

THE GENT FROM AUSTRALIA

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*"Claims He Wants a Bronc Stomper—
and Picks Him a Leather-Puller on
Purpose!"*

THE big bay bronc bucked and bawled as if hell wouldn't hold him while they laced the saddle on, but when Gitaway Griffin eased his young hundred and seventy pounds down into the bucking chute to straddle him, he suddenly stood still.

"If you're aimin' to ride him plumb to Australia," advised Shirt-Tail Jones with a wink, "you better fly a sail!"

He reached through between the chute planks and yanked the young puncher's shirt-tail out.

"Watch out he don't r'ar back an' lay on you," offered Hi Macey. "They're dangerous when they sulk thisaway."

It wasn't Gitaway's first rodeo bronc ride, but the inside of his mouth felt as dry as blanket fuzz under a boar's nest bunk. His Adam's apple travelled lonesomely up and down his sun browned neck like the cud of a cow with the hiccups.

"No need to swaller your cud, kid," grinned Chuck Harrison from his perch on the next saddling chute. "He can't throw you nowheres but off!"

"Aw, shucks, you fellers!" gulped the youngster—meaning he wasn't scared. Which he wasn't. Not of the horse. Nor was it stage-fright because of the crowded



grandstand that made him gulp so solemnly. The real cause of his nervousness was the presence of a certain ruddy cheeked gentleman over there by the fence—Mr. Archibald Quillan, of Australia.

"Ready?" inquired the gate-man.

"If I ain't now I never will be!" gulped Gitaway Griffin. "Turn 'im out!"

In that brief instant before the bay came out, Gitaway's glance picked out the gent from Australia among the watchers along the fence. The rest, being cowfolks, were squatted comfortably down on their bootheels. The stranger stood erect. Beside him Hi Macey, ramrod of the Y Cross, slanted a brief comment upward.

"This bay comin' out," he said, "is the straight buckin' kind. He may jolt a man's backbone to where it'll shove his hat off, but he won't never—wup! Lookit!"

On the bay's reputation, the rider also had expected a straight buckler, but as the horse lunged out, a dusty black hat sailed suddenly under his nose from the left. With a windy snort the bay bronc side-jumped high, wide and so unexpectedly that Gitaway felt fresh air breeze up under his flying shirt tail from where the saddle should have been. His right knee came scooting up to bump the saddle-fork, and for the space of a gnat's wink it looked as if the big bay had him "threwed."



"Oh, I say!" exclaimed Mr. Archibald Quillan mildly. "Why doesn't he grasp the horn, what?"

Hi Macey looked at him in surprise.

"Maybe he's skeered he'll uproot it," he observed dryly.

If this stranger who claimed to own a horse ranch in Australia didn't savvy the bronc-rider tradition about pulling leather who was Hi Macey to enlighten him?

AS FOR the well muscled, cherub faced youngster making the ride, he neither pulled leather, grabbed for the button, nor was thrown, though for the next two or three jumps, as Shirt-Tail Jones put it, "he set on that ol' bronc most ever'wheres but the middle." But before the judge's gun signalled the ride as finished, Gitaway was back firm in the saddle, "engravin' his monogram" on the bay bronc from shoulder to flank. Loose as the ride had looked, he had never even lost a stirrup nor his hat.

After the gun he swung off with a swagger and came roosting back to the chutes.

"Who threwed that hat?" he demanded.

He didn't need to ask. Perched like a human sparrow on top of an empty chute, a swarthy little skinny-beeches with a toy-hatchet face was trying in vain to look innocent in spite of the evidence of a hoof-trampled tatter of black felt that he was trying to reshape into a hat.

"Mico, you dang little ape," Gitaway Griffin addressed him, "do you realize you put near got me throwed?"

"You theenk?" Mico shrugged skinny shoulders, trying hard to look innocent. "Maybe the wind bow theesh at!"

"There wasn't enough wind to stir thistle fuzz. What you tryin' to do—git me my neck busted?"

"You theenk? If I wasn't throw the hat, maybe the horse didn't peetch, an' if he don't peetch, how you gonna show how you can ride? Moreover from that, it wass the wind, she—"

"Never mind," broke in Gitaway, "but hereafter when I'm ridin' you keep your foxy snoot out of it, you savvy?"

"But gee my gosh, Geetaway!" protested Mico. "Alla time when I try for help you, for why make mad weeth me? Joost because—"

"Just because you want me to stick around here all my life, you're tryin' to mess up my chances by gittin' me throwed practickly right in Mr. Quillan's lap. For a week's rent on a plugged nickel, I'd kick your pants!"

Without waiting for an answer to this, Gitaway Griffin strolled over in the direction of the man from Australia.

Mr. Archibald Quillan, off the train at Mesita on account of a railroad washout, had been persuaded to stay a few days and see his first rodeo. Obviously a man of much mazuma but meager words, he had nevertheless let it leak out that he could use a competent "tamer" on his "horse-station" in Australia. Even "down under," it seemed, grass-reared horses were sometimes inclined to "buck-jump." Perhaps one of these American cow-chaps would know how to tame them, eh what? Opportunity for some youthful lad, y'know. Ocean voyage, travel, see the world—all that sort of thing—and quite satisfactory employment at the bally end of it, what?

"Whyn't you stay for the rodeo an' pick you somethin' salty?" he had been advised.

"Why not, indeed!" agreed Mr. Quillan.

Further advice had been generous and not a little contradictory:

"Pick you a peeler with long legs, mister, so's he can hook his spurs together under the hoss if he has to!"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Quillan.

"What you want in a bronc-buster is plenty of heft. Then if he does git kinder up in the air the wind won't blow him off his course comin' down."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Watch their shirt-tails mister. A feller that rides with it tucked in neat, it's a sign he's tender around the seat!"

"Indeed!"

"Remember it's the little fellers that makes the best bronc stompers! Ain't got so much to keep track of!"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Archibald Quillan, who knew nothing about bronc riding, but preferred to wait and see for himself.

AN IMMIGRANT'S orphan, adopted and raised by the Y Cross cow outfit, Gitaway Griffin, at "purt near nineteen," was a full-fuzzed cowhand. But for some time he had been "hankerin' to see the elephant." The lure of a fabulous, unknown world beyond the rim of the range had already prompted him several times to "git away" from the ranch and head out for glory and glamor elsewhere. But each time, thanks mostly to the fox faced little Mexican roustabout called Mico, something or other had interfered to change his mind. To Mico, the Y Cross without Gitaway would be as lonesome as boiled beans without sowbelly. To Gitaway the possibility of a chance to see the elephant via Australia was like the smell of fresh fish to a pet coon.

Now he approached the gent from Australia, sort of battin' his eyes as he had seen Chuck Harrison do when he wanted to appear unconcerned.

"Howdy, Mr. Quillan," he drawled. "I don't suppose you noticed that next to the last ride?"

"Ah," said Mr. Quillan, tamping his pipe.

"The big bay," suggested Gitaway, "the one that like to unskun hisself when they throwed that hat under him."

"Mmm," said Mr. Quillan.

"I don't know if you noticed—nobody got throwed, no stirrups lost, no leather pulled, neither."

Lighting his pipe, Mr. Quillan grunted noncommittally.

"The feller that rode the big bay," Gitaway's round, cherubic face tried to look modest, "was me!"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Quillan.

"About that there job in Australia," Gitaway began, but another bronc and rider popping out of the chutes suddenly took Mr. Quillan's attention.

"Never mind, kid," said a friendly voice at his elbow. "I was watchin' your ride. It was a pip!"

For a second, as he turned to look at the pretty gal in blue silk trick-riding togs, Gitaway's chin just about hit his brisket with a mixture of admiration and bashfulness.

"Aw, shucks, ma'am," he stammered, red as a cook's nose with embarrassment. "It wasn't much of a ride, I reckon. Say—you're Skeeter Bill Tanner's trick-ridin' pardner, Kansas Kitty, ain't you? Golly, I betcha it's fun jest travellin' around to all the rodeos, seein' the world!"

"Well, it buys beans. But—look! Who's the Romeo rakin' that roan? That rooster rides 'em rough, don't he?"

"Yes, ma'am," admitted Gitaway ruefully. "That's Bud Blaylock from the H O. He's the main one tryin' to beat me out for this here trip to Australia. Shirt-Tail Jones says—"

But the gal in blue was gone, hurrying to the track for a turn of exhibition trick riding.

THE Mesita Rodeo was a three day contest. On the second day, both Gitaway and Bud Blaylock drew spinners that came unspooled to the tune of such squalling that to the crowd they seemed wilder than a wolf with his tail afire, though not actually hard to ride. Even Mr. Archibald Quillan clapped his hands a couple of times and said "bravo," as enthusiastic as yesterday's gravy.

Looking like a mosquito under a washpan in the huge new hat Gitaway had bought him, Mica sidled up and poked the Australian gent in the ribs with his sharp little elbow.

"Horse's feathers!" he said disdainfully. "More better than that I ride myself!"

"Indeed?" Mr. Quillan looked at him with interest. "You look like a mere child!"

"You theenk? *Caramba!* When' I am seex year old, already my oncle teach me to ride from nobody's beezness! Spozzin' a horse wass wheez around weeth me, I joost make a teeth-broom weeth hees tail an' brash her tooths! Thees Geetaway, every time he estraddle a bronco, if he don't git some advise from me myself—Creemas, he fall off! Alone by herself he can't ride from notheeng!"

"Indeed!"

"Sure for Mike! The risson I'm told you thees—"

"Howdy, Mr. Quillan!" Gitaway's arrival interrupted him. "Mico tryin' to plant bug-seed in your ear?"

"He was just telling me—ah—what an excellent horseman you are, Griffin! I say—clever, what?" He nodded toward Kansas Kitty doing a headstand down the track.

"Purty," Gitaway sighed. "Now you take it on a bronc—"

But once more Mr. Quillan's attention was elsewhere.

That evening Hi Macey tried to sound out the gent from Australia on his selection.

"This kid of ours is right smart of a rider, eh, Quillan?"

"Ah!" said Mr. Quillan. "Reckless, eh what?"

"Oh, not to speak of. Y'know, Quillan, the kid has sure got his heart set on this trip to Australia. 'Course we'll miss him, but if he wants to go—"

"I say!" interrupted Mr. Quillan. "These lads—none of them attempts to hold on with his hands! Astonishing, what?"

"So's my Aunt Janey on a bicycle," Macey grunted. "But she don't fall off!"

FOR his third day's ride Bud Blaylock drew the same big bay Gitaway had ridden the first day. Gitaway drew a long legged dun called Squatter. Back of the chutes the Y Cross cowboys gathered around Gitaway in a council of war.

"They call this dun 'Squatter'," said Chuck Harrison, "because he squats in the chute an' aims for the moon. If you ain't all set for that first jump, you won't be there to worry about the next 'un, kid."

"I hear he always lands twice," offered Shirt-Tail. "Once with his front feet to jar your teeth loose an' agin with his hand 'uns to make you spit' em out!"

"Quillan seems right smart impressed that you don't never pull leather," said Hi Macey. "Play up to it an' ride' him free—even if he throws yuh!"

"Feesh-worms!" shrugged Mico. "For fi' cents I'm betcha Geetaway weel fall off from a burro!"

By now the crowd had heard of the gent from Australia and the rivalry between Bud Blaylock and Gitaway Griffin for his approval. With an eye to climax in grandstand interest, the Arena Director held the two young rivals' rides

for the last event.

They tossed for turn, and Bud Blaylock came out first. For a few seconds his was a ride to write home about. Then the bay, at the top of his jump, kicked higher still, and as he came down stiff legged on only his front feet, the cantle board of the saddle suddenly caught up with the seat of Blaylock's pants with a smack like a paddle on a fat pig. With visions of his nose plowing the gravel, Bud Blaylock grabbed wildly for the horn, missed it and somersaulted through the air.

"Tryin' to save his meat an' lost his mutton!" grinned Shirt-Tail Jones. "Now, you show 'em kid!"

With a gleam in his eye, Gitaway eased himself down astride the saddle. The dun seemed to sink away under him, squatting on his haunches. Somewhere the gate of one of the empty chutes banged as if swung shut by the wind. A leftover bronc in another chute snorted, but nobody heeded it. Their attention was centered on the youthful rider making ready to come out for the show's last ride—and maybe a trip to Australia.

"Watch that first jump!" warned Chuck Harrison.

"Turn 'im out!" yowled Gitaway. "I'm done glued on!"

For an instant after the gate swung open the dun hunched back against the boards. Then, as if shot from a cannon, he sailed high, a full twenty-five feet out into the arena and came down with all four feet together, stiff legged.

To his rider the dun's curved back seemed suddenly shrunken till the saddle stuck out over both ends. But he was still in it—that was the main thing. The dun's head disappeared between his front legs, "tryin' to git a lizard's view of his navel."

Shucks, it was easy, now! Little ol' stiff legged jumps!

Gitaway yowled and reached for his hat to fan him.

SUDDENLY, out of another chute lunged that left-over bronc. On top of him, like a sparrow on an elephant, screwed down with both spurs in the cinch, both hands choking the horn, was Mico.

"How you theenk thees, Geetaway?" he yelled. "You ride 'urn, I ride 'um—maybe Meester Australia gonna took ever'body, eh!"

Seeing Gitaway reach for his hat, Mico let go the horn with one hand and reached for his. But when he started to wave it, the stiff new brim slipped from his fingers, caught the wind and sailed smack under the belly of Gitaway's dun.

With a snort the dun exploded straight up in the air. What he did from there on nobody exactly knew—not even Gitaway. All he knew was that the saddle was hard to find but smacked him like a sledge hammer whenever he did find it.

He caught a glimpse of Mico choking the horn and yelling as his easy bronc crowhopped around. Three times Gitaway's very insides told him he was "throwed" if he didn't grab the leather, but he bit a hole in his tongue and resisted the temptation. He could hear the roar of the crowd, stirred by such a ride as few of them had ever seen. Above it all he heard Kansas Kitty's voice:

"Stay, kid! You're wiltin' him down!"

Gitaway didn't hear the judge's gun, but all at once the dun quit cold, stood trembling for an instant, then suddenly came unravelled again. The pause, somehow, had thrown Gitaway's rider-rhythm out of gear.

He went off as he had ridden, wild and kickin'. But even as he hit the ground, he knew that he'd made a ride—a ride in a

million—and the roaring cheers of the crowd seemed to agree with him.

As he got up dizzily he saw the gent from Australia hurrying toward him with Hi Macey and heard Hi ask him:

“Well, does the kid git the job?”

“Oh, quite!” Mr. Archibald Quillan sounded enthusiastic for once. “Just the demonstration I’ve been waiting for, what! You don’t think he’s—er—too young?”

“Hell, no! Not if—hey, where the hell you goin’?” Hi Macey caught Quillan by the arm as he started right on past. “Here’s your bronc rider, right here!”

“Not mine!” said Mr. Quillan. “I’ll take the little Mexican chap—the only one of them all with sense enough to hold on!”

He hurried on to where Mico, looking forlorn and forgotten, still clung to his now quieted bronc.

The Y Cross hands looked dazed as the gent from Australia came piloting the little Mexican back.

“Great Godfrey of goofus!” exclaimed Shirt-Tail Jones. “Claims he wants a bronc stomper—an’ picks him a leather-puller on purpose!”

“You theenk?” Mico pulled away from Mr. Quillan, shrugged his skinny shoulders, put a grimy thumb to his bird-beak nose and wagged his fingers. “Thees for Australia,” he said, “onless you gonna took Geetaway too!”

“Indeed!” began the gent from Australia. “If you will agree always to hold on when you ride, Griffin, perhaps—”

“On them terms, Mister,” Gitaway shook his head and Chuck Harrison saw a familiar faraway look begin to come over the kid’s cherubic face as his glance turned toward Kansas Kitty and Skeeter Bill gathering up their trick riding equipment. “I reckon I ain’t interested in Australia! Besides—I wonder how long it would take a country boy like me to learn that there trick-ridin’?”