've decided to give each of you two hundred and fifty dollars," said Mr. Alden, as though expressing his thoughts out loud.

"Phew! Two hundred and fifty dollars! That's more money than I ever had all at once," exclaimed Tom in delight. "Think of having all that to spend, Larry."

"But you mustn't spend it all," warned their father. "I was going to say when you interrupted, Tom, that out of this money you must pay your railroad tickets, for your berths to sleep in, and for your meals. These things will amount to about seventy-five dollars, I should think."

"But that will still leave us one hundred and seventy-five dollars," declared Tom.

"True enough, but don't forget it will cost seventy-five dollars to get back. If I were you, when you get to the ranch, I would give the money for your return tickets to Mr. Wilder. He'll keep it for you, so you'll be sure not to spend it.

"It's a thing you ought always to remember when you take a trip of any distance—always save enough out of your money to carry you back home"

The boys promised to do as their father suggested, and the farmer continued:

"This will be your first experience with the world, and I don't want you to forget the things your mother and I have taught you.

"It takes bad men as well as good to make up life, and somehow it seems as though the bad men had the easiest time of it. You'll find gamblers and others who live by their wits in Tolopah. They'll try to be pleasant to you because you are young, and when they learn you are from the East they will try to get your money away from you.

"You must also be careful to whom you speak on the train. Under no conditions mention anything about the money you have with you. A lot of people, when they have any substantial sum, either like to show it in some way or to talk about it, and then, if they happen to be robbed of it, they wonder. Remember you can't recognize a thief by his clothes, and lots of the slickest of them travel about the country."

With this and other advice Mr. Alden counseled his sons, and so interested did they become in what he told them about the country of which they were soon to have their first glimpse that they were in Olmsted almost before they knew it.

Going first to the bank, Mr. Alden drew out the money for his sons, obtained a letter of credit for himself and then arranged to purchase his steamship tickets in Pittsburg, whither all four travelers were going together.

When they reached home Mrs. Alden had finished her packing and all was practically ready for the start on the morrow.

After supper the farmer and his wife drove to Bramley to say good-by to their friends, but the two chums decided to stay at home.

Eager to be on their way, it seemed to Larry and Tom that the hours never passed so slowly. They tried to read, but in place of the print on the pages pictures of cowboys and bucking bronchos danced before their eyes, and they soon shut their books.

"Wish we'd gone with father and mother," exclaimed Tom. "It's more stupid here than saying good-by."

But scarcely were the words out of his mouth when the door opened and in came an old friend named Silas Haskins, a former gold miner.

"I got to go to Husted to-morrow, so I came over to-night to say 'so long,'" he said in explanation of his call.

Cordially the boys made him welcome, and the time passed quickly when they had led Silas round to talking about his adventures in the far West.

When at last the gold miner rose to go he said:

"I brung some presents for you. They'll be useful in the West."

And from his pockets Silas drew forth two fine big jackknives and two long pieces of thong.

"They're both the same, so you won't need to quarrel about 'em," he smiled as he handed their presents to each.

The boys were deeply touched by such evidence of friendship from their aged friend and were profuse in their thanks when he again put his hands in his pockets and produced two little bags made of buckskin and attached to a stout strip of the same strong material.

"I don't know how you're intending to carry your money," he began, "but — —"

"Why in our pockets," interrupted Larry.

"That's just what I supposed," grunted the old gold miner. "Now I want you to put it in these two bags and hang 'em round your necks. There can't no one get to 'em without waking you up nor take 'em without giving you a chance to fight."

Readily the boys promised to wear the money bags, and with a hearty handshake with each their aged friend went home.

The night passed quickly and the morning was busily spent in getting the luggage to the station.

As the family waited for the train the dingy little station was alive with people who had come to wish the Aldens pleasant journeys.