

SURROUNDED BY REDSKINS! Of all the thrilling experiences the CHUMS OF ROOKWOOD have had in the Wild West, none comes up to this week's—when Jimmy Silver & Co. find themselves surrounded by Redskins on the war-path!

Reds on the War-Path!



ANOTHER THRILLING LONG COMPLETE STORY DEALING WITH JIMMY SILVER & CO. OF ROOKWOOD IN THE WEST.

BY
OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Just Like Lovell!

ROT!" That was Lovell's opinion. Arthur Edward Lovell never hesitated to express his opinion; opposition only made him express it with additional emphasis.

"You see——" said Jimmy Silver.

"I don't see!" interrupted Lovell.

"You understand——" said Raby.

"I don't!" contradicted Lovell.

"Well, that's about right," remarked Newcome thoughtfully. "Lovell never does understand anything."

Snort from Lovell!

"The fact is——" recommenced Jimmy Silver.

"My dear chap, I know what the facts are," said Lovell. "Somebody has been smuggling firewater to the Indians on the reservation, fifty miles from here, and a lot of people think there is going to be trouble with the Redskins. Well, I don't."

"You know all about it, of course!" murmured Raby.

"I suppose that's meant for sarc," said Lovell. "But the fact is, I do. It's all rot."

"Look here——"

"Mr. Smedley wants to keep us hanging about in sight of the ranch," said Lovell warmly. "Why, it's just like being kept in House bounds at Rookwood. We didn't come to Canada to be kept in bounds."

"We're bound to respect Mr. Smedley's wishes, as his guests, I should think," said Newcome.

"Yes, that's all right. I respect him no end, of course," said Lovell. "He's a splendid chap. But he thinks we can't take care of ourselves, and that's where he's off-side. The cowpunchers go out on the plains just the same as usual."

"They take their guns now, since there's been rumours of trouble with the Blood Indians," said Jimmy Silver.

"Well, we'd take guns, too, if Mr. Smedley would hand them out," said Lovell. "He won't."

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"You'd be jolly dangerous with a gun," remarked Raby. "Not to the Indians, though."

"Look here——" roared Lovell.

"Peace, my infants—peace!" said Jimmy Silver. "The fact is, Lovell, we've got to toe the line. I'd like a gallop as much as you would, and I'm no more afraid of Leaping Elk and his jolly old warriors than you are. But duty's duty."

"Rot!"

"We're not going out of sight of the ranch, just as Hudson Smedley told us," said Jimmy Silver decidedly. "We're bound to play up."

"Rubbish!"

Arthur Edward Lovell was growing more and more emphatic. He was irked by restraint, and he did not like it; and he never made any secret of his likes and dislikes. He was, indeed, rather given to shouting them from the house-tops.

The Fistical Four of Rookwood had ridden out on the prairie that sunny morning, north of the Windy River Ranch. Far in the distance over the rolling plain, the tip of a chimney-stack could be seen. The juniors were not out of sight of the ranch—not quite out of sight. But they were sailing very near the wind, so to speak. And so Jimmy Silver had reined in Blazer.

"Rooting round the blessed old ranch like schoolboys kept within bounds!" snorted Lovell.

"Well, we are schoolboys, you know," said Jimmy Silver mildly.

"Bosh!"

"What I like about Lovell," said Raby, "is his polished style in argument. Beats Chesterfield hollow."

"Skitter Dick's at Lone Pine," said Lovell. "He's all on his own, five miles from the ranch. That doesn't look as if they really expected a Redskin raid."

"Well, the cattle have to be looked after," said Jimmy Silver. "Mr. Smedley doesn't want us to run the same risks as the cowboys."

"Why shouldn't we?"

"No reason at all, excepting that

we're under orders. We'll trot along home now, shall we?"

"Let's!" said Newcome.

"I suppose if I made a break you'd feel it your dashed duty to yank me back to the ranch—what?" asked Lovell.

"Yes, old chap—by your ears, if necessary," said Jimmy affably. "Luckily, they're big enough to give a good hold."

"You silly ass!"

"Thanks! Shall we start?"

"I'll give you a chance," said Lovell.

"How's that?"

"Like this!"

Arthur Edward Lovell suddenly put spurs to his horse, and dashed away to the northward, where the far horizon was shut in by the rugged rocks of the "bad lands."

"You silly chump!" roared Jimmy Silver. "Come back!"

Lovell laughed, and rode on. Jimmy Silver stared after him, in great exasperation, and then looked at his chums. Arthur Edward Lovell was evidently in a wilful mood.

"The silly owl!" exclaimed Raby.

"After him?" asked Newcome.

Jimmy Silver hesitated a moment or two. To follow Lovell was to ride completely out of sight of the ranch, and Jimmy was anxious not to disregard Hudson Smedley's commands. Whether the Indian outbreak would ever materialise Jimmy could not know; but he knew that the rancher's orders should be respected, irksome or not.

But if there was danger for the juniors on the open prairie, evidently Lovell could not be left to ride into it alone. Jimmy Silver loosened the lasso that hung from his saddle.

"After him," he said. "I'll jolly well rope him in, and lead him back at the end of the lasso!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good egg!"

And the three juniors rode on the track of Lovell, who was heading at a breakneck gallop for the bad lands, obviously determined to have the ride he had set his wilful mind upon, and to

give his comrades a long chase before they came up with him.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Laughing Wolf in Luck!

LAUGHING WOLF pricked up his ears and listened.

He was alone in a rocky ravine in the bad lands. Round him were rocks and sandy ridges, with here and there a clump of pines and firs; overhead, the blue summer sky of Alberta. His horse was drinking at a pool in the rocks; and Laughing Wolf, seated on a boulder, was sharpening a knife—already keen—on a stone.

There were daubs of red ochre on Laughing Wolf's coppery face. The wolf's head depicted on his bare, brawny chest was newly painted. Laughing Wolf, a young brave of the Blood tribe, was on the warpath.

It was long since the Bloods had taken the war-trail. The days were long over when hordes of painted warriors had swept down on the settlements—over, and almost forgotten.

When the young braves, ignorant of the white man's power, showed signs of impatient restiveness, the sage old chiefs knew how to keep them in check. In North-Western Alberta an Indian rising was the last thing the ranchers and lumbermen would have thought of.

And an Indian rising on a large scale was never likely to come. But for once the authority of Leaping Elk; the great chief of the Little Blood Reserve, had been set at naught. A smuggled cargo of fire-water had reached the Indian reservation, and the young men of the tribe were out of hand.

Under the influence of the potent fire-water, the war-dance had been danced, and the buried hatchet dug up. Leaping Elk and the other old chiefs remained in the lodges, knowing full well that the outbreak would be followed by stern measures which the red men could not possibly resist. But a crowd of young braves, reckless of consequences, had ridden out of the reserve, and already cattle had been run off from out-lying ranches, and the crack of rifles had been heard along the valley of the Windy River.

Laughing Wolf was on the trail of his first scalp. For days, from the rocks of the bad lands, he had watched the plains for a wandering cowpuncher, but so far he had watched in vain. His scalping-knife, keen as a razor, was still unstained. No gory trophy was suspended from his belt, to be shown off before the squaws in the tepees of the Bloods.

And now, as he rested in the ravine, the sound of galloping hoofs came to his sharp ears; and he listened intently, with an expression on his face not unlike that of the animal from which he derived his name.

Gallop, gallop!

Laughing Wolf stepped to his horse, and jerked loose the raw-hide lariat. Then he drew the horse out of sight amid a stack of rugged rocks.

Silent as a panther, keen as a wolf, the Blood watched from the rocks.

The hoof-beats were drawing closer, louder; the horseman was coming up the rugged ravine, as yet hidden by the irregular rocks and jutting pines. But unless he stopped, he had to pass within a lasso-cast of the Indian's hiding-place.

Laughing Wolf watched, his eyes glittering.

Gallop, gallop!

The Blood's eyes blazed, as the rider came in sight. It was not a cowpuncher, as he had expected—or if so, it was the youngest one Laughing Wolf had ever seen. It was, in point of fact, Arthur Edward Lovell.

Lovell rode on gaily, utterly unsuspecting of danger in his path. He never dreamed that a pair of keen, black eyes, with a savage glitter in them, watched him as he came; that a sinewy arm was preparing to hurl the lasso. Laughing Wolf had no firearms, or Lovell would probably have been shot dead on sight. As it was, he rode on carelessly into the range of the rope.

Whiz!

What happened next Lovell hardly knew.

The clutch of the lasso was so sudden that he was plucked out of the saddle before he could realise what was happening.

He came down on the hard ground with a crash, dazed by the fall, and his startled horse went careering up the ravine at full gallop.

"Oh!" gasped Lovell.

For a moment or two he did not move. He was almost stunned by the sudden shock.

Then, as he sat up dazedly, he sighted the Indian.

Laughing Wolf was coming down the rocks, the rope gripped in his left hand, and something that shone and glittered in his right.

Lovell stared at him blankly.

The war-paint on the Redskin's face, the savage glare of his eyes, the drawn knife, told their own tale. Lovell had jeered at the Indian danger, but he realised now, with a terrible shock, that it was real, and that it was fearfully close.

Laughing Wolf was only a few yards from Lovell, when the clatter of another horse's hoofs on the rocky soil caught his ears. A second horseman was following the first.

For a moment the Indian hesitated.

The pursuing horseman was coming on fast; he might burst into view at any second.

It behoved Laughing Wolf to get on his guard against a second enemy. But the temptation of the scalp was too strong for him. For three days Laughing Wolf had watched for his chance, and now his chance had come. The paleface lay at his mercy.

Laughing Wolf gripped his knife and rushed on the fallen schoolboy, his yell ringing among the rocks as he did so.

Lovell strove to rise, but the grasp of the Indian was upon him, and he was forced down again.

"Oh crumbs!" panted Lovell, his eyes dilating, as the coppery, painted face stooped over him, and the scalping-knife glinted in the sun.

He made a frantic clutch at the Indian, and caught his wrist. Laughing Wolf showed his teeth in a snarl, and dragged at his right arm to free it. He was stronger than Lovell—twice as strong—but desperation lent Lovell strength. He knew that if the Indian's arm were freed, the knife would be in his heart the next moment.

He held on desperately, wildly, shouting hoarsely, hardly conscious that he was doing so.

Clatter, clatter, clatter!

Horses' hoofs crashed on the rocks—closer and closer! But the Redskin tore his arm loose at last, and the bright blade flashed as it rose in the air, and Lovell, with a groan, closed his eyes.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Hunted on the Prairie!

JIMMY SILVER dashed up the rocky ravine at a gallop. He knew that he was close behind Lovell. Blazer had covered the ground in great style, and Raby and Newcome were left behind. Lovell had ridden as far as the bad lands, but Jimmy was sure of running him down before he had penetrated very far into the broken country. Jimmy had his lasso in hand, being quite determined to rope in his headstrong chum, and lead him back to the ranch, as a lesson to him. And then suddenly, as he came round a bend in the winding ravine, Jimmy Silver caught sight of his chum, on his back on the rocks, struggling in the grasp of the Blood Indian.

It was fortunate for Lovell that Jimmy Silver did not lose his presence of mind at that startling sight.

He came on at a frantic gallop, and his lasso flew, uncoiling as it sailed through the air.

It was at that moment that Laughing Wolf freed his hand, and drew back the knife for the death-thrust.

The cast was too hurried to be successful; Jimmy's only thought had been to stop that thrust, and in that he succeeded. The whirling rope struck the Indian, and he started under the shock. The drive of the knife came down, but it missed Lovell by two or three inches, and the blade snapped on the rocks beside him.

Laughing Wolf leaped to his feet.

He cast aside the snapped knife, and jerked the tomahawk from his belt. But Jimmy Silver, at full gallop, was right upon him now, and Blazer crashed into the Indian.

Laughing Wolf was hurled away, sprawling on the rocks. He would have been up again in a moment, but Jimmy Silver did not give him time. It was not a moment for mercy. Before the Redskin could gain his feet, Blazer's hoofs were trampling him down. Blazer had been a savage buckjumper in his time, and Laughing Wolf was not the first man he had trampled. The heavy hoofs crashed on the Indian as Jimmy Silver rode him down, and the Blood yelled wildly and crumpled up under the attack.

Lovell dragged himself to his feet, dazed, dizzy, and hardly knowing whether he was alive or dead.

Like a fellow in a dream, he looked on at the terrible scene, of the sprawling Indian yelling and struggling under Blazer's deadly hoofs.

The struggle was brief.

Laughing Wolf lay on the rocks with broken limbs, senseless; and Jimmy Silver, with a white, set face, backed his horse away.

"Good heavens!" breathed Lovell, pale as chalk. "Good heavens!" He turned his shuddering gaze away from the trampled Indian.

Jimmy Silver cast a quick, anxious glance around.

His only thought had been to save Lovell. He did not know yet whether Laughing Wolf was the only foe he had to face. But the ravine was still and silent—no fierce war-whoops awoke the echoes, no painted face showed glaring among the rocks.

"Lovell, you dummy!" Jimmy panted. "Where's your horse?"

"I—I don't know!" stammered Lovell.

Jimmy hurriedly dismounted and coiled his lasso. He avoided looking at the wretched Redskin, stretched senseless on the rocky ground.

"The—the horse ran on, I think," said Lovell, staring up the ravine. "I—I was lassoed, Jimmy!"

"I can see that."

"Thank goodness you came!" Lovell shivered. "I—I was nearly—nearly—"

"You've seen no more of them?"

"Only that one. He was hiding in the rocks when I came by. I—I never saw him till he was on me."

There was a sound of galloping hoofs. Raby and Newcome were riding into the bad lands.

"We've got to get out of this," said Jimmy Silver. "Goodness knows how many of the brutes we may run into if we go after your horse. You'd better mount behind me."

"But the horse—"

"Never mind the horse. Better lose the horse than lose your scalp," said Jimmy Silver tersely.

Lovell glanced at the senseless Red-skin.

"I—I suppose we—we've got to leave him like that?" He shuddered. "He tried to kill me, but—"

"The rocks may be swarming with them," snapped Jimmy. "Get up behind me on Blazer."

"All right!" said Lovell, with unaccustomed meekness.

He mounted behind Jimmy Silver. It went against the grain with Jimmy to leave Laughing Wolf as he lay, but there was no time for delay. At every moment Jimmy Silver expected to hear the war-whoop of the Bloods ringing out over the bad lands.

He wheeled his horse to ride back to the plains, when Raby and Newcome came galloping up.

They reined in, with exclamations of horror, at the sight of the Indian.

"What's happened?" panted Raby.

"That has!" said Jimmy Silver, with a nod towards the Blood. "Let's get back to the ranch before we get a hornets' nest round us."

"That ass, Lovell—"

"Come on!"

The juniors rode out of the bad lands, and the grassy prairie was under the galloping hoofs. And then suddenly Jimmy drew rein.

Ahead of the juniors, on the open prairie, feathered head-dresses and bright spear-points flashed in the sun.

"Halt!" panted Jimmy.

He sat in the saddle and scanned the enemy. There were six of the Indians, and they were between the juniors and the ranch. The half-dozen Bloods were riding across the path the juniors were following. But the discovery was mutual, and the Redskins turned their horses at once towards Jimmy Silver & Co.

"We're cut off from the ranch," muttered Newcome.

"Make a dash for it," said Lovell. "We may get through."

"We should not get through alive," snapped Jimmy Silver. "They're heading for us now, and they mean business, the same as that brute in the bad lands!"

"What are we going to do, then?" muttered Raby. "We can't turn back—we may ride into a whole horde of them, now they're out of the reservation."

Jimmy Silver thought hard.

"Make for Lone Pine," he said, after a moment or two. "If we get there first we can hold them off till help comes. Skitter Dick will be there, too."

"But—"

"But—"

Jimmy Silver did not heed. He wheeled his horse to the left and put Blazer to the gallop. Raby and Newcome followed fast.

There was a yell from the Bloods.

which reached the ears of the juniors, distant as the Indians were as yet. On their wild, shaggy ponies the Redskins were riding hard. To reach Lone Pine Jimmy Silver & Co. had to turn almost at right angles to their previous course, which gave the pursuers an advantage. The nodding feathers and gleaming spears drew closer as the Rookwood juniors rode.

Crack, crack!

One or two of the Bloods, at least, had firearms. A bullet knocked up the soil within a yard of Blazer's forefeet.

Jimmy Silver set his teeth and spurred on. Blazer, double-loaded as he was, easily kept pace with Raby's and Newcome's horses. The grass seemed to fly under the galloping hoofs.

Lone Pine came in sight at last—a tall, solitary pine, with the wooden

"Bring them in!"

Blazer had followed his master in. Raby and Newcome drew their steeds into the hut after him.

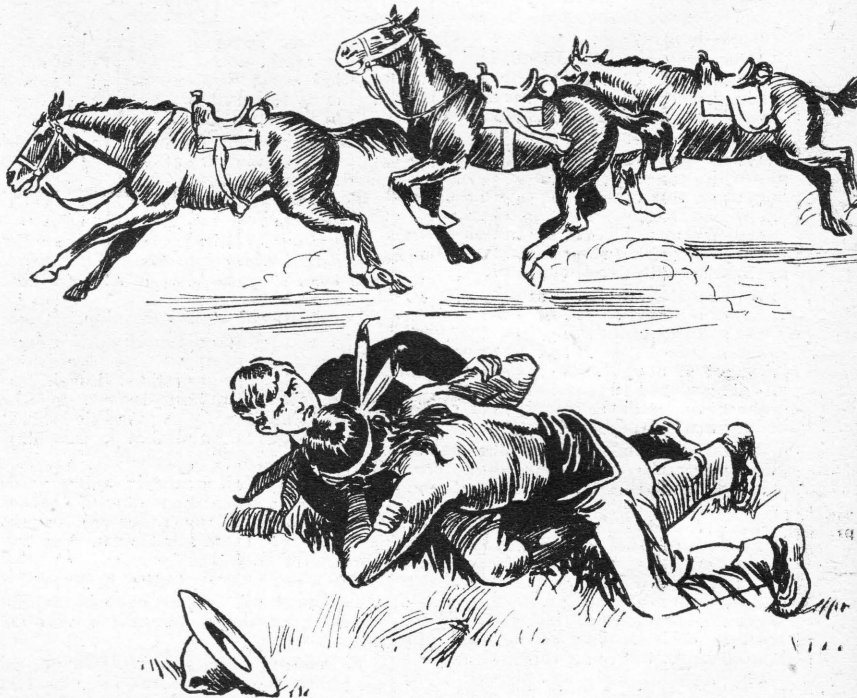
"Bar the window!" panted Jimmy.

He slammed the door shut and felt for the bar. There was a clatter of hoofs outside and a wild yell from the Bloods. They were on the scene now.

Crash!

A rifle-butt crashed on the stout pine-wood door, as Jimmy Silver, with furious haste, jammed the bar into place. The next moment there was a steady pressure on the door from two or three brawny shoulders. But the solid wooden bar, in iron sockets, held. And Jimmy stooped and placed the lower bar in position.

Raby had jammed the shutter over



stockman's hut at the foot. The hut was strongly built. It had been put up in the old days when Indian raids were not so rare. If Skitter Dick was not there the door would be on the latch, Jimmy Silver knew. Once inside the hut there was a chance of holding off the Indians till help could come—at least, it would be a respite. And if the Skitter was there, he would have his rifle.

But Skitter Dick was out on the plains—Jimmy Silver soon knew that. Had the cowpuncher been in the hut he would have been drawn out by the sight of the fleeing schoolboys with the Redskins galloping in pursuit.

Faster and faster Jimmy spurred on, and Blazer played up gallantly. The Bloods were still at a distance when the Fistical Four of Rookwood dashed up to the hut.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Beset by the Reds!

JIMMY SILVER sprang to the ground.

The door of the stockman's hut was closed, but it opened to his hand. The juniors crowded inside.

"The horses!" panted Lovell.

the window, and Newcome barred it as he held it shut.

For the moment the juniors were safe, but it had been touch and go. Through a crack in the wooden shutter a wild, glaring eye looked into the dusky hut.

Jimmy Silver put his revolver to the slit, and the eye was withdrawn instantly.

There was galloping outside—an incessant thunder of hoofs. The Indians rode round and round the hut, yelling furiously. The wild yells and howls of the braves rang through the hut, almost chilling the blood of the schoolboys within.

"If they get at us!" breathed Raby.

"They're trying to rattle our nerves," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "So long as they do nothing but yell we're all right. They won't frighten us with yelling."

The galloping and yelling stopped at last, and the juniors heard the Redskins gather outside the door. There was a murmur of voices, and they heard muttered words in the Blood dialect—strange, and incomprehensible to their ears.

Then there came a knock at the door. A voice called to the juniors in English:

"Let my white brothers listen to the voice of Running Water."

"Go it!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

"What do my little white brothers fear?" went on the Blood, subduing the harshness of his voice and speaking in friendly tones. "The young men of the Blood tribe are on a visit to the ranch, and they think of no harm to the palefaces. Let my white brothers open the door of their lodge and smoke the pipe of peace with the Bloods."

"I don't think!" said Jimmy Silver, almost laughing at the impudence of the request.

"Running Water does not understand."

"We're not opening the door."

"Running Water and his young men are the friends of the palefaces," said



SMOKED OUT! The horses burst out of the burning hut and went tearing over the prairie. Almost blinded by smoke the Rookwooders staggered out into the air, and the next moment the Indians were upon them! (See Chapter 6.)

the Blood. "Let us speak together in peace."

"Yes, with the door shut," said Jimmy Silver.

"The little white man does not trust his red brother?"

"Not an inch," answered Jimmy Silver.

"No jolly fear!" said Raby. "The man must be a silly ass to think he can take us in like that."

"Clear off, you scoundrel!" shouted Lovell.

There was a muttering again in the Indian dialect. Probably Running Water had not expected his trickery to succeed. At all events, he knew now that the door would not be opened.

"Hallo, they're going!" exclaimed Lovell.

There was a trampling of hoofs.

From cracks in the timber the juniors were able to see the Blood warriors remount their horses and ride away.

They swept off at a gallop to the west, and then, turning by the corral fence, vanished from sight.

"Thank goodness!" said Raby.

Jimmy Silver did not speak. He did not believe for a moment that the Bloods were gone.

"We'll give 'em time to clear," said Lovell. "With a good start we can get back to the ranch, even if the brutes get after us again."

"I fancy we shouldn't get much of a start," said Jimmy dryly.

"Why not? They've gone."

"They've not gone."

"Fathead!" said Lovell. "They're half a mile away already, I should say."

"I should say about fifty yards," answered Jimmy.

"You can't hear their horses now."

"Because they halted as soon as they were under cover of the corral fence," said Jimmy. "They've not gone."

"Oh, rot!" said Lovell.

Arthur Edward put his eye to a crack and stared out on the plain before the hut. The corral fence, of pine stakes and wire, stretched away to a good distance.

"You think they've turned the corner of the corral and stopped there, Jimmy?"

"Yes."

"We should see them over the fence."

"Not if they dismounted."

"It's a trick, of course!" said Raby, with a nod. "They want us to think that the coast is clear, and to tempt us to come out."

"That's it," agreed Newcome.

"Well, I don't think so," said Lovell, with a shake of the head. "My idea is that they've gone, Jimmy. How long do you think we're going to stick in this hut with the horses? We can't stay here for ever."

"We're going to stick here till it's safe to get out," said Jimmy Silver quietly.

"I fancy it's safe now, old man."

"You can fancy what you like, but we're sticking under cover, Lovell. For

goodness' sake, don't start playing the goat again."

Lovell grunted.

There was absolute silence from the plains outside; by eye or ear no one could have told that there were human beings within miles of the stockman's hut. That half a dozen watchful Redskins, with crouching horses, were bunched behind the turn of the corral fence Lovell could not believe. He believed that Running Water and his men had given the juniors up now that the party had taken shelter, and were off on some other trail.

"Well, hang on, if you like, Jimmy," said Lovell at last. "Tain't very nice in here with three dashed horses, I can tell you."

"Better than being scalped," remarked Newcome.

"Oh, rot!"

"There's grub in the place," said Raby. "The cowpuncher who's stationed here always has grub enough for a week. Let's get some lunch."

"Good egg!"

"I say, suppose Skitter Dick comes back while these Redskins are around?" exclaimed Newcome suddenly. "He may drop in any minute."

"He's bound to spot them," said Jimmy. "All the cowpunchers are on their guard now, and armed. We can't see the Redskins from here, but Skitter Dick would spot them from the prairie."

"Unless he comes back after dark, and they're still here," suggested Newcome.

"It's a long time to dark," said Jimmy Silver.

"And they're not around, anyhow, in my opinion," said Arthur Edward Lovell. "They're gone, you know."

"Fathead!"

The Fistical Four of Rookwood lunched on the cowpuncher's provisions in the hut. There was, fortunately, a can of water in the hut also; but that was all the supply, as the man on duty at Lone Pine was accustomed to getting water as he wanted it from the spring outside.

But Jimmy Silver was fairly certain that the party would not be besieged long enough to suffer from the want of water. If the Redskins failed to trick them into leaving the hut there would be an attack, and Jimmy, though his courage did not falter in the least, could not help realising that the chances were in favour of the enemy. The only weapon in the Rookwood party was Jimmy's revolver; and there were six of the Indians, all armed. But if the attack was beaten off, as Jimmy hoped, it was probable that help would come later, for the news of the Indian raid would not be long in spreading all through Windy River county. By the next day, at all events, the ranchers would know that fighting was going on at Lone Pine; and at any moment, too, Skitter Dick might turn up and sight the enemy. So the pressing danger, in Jimmy's mind, was that of the Blood attack, which he felt would come before long.

After lunch was over Lovell yawned and moved restlessly about the stockman's hut. He peered again and again from rifts in the timber of the hut, and saw only stillness and lifelessness on the prairie. It seemed incredible to Lovell that six savage men, with murderous intent, were crouching near at hand, so silent, so motionless for long hours. It was two hours or more since the Redskins had ridden away from the corral fence, and in that time there had been no sound, no sign.

"Look here, let's chance it!" said Lovell at last.

"Fathead!" was Jimmy Silver's reply.

"I'm fed-up with this, I can tell you."

"You shouldn't have played the fool this morning," answered Jimmy Silver tersely. "It's all your fault, Lovell."

"Oh, rot!" said Lovell.

"We should be safe at the ranch now if you hadn't played the goat," said Raby. "It's up to you to shut up, Lovell."

"Oh, rubbish!"

Lovell moved restlessly about. Raby and Newcome occupied themselves with rubbing down their horses, Jimmy Silver sat on the pinewood table, his revolver in his hand, ready for what might happen. Arthur Edward Lovell halted at last at the door.

"Look here, I'm fed-up!" he said. "You fellows can stick in here as long as you like, but I—"

Lovell was interrupted.

From the silence outside came a sudden uproar—a trampling of hoofs, a ringing of savage yells, and then the crashing of hatchets on the door of the stockman's hut.

It was the attack!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Hard Pressed!

JIMMY SILVER sprang from the table, revolver in hand.

Crash! Crash! Crash!

The attack had come so suddenly that it almost took away the breath of the Rookwooders. Lovell staggered back from the door-aghast. Evidently the Redskins had given up the hope of enticing the juniors out of the stockman's hut; and when they changed their plans they changed them with startling suddenness. Six shaggy horses ran loose round the hut, while six savage braves assailed the door with their hatchets, crashing blow after blow on the stout pine.

Crash! Crash!

"My hat!" gasped Newcome.

"They—"

"Then—they—they're here, after all!" stuttered Lovell.

A gleaming edge came through the door. Jimmy Silver stepped closer to the door, and as the axe was dragged away he put the muzzle of the revolver to the narrow slit.

Crack!

A yell answered from outside.

Crack!

Another wild howl.

Then the crashing of the hatchets went on again. But Lovell, peering from a crack in the window shutter, saw one of the Redskins crawling painfully away, while another was binding a strip from his blanket round his arm. Two had been hit.

But that was a game two could play, as Jimmy quickly discovered. A rifle-muzzle was jammed to the door outside and the trigger pulled. The bullet came whizzing across the hut, missing Jimmy by a few inches.

The juniors stepped aside quickly from the door.

Again and again the rifle rang, and the bullets crashed through the slits in the door.

Then the hatchets crashed again.

Jimmy Silver looked from the slit in the window-shutter. There was, of course, no glass in the window; only the shutter covered the small opening. Less than six feet away from Jimmy four Redskins were raining blows on the door.

Jimmy silently unbarred the shutter.

His chums watched him in silence. It was a terrible risk to take, but it was the only way of stopping the attack on the door, which was becoming dangerous now, as huge splinters flew under the sharp axes.

Softly, silently, Jimmy Silver drew the shutter a few inches open on its hinges.

The attention of the Indians was fixed on the door, a few feet to the left of the window, in the front wall of the hut. They were not looking towards the shuttered window. Jimmy had a few seconds in which to act, and he acted promptly.

He thrust the revolver out and fired at the group outside the door. It was hardly necessary to take aim at such short range and with the enemy bunched together.

Crack! Crack!

He fired twice, and slammed the shutter. Raby was ready with the bar, and it was jammed instantly into place. The next moment a hatchet quivered in the wood.

A deep groan was heard from without. The crashing blows on the door ceased.

From a slit in the timber wall Jimmy looked cautiously out. Both his bullets had taken effect, and one of the Redskins was seriously hurt, for his comrades were carrying him away.

The attack on the stockman's hut ceased as suddenly as it had begun. To the terrible uproar a deep silence succeeded.

Jimmy Silver reloaded the empty chambers of his revolver. His face was a little pale, but set and grim.

"Four of them hit!" muttered Newcome. "One fairly knocked out, I think. All right for us, so far."

"Perhaps the brutes have had enough," said Lovell hopefully.

Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"They're after scalps," he said. "They won't let up on us unless they have to. But we're holding our own."

The juniors waited. The Bloods did not approach the hut again, and a long interval of silence followed. It was trying enough to the nerves of the juniors.

But a sound broke the silence at last.

"They're behind the hut!" muttered Raby.

Faint sounds reached the juniors. The Indians were creeping round the hut, for what purpose the Rookwooders could not yet guess. The back of the hut, against the tall pine-tree, had neither door nor window. The strong pine-wood wall was between them and their enemies, and it could have defied for a long time the hatchets of the Bloods. But no blow was struck; only those faint creeping and brushing sounds continued to reach the straining ears within.

"What are they up to?" muttered Lovell.

"Blessed if I know. Whatever it is it will come suddenly," said Jimmy Silver.

Something moved outside the window shutter in the front. The tiny gleam of daylight that had come through the slit in the wood was suddenly blotted out.

Something had been placed against the shutter.

A moment more, and Jimmy Silver knew what it was. He drew a deep, hard breath.

"They're stacking stuff up round the hut," he said. "That's a heap of brush-wood."

"What on earth for?" asked Lovell.

Jimmy did not answer.

"You—you don't mean—" Raby caught him by the arm. "Jimmy, they're going to fire the hut!"

"I'm afraid so."

"Good heavens!"

The juniors understood now the new scheme of the savage Bloods. The faint movements on the part of the enemy had a meaning now.

Dry grass from the prairie, brush-wood from the thickets, wooden stakes from the corral fence, were being stacked up round the stockman's hut. After the hot Canadian summer the fuel would burn almost like tinder; there had been no rain for weeks. It was the funeral pyre of the chums of Rookwood that was being stacked up by the Redskins.

A tomahawk crashed on the door suddenly, and the voice of Running Water was heard calling, in mocking tones:

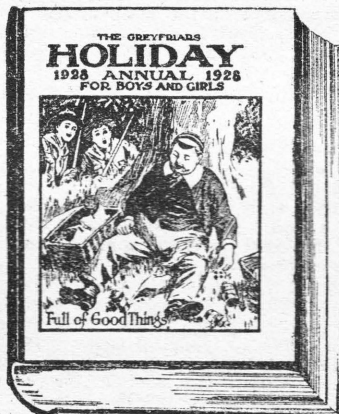
"Will my little white brothers come

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out of their lodge, or will they wait for the fire to drive them out?"

There was no answer from the juniors.

To go from the hut was to go to immediate death; and, in spite of the terrible imminence of their peril, they had not given up hope.

They waited in tense silence.

Lovell's face twitched.

"I—I say, this is all my fault," he said huskily. "I—I'm sorry, you chaps. I've landed you in this."

"That's all right," said Jimmy. "Can't be helped."

Lovell gave a groan. Death in its most terrible form hovered over the Rookwooders. At that moment Lovell would willingly have given his own life to ransom his comrades. It was his wilful recklessness that had brought about the disaster, and he realised it. But repentance came too late.

An acrid smell penetrated to the hut. "They've lighted it!" muttered Newcome.

Through a score of interstices in the timber walls the smoke came eddying into the interior of the stockman's hut. It floated to the roof in a thickening cloud.

The juniors looked at one another in the thickening vapour. The three horses stirred uneasily, whinnying with fear. The heat increased fast, till the stockman's hut was like an oven.

Through cracks in the walls red glimmering of flame could be seen now. The horses, terrified, began to trample wildly in the hut.

Through the crackle of the fire came a yell from the Indians. It was a yell that told of triumph.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Skitter Dick Chips In!

JIMMY SILVER ran to the door at last. He threw down the bars and dragged the door wide open.

Outside, a stack of brushwood and piled fence-rails burned fiercely. The smoke came rolling in.

"We've got to chance it now, you chaps," said Jimmy Silver huskily. "We can't stay here—"

"All together!" muttered Lovell.

"Look out, Jimmy!"

One of the horses, maddened by the smoke and falling sparks, for the walls and roof were catching fire now, rushed wildly for the open doorway. Jimmy jumped aside, and the horse, with a shrill squeal of pain and terror, plunged blindly through the pile of burning brushwood, scattering it right and left as he went. The open prairie and the blue sky were seen again. The other two horses rushed after the first, squealing wildly, and the juniors heard a yell from a Blood brave, knocked down by one of the horses.

"Come on!" breathed Jimmy.

He led the way.

With a desperate rush he came through the scattered burning embers outside the doorway, and his chums followed him fast.

Blinded by the smoke, the juniors staggered out into the air, hardly conscious of anything but of the relief of the fresh air to their tormented lungs.

Jimmy Silver stumbled over a sprawling Redskin—the man who had been knocked down by the horse. The Blood clutched at him, and they rolled on the ground together, struggling.

Two savage figures, with uplifted tomahawks, closed in on Lovell and Raby and Newcome.

The juniors, unarmed, and blinded by smoke, were utterly at their mercy.

The tomahawk of Running Water flashed over Lovell's head.

The sharp report of a rifle came suddenly from the prairie.

Like one in a dream, Lovell saw the flashing tomahawk sink down to the Indian's side, as Running Water staggered, a terrible change coming over his coppery, painted face.

He reeled back and collapsed on the ground at Lovell's feet.

Crack!

The rifle-shots were so close together that they seemed blended into one.

Somehow—how, they were too dazed to understand—the Rookwood juniors found themselves free of their foes.

Jimmy Silver was on the ground, struggling with his enemy. A horseman came dashing up at a furious speed and leaped to the ground, leaving the horse rearing. A rifle-butt crashed on the Redskin's head, and Jimmy Silver found himself suddenly released from the grasp of the Blood.

He lay panting.

"Skitter Dick!" exclaimed Raby.

"Dick!" panted Jimmy Silver.

The cowpuncher, with his finger on the trigger of his rifle, stared round him, amid the eddying whirls of smoke

NEXT
WEEK'S
LONG
THRILLER:—



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which deals with the
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wood Chums in the Wild
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from the burning hut. But the remaining Redskins, all of them wounded men, were creeping away in the grass, and the fight was over.

Skitter Dick caught his plunging horse.

"I guess this hyer circus is over," he remarked. "Any of you 'uns hit?"

"I—I think not!" gasped Lovell, hardly knowing whether he was safe or not. "I—I— No."

Jimmy Silver staggered up.

"You came at the right time, Dick," he said breathlessly.

The cowpuncher nodded.

"I guess I saw the fire a good way off," he said. "I've been out on the range all day, and I shouldn't have got back hyer till sundown; but I saw the fire, and reckoned it was Injuns. I was surprised to see you 'uns hyer, though, and I reckon I didn't chip in any too soon. What are you kids doing hyer? Wasn't the boss keeping you on the ranch?"

"It was my fault," said Lovell, cringing. "I—I cleared off, and they came after me."

"I guess you're a pesky young jay then," said Skitter Dick. "You was gone coons, the crowd of you, if I hadn't seen the fire from the prairie, and come back to see what was doing."

"I know!" said Lovell.

"Thank goodness you did come," said Raby. "There isn't much of the hut left now, Skitter Dick."

"I reckon I haven't use for Lone Pine now that I know for sartin the Injuns are out," chuckled Skitter Dick. "They'd have the scalp off me if I hung on hyer, before you could say 'No sugar in mine!' I'm going back to the ranch, I guess. That gang of Bloods isn't the only crowd that's broke out of the reserve, I guess—they'll be as thick as skitters on the prairie, till the Mounted Police take them in hand and run them back to the reserve. You 'uns had better mosey along with me."

"You bet!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Our horses are gone," said Raby.

"I guess they're nearly at the ranch by this time," said Skitter Dick. "It's legging it for you 'uns."

"We can leg it," said Lovell.

"Come on!"

Skitter Dick remounted his horse, and the party started, the cowpuncher walking his steed to keep pace with the schoolboys. He held his rifle across his saddle before him, and his keen eyes scanned the prairie on all sides, watchful for foes. Jimmy Silver, looking at him, could guess that Skitter Dick did not expect to reach the ranch without trouble.

"Put it on, you fellows!" said Jimmy. The Rookwooders tramped as fast as they could over the rough prairie. In the distance, against the blue sky reddened by the sunset, the chimneys of Windy River ranch-house rose into view at last; and never had the juniors been so glad to see them.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

For Life or Death!

SKITTER DICK reined in his horse. "I reckoned so!" he said coolly.

From a belt of scrub at a little distance, a bunch of horsemen suddenly shot into sight. Waving feathers and shaggy manes tossed in the wind, as the horsemen rode to cut off the party from the ranch. Evidently Running Water's war party was not the only gang of Bloods out on the prairie that day.

Skitter Dick could have ridden to safety, but the juniors were on foot, and they had no chance of getting through. The cowpuncher jumped from his horse.

"Take cover!" he rapped out.

Skitter Dick threw himself into the grass, his horse lying down, and he sighted his rifle across the horse. The Rookwooders were down in the thick grass the next moment. Skitter Dick pushed back his Stetson hat, and watched the horsemen with keen eyes. The crack of his rifle rang far over the prairie. Crack, crack, crack!

The Indians, riding at full speed, circled round the halted party, at a rate that made good shooting almost impossible. Good shot as Dick Lee was, his bullets flew wide.

"I guess they'll hear that at the ranch," said Skitter Dick. "If these hyer Injuns don't wipe us out in five minutes, I reckon the boys'll be on them. Savvy?"

He fired again, and this time the ball went closer, cutting a waving feather from the head of a Blood warrior.

There were nine or ten Indians in the bunch, and they circled round and round, the circle drawing gradually in. The juniors watched them through the grass with anxious eyes. Well the Redskins knew that they had a good marksman to deal with, and that a direct rush would cost them the lives of at least three or four of their band. But the circling rush, closing in gradually on the surrounded whites, made it difficult to hit the whirling target.

Sooner or later would come the rush, suddenly and without warning. And when it came, the surrounded party would be ridden down and "wiped out" to a certainty. But Indian caution held back the braves from making the rush till they were close enough to make it with the least danger to themselves.

Round and round they swept, leaning down from their steeds, half hidden by their horses, and yelling incessantly. Skitter Dick loosed off his rifle every minute, knowing that every shot would now be heard on the ranch. And at last a bullet told, and an Indian horse went plunging to the earth, throwing his rider into the thick grass.

Still the wild horsemen swept round and round, the circle narrowing, and the riders going at so terrific a speed that it was almost impossible to plant a bullet with effect.

"Hyer they come!" breathed Skitter Dick. "I reckon this is the last round."

The circling horsemen suddenly swerved, and rode directly at the little party crouched in the grass, yelling and brandishing their weapons.

In less than a minute all would have been over. Skitter Dick fired point-blank, and a yelling savage rolled from his horse, his yells stilled for ever. Jimmy Silver blazed away with his revolver, and another of the Redskins tumbled into the grass. And then—

Then the earth seemed to be shaking under the thunder of hoofs. But it was not only the hoofs of the Indian ponies that rang on the prairie—from the direction of Windy River Ranch came a crowd of horsemen—Pete Peters and Spike Thompson, and Red Alf, and a dozen more cow-punchers, headed by Hudson Smedley. They came on at a mad gallop, and crashed into the Indian band in wild collision.

Skitter Dick gave a yell.

"Hurrah! It's the outfit!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Lovell.

The juniors sprang to their feet. The Bloods had broken and scattered under the charge of the rancher and his men. Three or four of them were yelling in the grass, under the thundering hoofs; the rest were already in wild flight,

lashing their shaggy horses to terrific speed.

Hudson Smedley, reined in his horse and jumped down.

"Jimmy—"

"We're all here," said Jimmy Silver breathlessly. "All serene."

"All safe?" asked the rancher.

"Right as rain."

"Your horse, Blazer, got back to the ranch," said Hudson Smedley. "I reckoned there had been trouble, Jimmy. I was starting out to hunt for you when we heard the shooting."

Thank goodness we came in time. What's happened at Lone Pine, Skitter Dick?"

"Burnt out!" said the cowpuncher laconically.

"And the cattle—"

"I left 'em on the range, but I guess some of the Reds are running them off into the bad lands by this time, boss."

Hudson Smedley compressed his lips.

"The Mounted Police will be up from Red Deer to-morrow," he said. "This trouble will be stamped out pretty quick. Get back to the ranch, boys."

The outfit rode home to Windy River. More than one "gang" of the Bloods was sighted on the prairie before the ranch was reached, but the Redskins did not venture too near so numerous a party. In the sunset Jimmy Silver & Co. reached the ranch, and glad enough were the Rookwood juniors to find themselves in the safe shelter of its walls again.

"Well," remarked Arthur Edward Lovell at supper, "I wanted to see an Indian rising—and now I've seen it. I don't want to see another. I'm blessed if I quite feel the scalp safe on the top of my head, Jimmy! It's lucky for you fellows I was with you to-day—what?"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Lucky for you chaps," said Lovell. "I hardly think you'd have gone through if I hadn't been there. Until this trouble with the Indians is over, I'm jolly well going to keep you under my eye."

"Well, my hat!" said Jimmy Silver.

That was all he could say for the moment. When he spoke again it was in a shout:

"Collar him!"

"Look here, you asses!" yelled Lovell, as his three chums closed in on him. "What are you at— My hat! Yarooop!"

Violent hands were laid on Arthur Edward, and he found himself whirled to the hard, unsympathetic ground. He arrived there on his back with a crash.

"Yarooop!"

"Now bump him!" said Jimmy Silver. "He's asked for it!"

Bump!

"That's for riding off against orders!"

Bump!

"That's for getting us in a scrape!"

Bump!

"And that's for being a silly, obstinate, footing ass!"

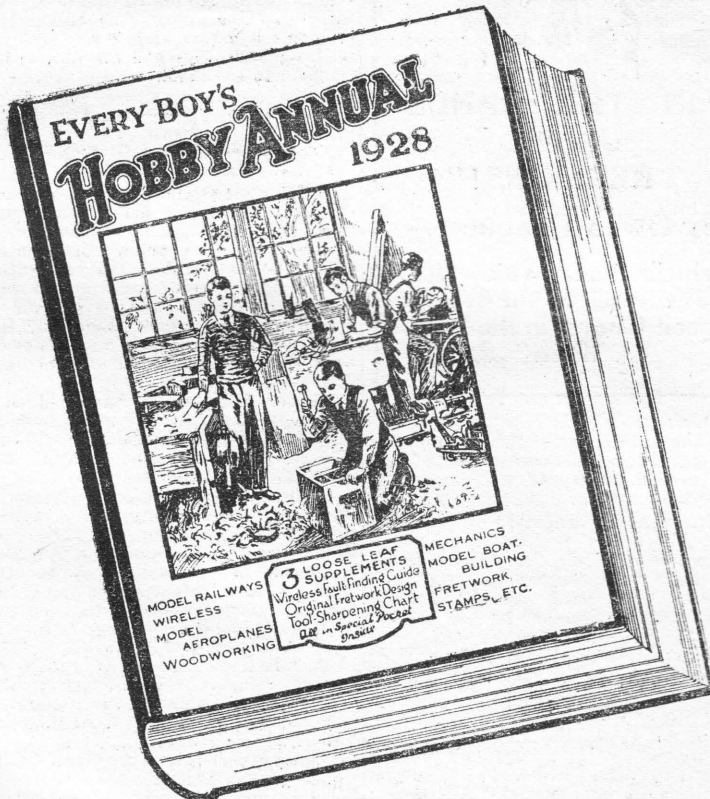
At the accompaniment to each bump a yell rang out, and when Jimmy Silver & Co. had finished, Lovell was left lying in a dazed and very dusty heap. After that Lovell wisely let the matter drop.

THE END.

(Next week's stirring extra-long complete story of Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood contains a full batch of thrills, chums. You must not miss "IN THE HANDS OF THE REDSKINS!" by Owen Conquest. Give your pals the tip about these yarns, and don't forget yourself, to order next week's issue early.)

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