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THE BEST BOYS' PAPER IN THE WORLD!

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The Peril of the Prairie!

By Owen Conquest.

Pequod le Couteau, the horse-thief, shows gratitude when Jimmy Silver, at great risk to himself, saves his life!

The 1st Chapter. The Escort.

"The trooper's come!" Jimmy Silver made that remark as the Rookwood chums came out of the ranch-house at Windy River after breakfast.

It was a sunny morning in early summer. Wide and green, the Alberta grasslands stretched away, under a cloudless sky, towards the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Jimmy Silver & Co. looked bright and cheerful as they came out of the ranch-house. They were enjoying every day of their holiday in the Canadian West.

"Let's have a look at him," suggested Lovell.

Jimmy Silver hailed Skitter Dick, the cowpuncher, who was rubbing down a horse by the rails of the home corral.

"Where's the bobby, Dick?" Skitter Dick looked round.

"The what?" he asked.

"The peeler," said Raby with a grin.

"I reckon you've got me guessing," said Skitter Dick.

"The copper," explained Newcome. The cowpuncher still looked puzzled.

"The policeman," said Jimmy Silver, laughing.

"Oh, I guess you mean the trooper," said Skitter Dick. "You'll find him over by the bunk-house, if you want him."

Jimmy Silver & Co. strolled away towards the bunk-house. They were curious to see the member of the North-West Mounted Police who had arrived at the ranch to take away the captured horse-thief, Pequod. They had already caught one or two glimpses of the famous Mounted Police, but had not seen them at close quarters yet.

"That's the chap!" said Lovell, with a nod towards a stalwart man who was in talk with Pete Peters, the foreman of the ranch.

The juniors looked at the trooper with interest. He was a powerful fellow in khaki—not in the famous scarlet coat of the Mounted Police that they had seen in pictures. He wore a revolver in his belt, and carried a carbine under his arm.

"Looks a pretty hefty johnny," remarked Lovell.

"They're fetching out Pequod," said Newcome.

Two cowpunchers had unbarred the door of the hut in which the horse-thief was confined. They entered the hut, and came out leading Pequod le Couteau between them.

The half-breed's hands were loosely shackled, but his legs were free. He walked between the two cowpunchers holding his head high, his black eyes gleaming.

His glance fell upon Jimmy Silver, and his eyes blazed for a moment with ferocity. It was to Jimmy Silver that the horse-thief owed his capture, and he did not look as if he had forgotten it. But after that one savage glance he took no further notice of the schoolboy.

The cowpunchers led him towards

the spot where Pete Peters and the trooper stood.

The latter looked at him. Pequod returned his scrutinising look with sullen defiance.

"I guess that's the critter," said the trooper. "That's Pequod, right enough. Roped in at last!"

"I am not behind the prison walls yet," said Pequod, shrugging his shoulders.

"I guess you will be in two days," smiled the trooper. "I'm here to take you to Red Deer."

"Much may happen in two days," sneered the half-breed.

The trooper laughed.

"I guess you'll be taken care of," he said. "If my horse is ready, Mr. Peters, let your boys hitch the critter on, and I'll be moving."

"You bet!" said Pete Peters. "Glad to see the last of him. Mind he don't play you any tricks on the trail to Red Deer."

"I reckon I'll watch him."

"Bring that boss here, Skitter Dick," called out the foreman.

He glanced at Jimmy Silver & Co. and smiled, and spoke to the trooper again. "There's the kids that roped him in, Bright."

Trooper Bright glanced at the Rookwood juniors.

"Those kids?" he said.

"Sure!"

"Little us," said Jimmy Silver with a smile. "We're tenderfeet from the Old Country, Mr. Bright. Just beginning to learn our way about."

"I guess you've started well," said Mr. Bright. "This galoot Pequod is a dangerous customer. Hitch him to the saddle," he added, as Skitter Dick led up the horse.

"How are you getting him along, Mr. Bright?" asked Jimmy Silver, in surprise, as the cowboy proceeded to knot a trail-rope to Pequod le Couteau.

"I reckon he's walking behind my horse."

"My hat! That will be a long stretch on foot, all the way to Red Deer, won't it?"

"Sure."

"Couldn't he be put on a horse?" Trooper Bright grinned.

"We're not so pesky particular about hoss-thieves," he said. "And I guess Mr. Smedley isn't sending a horse away to Red Deer for nothing."

Jimmy Silver could not help feeling a little compassionate as he looked at the horse-thief. Pequod was a rascally ruffian, savage and murderous as the most savage of the Redskins from whom he was, on one side, descended.

But that long, weary tramp across the endless plains, at the tail of the trooper's horse, was likely to be a hard experience, and prison bars awaited the hapless wretch at the end of it.

The half-breed gave no sign; he accepted his fate with sullen stoicism.

Mr. Hudson Smedley came out of the ranch-house and approached the spot. Jimmy Silver hurried to meet him.

"They're sending away the horse-thief, cousin Smedley," he said.

"The sooner the better, I guess," said the rancher.

"I've been thinking—" began Jimmy, hesitating.

The rancher smiled.

"Well, what idea have you got in your head now?" he asked. "Out with it, Jimmy!"

"Pequod's a rather dangerous customer, to make a long trip like that in charge of only one man," said Jimmy.

"I guess Bright will keep his eyes peeled."

"He will have to camp one night and sleep," said Jimmy. "Suppose that rotter Pequod—"

"No good supposing that he will catch the Mounted Police napping," said the rancher. "He won't! Put it plain, Jimmy."

Jimmy Silver grinned.

"Well, I was thinking that we've never seen Red Deer, and we'd like a trip on the plains," he said candidly.

"I think we might be useful in helping Mr. Bright to look after his prisoner. Do you think we might ride to Red Deer as—escort?"

"I don't see why not, if you'd like the trip," said Hudson Smedley.

"That is, if Bright don't mind being bothered by a parcel of tenderfeet. I'll speak to him."

"Good!" said Jimmy. "And—and if we go, you could lend a horse for the half-breed to ride, and we could bring it back with us."

The rancher nodded, and joined the group by the bunk-house. The Pistical Four of Rookwood watched him rather anxiously as he talked to the trooper. They had discussed the matter among themselves earlier, and they were rather keen on the trip to Red Deer. To their satisfaction, Trooper Bright nodded assent.

"You 'uns want to come along?" he called out.

"Yes, if you don't mind," said Jimmy Silver modestly. "We won't be any trouble."

"We'll do the chores in camp," said Lovell.

"I guess I'll keep you to that," said Mr. Bright. "You can come along and welcome. If my prisoner turns out too much for me, I dare say you'll look after him."

There was a chuckle from the cowpunchers. The Rookwood juniors took Mr. Bright's little joke with good-humour. As a matter of fact, they had an opinion that they would be useful in helping to guard that extremely slippery prisoner.

"Put the galoot on a horse, then, if these kids can bring the animal back from Red Deer," said Mr. Bright. "I guess it will save time on the trip."

Skitter Dick brought a horse from the corral, and the half-breed was mounted upon it. His feet were tied to the stirrups for security. Mr. Bright was too experienced to take any chances with his prisoner. The trail-rope, attached at one end to the half-breed, was fastened at the other end to the trooper's saddle.

Meanwhile, Jimmy Silver & Co. made hurried preparations for departure.

It did not take them long to saddle their horses, roll their blankets, and stuff provisions into their wallets.

(Continued overleaf.)

TO RESCUE AN ENEMY! With unflinching gaze Trooper Bright watched Jimmy Silver climb down the loose rope to the rescue of Pequod le Couteau, who clung desperately to the rock in the stream far below.



The Peril of the Prairie!

By Owen Conquest.

(Continued from previous page.)

"Keep up!" he said.

Pequod's horse was following that of the trooper, and the connecting rope was stretched almost taut. The half-breed had not the use of his hands; but, like a good horseman, he was able to control his steed with his knees, and he was keeping the animal as far behind the trooper as the trail-rope allowed.

If Jimmy Silver had stayed nearer the prisoner, in his kind desire to relieve him of the flies, he might have observed a circumstance that had escaped attention.

Ever since leaving the ranch Pequod's nimble, slim fingers had been tirelessly but unobtrusively at work. His hands, loosely shackled, hung before him, resting on his belt. And with quiet persistence, with the patience of the Red Indian, Pequod had been slyly at work on the rope that was knotted to his belt, and fastened at the other end to the trooper's saddle.

The knot after several hours of picking, was giving way.

For a man to attempt flight with his hands tied and his feet secured to his stirrups, in a hilly and rough country, was hardly to be expected, even if he had cast off the connecting rope. But Pequod le Couteau was desperate enough for the most hopeless attempt.

That was his intention, almost certain to fail, and, in the event of success, certain to leave him a hopeless wanderer on the prairie, till he could get rid of the rest of his bonds, unable to control a galloping horse in a country dangerous for a careless rider. But the desperate half-breed did not think of hesitating.

His rude rebuff caused Jimmy to leave him alone, and the half-breed's wiry fingers continued at their work.

It was close on noon when the knot was loose at last, and only the half-breed's fingers held the trail-rope to him. He did not cast it off yet. When the midday halt came, Trooper Bright would dismount, and that would give the fugitive a second or two's start in a wild race for freedom. That was the best that Pequod could count upon. As for the juniors, he did not heed them. In any case, he had to take his chance of anything that they could do.

Trooper Bright pulled in his horse at last in the shade of a patch of timber by the side of a creek.

"Halt!" he said.

"Oh, good!" said Lovell breathlessly. "About time we did, I think."

The trooper dismounted.

He drew on the trail-rope, to pull Pequod's horse towards him, and as he did so the half-breed let the rope go.

The sudden loss of resistance on it caused Mr. Bright to stagger back, and he almost sat down.

At the same moment the knees of the half-breed turned his horse, and his shackled hands struck at the animal repeatedly, urging it into a gallop. The horse darted away, the half-breed urging it on with hands and knees, uttering a loud yell as he dashed away.

"By gum!" shouted the trooper.

He fairly flew to his saddle again.

"Oh, my hat!" said Lovell, staring blankly. "He—he—he's loose!"

"After him!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

In his flight the half-breed had almost brushed by Jimmy, but there had been no time to grasp at him. Now he was already a hundred yards distant, fleeing with frantic energy.

Jimmy swung round his horse, and rode after him.

Quick as he was, the trooper was some yards ahead. Mr. Bright rode furiously, with set teeth and gleaming eyes, much exasperated by this sudden trick of his slippery prisoner.

But it was a case of more haste and less speed. The trooper's horse put a forefoot into a prairie rabbit's hole, and went down with a heavy crash.

Sudden as the disaster was, Mr. Bright jumped clear, and landed on his feet. But he was dismounted—and the half-breed now was riding like the wind. His blows, the pressure of his knees, and his yelling voice, drove on his steed as fast as whip or spur could have done.

Jimmy Silver passed the dismounted trooper like a flash.

Bright shouted to him; but Jimmy was too far off to hear what he said by the time the words were uttered. He did not even know that Mr. Bright was asking for his horse.

The trooper did not waste time in calling again. He rushed back to the other juniors; and, without wasting a second in speech, jerked Lovell away from his horse, threw himself upon the animal, and started again in pursuit.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Lovell, sitting down suddenly. "My only hat! What the thump—"

But the trooper was gone.

Lovell's saddle must have been somewhat uncomfortable for a man of Trooper Bright's size and weight; but he did not heed it. He was only thinking of recapturing his slippery prisoner.

Jimmy Silver glanced back over his shoulder.

He saw the trooper coming on, but at a great distance behind—Raby and Newcome were remaining with Lovell.

Jimmy urged on his horse. He was mounted upon Blazer, the buck-jumper he had tamed and that Hudson Smedley had given him to ride. Blazer—quite amenable now to his master's hand—stretched his powerful limbs in a fierce gallop.

The wind sang by Jimmy's ears as he rode, and stung his face and brought the water to his eyes. But he rode harder and harder, feeling all the exhilaration of a wild gallop and a hunt.

The half-breed was not more than a hundred yards ahead.

He was riding furiously. A glance behind had shown him the fall of the trooper—a stroke of luck upon which he could not have counted. There was fierce hope now in the half-breed's breast—and a second glance at the big trooper mounted on the

Jimmy drew nearer and nearer, till his horse's nose was brushed by the whisking tail of the half-breed's steed.

Then slowly but surely Jimmy drew alongside.

The half-breed gave him a glare of bitter hate.

Had his hands been free, he would have torn the schoolboy from his saddle and hurled him crashing to the earth. But, fortunately for Jimmy Silver, the half-breed could not use his hands.

"My game, I think," said Jimmy breathlessly.

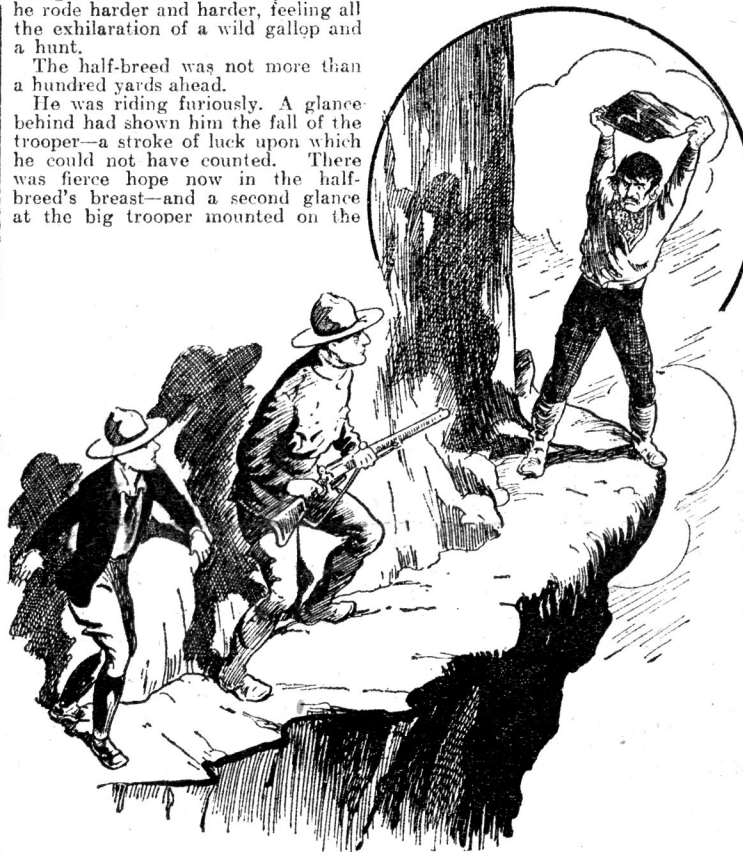
There was no bridle on the fugitive's horse for him to catch; but he grasped at the half-breed, and caught him by the shoulder.

"Laissez moi!" hissed Pequod.

"I don't think," grinned Jimmy Silver. "Stop!"

The half-breed still urged on his horse desperately. But Jimmy, riding close, still held to him tenaciously, and the speed slackened. Even then, Jimmy was not quite able to stop the desperate fugitive; but, as the tired horse slackened down under the drag on the rider, Trooper Bright came galloping up on Lovell's horse.

The big trooper's grasp on Pequod was a different proposition from Jimmy Silver's. It stopped him at once.



PERIL! As Trooper Bright called on Pequod le Couteau to surrender, the half-breed snatched up a lump of rock and swung it threateningly above his head.

schoolboy's horse did not trouble him. He knew that Bright would never run him down, unless some accident happened to his steed—and he was taking the chance of that. He had only the trooper's carbine to fear—and Bright was not likely to shoot if he could help it.

But the half-breed's face blackened with rage as he saw Jimmy Silver on his track. The trooper was out of the race; but he had the schoolboy to deal with.

Blazer was the better horse of the two—much the better—and Jimmy knew how to get speed out of him. He was overhauling the fleeing half-breed yard by yard.

Closer and closer the schoolboy came behind, and more and more furious became the efforts of the half-breed.

Guiding his horse only with his knees, he rode with wonderful skill, and put up a desperate race. He swerved incessantly in his course, taking advantage of every chance of the ground—throwing patches of scrub, rough hillocks, between him and his pursuer. More than once, riding straight at the fugitive, Jimmy found himself stopped by some obstacle the half-breed had cunningly wound round and left in his way—and he fully realised that, in cunning and resource, Pequod le Couteau was more than his match.

But the speed and reserve strength of Blazer more than compensated, fortunately.

Pequod rapped out a savage exclamation.

The trooper did not trouble to answer him or to speak at all. With a powerful grip on Pequod, he led the chase back, and Jimmy Silver followed. The half-breed's desperate attempt had failed.

The 3rd Chapter. Camping Out.

"Got him!" exclaimed Lovell gleefully.

Lovell and Raby and Newcome had remained at the timber by the creek, waiting and watching anxiously. The inequalities of the prairie hid the chase from their sight; and they were greatly relieved when Trooper Bright rode up, with his grasp on the prisoner, and Jimmy Silver following behind.

"Good!" exclaimed Raby.

Pequod's face was black and sullen, with perspiration streaming down the dark features.

"I guess that was a near thing," remarked Trooper Bright, as he proceeded to secure his prisoner. "I fancy it's you that saved him for me, Silver."

"Glad I was able to help," said Jimmy modestly. Jimmy was breathing hard after his exertions, and swimming in perspiration; but he was feeling very satisfied.

"I guess you saved the critter's life, too!" said the trooper grimly.

"How's that?"

"You were just behind him, and I couldn't pull a bead on him without hitting you," said Bright. "I should have used my carbine when I saw I couldn't run him down. You were in the way."

"Oh, my hat!" said Jimmy. "Well, he's given us a lot of trouble; but I'm rather glad I was in the way, Mr. Bright."

"He won't give us any more trouble," said the trooper.

He lifted Pequod from the horse and proceeded to bind him to a tree, there to stay in security during the noon-day rest. The trail-rope wound round Pequod and the trunk, was knotted behind the trunk, far out of the prisoner's reach.

"I guess that fixes him!" said Mr. Bright. "Now for my horse."

The trooper's horse still lay where it had fallen. Mr. Bright examined the damaged leg anxiously. Then, with a grim brow, he examined the charge in his carbine.

"You kids had better look the other way," he grunted.

Jimmy shivered a little.

"Is he very bad," he asked.

"Leg broke," said the trooper sorrowfully. "I guess it's lucky we brought a horse along for Pequod—it will carry me to Red Deer. The breed will have to leg it from this on. Clear off, you 'uns—I've got to put this poor critter out of its pain."

Jimmy Silver & Co. went into the timber, willing enough to escape that sight. In the timber they heard the short, sharp crack of the trooper's carbine.

When they came back Trooper Bright was already seated under a tree with his haversack open, eating his lunch. Jimmy Silver & Co. unpacked their provisions and joined him.

The Rookwooders made a good lunch. They were glad to hear that Trooper Bright intended to rest an hour before starting on the trail again; and they laid in the grass to rest under the shade.

Trooper Bright fed the prisoner. He freed one of Pequod's hands for the breed to eat, and handed him his food and drink—keeping his revolver in one hand all the time. He was not taking chances.

When the meal was over, Pequod was secured again, and Trooper Bright did not fail to examine the knots carefully.

After that, the trooper lay in the grass to rest till it was time to take the trail.

Prompt to the minute he jumped up, and saddled Pequod's horse with the saddle from his own mount. Pequod's saddle was slung on Jimmy Silver's horse, to be carried. There was no more riding for the half-breed. When the party started, Pequod marched beside the trooper's horse on foot, with the end of the trail-rope knotted round his waist. And every now and then, a powerful jerk on the rope "bucked" up the tramping prisoner, and assured the trooper that the rope was in good order.

A much slower pace was set for the afternoon than for the morning. Pequod, the half-breed, was hardy and seemed tireless; but he could not have kept up with the trot of a horse on the long journey. The party proceeded at a walk.

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not object to that. In fact, not being quite so hardy as Trooper Bright or the breed, they rather preferred to take things easily.

The horses ambled on in the pleasant sunny afternoon, with the breed tramping sullenly after the trooper.

Pequod had not spoken a word since his attempt at escape. Only his black eyes glittered, when he looked up at his guardians with ferocious intensity. He was waiting and watching for another opportunity; but it did not seem likely that an opportunity would come.

The sun sank lower and lower towards the Rocky Mountains in the west; and Jimmy Silver & Co. began to think of supper and camp and blankets.

But it was not till very close on sundown that the trooper gave the word to camp.

The party had reached a low range of hills, from which several creeks ran, feeding the upper waters of the Medicine River. During the whole day they had sighted only two or three distant horsemen on the plains, and once had passed in sight of a herd of steers. If they were following a trail, the trail was not discernible to the eyes of the juniors; though Trooper Bright was never at a loss. In the range of hills they had now reached solitude seemed to reign as completely as though the white man's foot had never trod west of the Great Lakes.

Trooper Bright pitched camp in a rocky canyon, at the bottom of which a stream flowed, with patches of timber here and there on the banks. There was herbage for the horses and water; and firewood to be gathered for the camp-fire. Warm as the day had been, the night was likely to be cold.

Jimmy Silver & Co. gladly dismounted, tired by the long day in the saddle.

"I guess you young galoots came along to do the chores," remarked Trooper Bright, with a grin. "Wade in."

The chums of Rookwood would have been glad to sit down and rest; but not for worlds would they have mentioned that fact to Trooper Bright.

They proceeded to "do the chores" with cheerfulness.

Wood was gathered, and a camp-fire built; water fetched, and food prepared. The horses were cared for, each looking after his own steed. Then the animals were staked out with trail-ropes, to give them a range for feeding, without danger of their straying away from the camp.

Arthur Edward Lovell rather proudly turned out hot cocoa for supper, to wash down the rather solid provisions.

Meanwhile, Trooper Bright had taken care of the prisoner. Pequod was secured to a tree again, in a position that allowed him to lean back when he wanted to sleep.

He was fed as cautiously as before; without uttering a word of thanks.

After he had fed, the half-breed leaned back, closed his eyes, and appeared to sleep.

Jimmy Silver & Co. chatted round the camp-fire for some time before they turned in.

Trooper Bright, under the influence of supper and rest, became more communicative, and told the juniors some stories of life in the Wild North-West, to which they listened with keen interest. In return they told him something of life at Rookwood School—as new a world to Trooper Bright as the Canadian West was to the Fistical Four.

The juniors rolled themselves in their blankets at last, to sleep, with their feet to the fire.

Trooper Bright lay down to rest within touch of the prisoner. The rope still held Pequod to the trooper, during the hours of slumber; and he could not have attempted to escape without instantly pulling it and awakening Mr. Bright.

But he had been bound too securely for any such attempt to be feasible; and the night passed without alarm.

The Fistical Four were still fast asleep in their blankets when Trooper Bright turned out in the sunrise.

Jimmy Silver was awakened by a heavy boot jamming into his ribs, and he opened his eyes with a jump.

"Groooogh! 'Tain't rising-bell!" murmured Jimmy drowsily.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Trooper Bright. "Do you think you're at school again?"

"Oh, my hat!"

Jimmy rubbed his eyes and sat up. He had been dreaming of Rookwood School, and cricket scores; and for the moment he had forgotten that he was in Canada. The rolling stream, the rocky sides of the canyon, crowned with pines, came strangely to him for the moment—with the khaki-clad trooper, the tethered horses, and the sullen half-breed bound to the tree.

"Tumble up!" said the trooper, with a grin.

"Right-ho!" said Jimmy cheerily. And he jumped out of his blanket, and kicked Lovell in his turn.

"Ow!" roared Lovell.

"Tumble up!" said Jimmy severely. "Are you going to snooze there all day, Lovell? Up with you, Raby—look alive, Newcome!"

"I suppose we can get a bathe in the stream," remarked Lovell, as he rubbed his eyes.

"We've got the chores to do."

"Oh, I forgot!"

"That's all right," said Trooper Bright, with a good-natured laugh. "You kids get a swim, if you like; and I'll rake up the fire and get the coffee going. We're not hustling this journey."

"Good!" said Jimmy.

And the Rookwood chums gladly stripped and plunged into the cold, refreshing waters of the mountain stream.

The 4th Chapter. Pequod's Escape!

Jimmy Silver & Co. enjoyed that swim. The water was distinctly chilly; but they were soon warm enough; and it was pleasant and refreshing to disport

themselves in cool, clean water, after a dusty day's ride and a night on the earth in blankets. Trooper Bright raked together the ashes of the fire, and added fresh fuel, and shoved on the iron pot to boil. At the foot of the tree close at hand, the half-breed watched him, with gleaming eyes and lowering brows.

The trooper bent over him and examined his bonds, with a keen and careful eye.

"I guess you're safe enough," he remarked.

And he picked up his carbine, and moved down the canyon, with the intention of looking for game.

The half-breed drew a deep breath.

He was left alone—for the time. Jimmy Silver & Co. were swimming, and the trooper was at a little distance, though not quite out of sight of the camp. Bound as he was, it scarcely seemed that the prisoner had any room for hope.

But a life of incessant danger and cunning trickery had sharpened the naturally keen wits of the half-breed. His black eyes followed the stalwart figure of the trooper for some moments, and then he glanced at the stream. The rocks and the timber hid the swimmers from his sight.

He breathed hard.

It was impossible for him to untie his bonds, or to wriggle loose from them; the trooper had seen very carefully to that. Yet there was hope in the desperate man's breast.

His glance turned on the embers that glowed and blazed under the swinging iron pot of water.

His hands were secured to the

fragment, striving to seize the unburnt end of it in his teeth.

It was not within reach, and the ropes held him back to the tree, and as he writhed and twisted and strained to reach it, his muscles stood out like cords, and his eyes seemed bursting from their sockets.

But he gained, at last, the distance he needed, and his strong teeth closed on the fragment of wood at one end—the other end still smouldering red under his panting breath.

He raised his head again, with the prize gripped in his teeth, and thrust the burning end between the rope and his rough shirt, where the rope passed under his arm round his body.

Then, releasing it with his teeth, he fanned it with his breath, till it glowed bright crimson again, and little flames trickled on it.

There was a smell of burning, as the half-breed's coarse shirt was scorched through, and the burning pain on his skin must have been terrible. But hardly a sign in his coppery face betrayed his suffering. He endured it with the iron stoicism of the Indian—as his savage ancestors had endured the agony of the torture-stake.

While the burning pain tormented him, with iron self-possession he continued to breathe on the ember, fanning it to flame, and slowly but steadily the rope was charred through.

It parted at last, under the straining muscles of the half-breed.

The rope fell apart.

He shook aside the ember, and dragged his hands free from the rope.

The half-breed's mind was made up.

But he still rested, gathering his strength for the effort of escape.

Jimmy Silver & Co., dressed and chatting, came walking back through the scrub towards the camp. There was no further time to be lost.

The half-breed leaped to his feet. Jimmy Silver gave a shout.

"Look out—he's loose!"

The juniors rushed forward. Pequod le Couteau turned his back on them, and sped away with the speed of an antelope.

"After him!" roared Lovell. Lovell and Raby and Newcome ran to the horses. But Jimmy Silver's quick eye noted that the half-breed was heading for the nearest rise of the broken hillside, where a horse could not follow. Jimmy gave chase on foot.

There was a shout in the distance behind him.

"Stand clear, Silver! I'm going to shoot!"

Jimmy Silver threw himself on his face.

Crack!

The trooper's carbine rang out behind him, the report echoing and re-echoing a thousand times in the hollows of the canyon.

Jimmy raised his head, and looked after the half-breed with tense anxiety. Pequod le Couteau had staggered for a moment. Then, with a hoarse yell of defiance, he plunged on, and a patch of scrub hid him from sight as he laboured up the rugged hillside.

He shook aside the ember, and dragged his hands free from the rope.



THE CHANCE TO ESCAPE! Trooper Bright dismounted and drew on the trail-rope to pull Pequod's horse towards him. It was then that the half-breed let go of the rope which he had so skilfully untied, on the ride across the plains, and the trooper almost sat down on the ground.

strong rope that passed round the trunk of the tree, and round his own body; knotted on the other side of the trunk far out of his reach. And the rope was placed where he could not reach it with his sharp teeth.

But though he could not use his hands, he could use his feet. He laid himself down as far extended from the tree as the rope allowed. His feet reached to the fire as he stretched himself out.

His eyes blazed, as he touched an ember with his foot. The half-breed was wearing Indian moccasins, not boots, which gave free play to his lithe and flexible feet. He fastened a grip with his feet upon a burning ember, and drew it towards him.

Writhing and twisting like a snake, the lithe half-breed drew the smouldering wood closer and closer.

The perspiration poured down his face, his features were drawn—tense. At any moment he might have been interrupted, and his labour would have been all in vain.

But he worked on, with Indian patient persistence.

When he could draw the fragment no nearer with his writhing feet, he released it, and it lay smouldering close at hand. Then, bunching up his legs, he gave it a backward kick that knocked it close to him—close to the tree-trunk to which he was bound.

Then he twisted over, and brought his face as close to it as possible, breathing on it till it glowed crimson at its burning end, and burst into a little flame.

Then came the most difficult part of his strange task.

He bent closer and closer to the

Once it had parted, all its coils and knots were as nothing.

He was free!

For a moment or two he sat, without motion, exhausted by his terrible efforts, even his iron strength and endurance failing him at last. He lay like a wild animal gathering his forces, waiting for his strength to return.

But he quickly pulled himself together.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had left the water, and he could hear their voices on the bank as they dressed themselves, partly hidden from him by the scrub. He could not see the trooper now; but he knew that Bright was not far away, and might appear at any moment.

He looked towards the tethered horses.

They were at a little distance beyond the camp-fire. Before he could reach them, and release one for riding, he knew that the juniors would spot him and rush him down. The instant he moved away from his position they would see that he was at liberty, and take instant measures.

He had no chance of getting hold of one of the horses. He realised that, and gave up the thought.

He looked round him farther. With a good start, he had little doubt of making his escape on the wild hillside above the stream. There were a thousand nooks and crannies, and above the canyon bottom it was impossible for horses to find a footing.

The pursuers would have to follow him on foot, once he had gained a start.

The 5th Chapter. Hunted Down!

Trooper Bright came up to the camp at a run, his face red with rage. The juniors gathered round him there as the trooper hastily reloaded his carbine.

"I guess I winged him!" said Bright savagely. "But he's got the lives of a cat! How did he get loose? Thunder!"

The trooper stared at the charred rope, and gave a long, low whistle as he realised how the cunning, desperate half-breed had gained his freedom.

"I guess that caps the stack!" he said. "I guess that galoot almost deserves to get loose. But I'm after him. You kids stay here and look after the horses!"

And the trooper hurried away on the track of the half-breed, carbine in hand.

"That's all very well!" grunted Lovell. "We ought to help running the rotter down."

"He might double back and get at the horses," suggested Raby. "Better stay here."

"Yes, that's so!" admitted Lovell. "And there's brekker, too," said Newcome philosophically. "I'll make the coffee."

And he proceeded to do so. Lovell and Raby and Newcome prepared their breakfast, while Jimmy Silver unhooked a lasso from his saddle. Since Jimmy had practised the use of the lasso at Windy River Ranch, he had certainly not become expert with it, but he knew how to handle it fairly well. Taking the coiled lasso

in his hand, he started after Trooper Bright.

"Aren't you coming to brekker, Jimmy?" shouted Lovell.

"Later!" called back Jimmy Silver. "Mind you don't catch Bright round the back of the neck with that lasso!" yelled Lovell.

Raby and Newcome chuckled; but Jimmy did not heed. He ran on rapidly on the track of the trooper.

Pequod le Couteau was well ahead. He had reached the steep side of the canyon, and was mounting the rocky acclivity with the activity of a mountain goat. Jimmy heard the sharp crack of the carbine, and a bullet splattered on the rocks. But the movements of the half-breed were too rapid for a good aim to be taken; the bullet missed him by more than a foot. A rather strong expression floated back from Trooper Bright, and it guided Jimmy to the trooper.

The active junior hurried on, and was soon close up to the trooper. Trooper Bright was clambering on a rocky ledge that jutted out from the hillside, almost like a shelf. It was along this ledge that Pequod was escaping to the upper hill. Jimmy was a good deal handier at this kind of work than the bulky trooper, and he very quickly overtook Mr. Bright.

"Missed him, by thunder!" growled the trooper. "But I'll run him down. You keep out of the way, youngster!"

Jimmy Silver obediently fell behind. But he kept pretty close to the heels of the trooper.

When he looked down from the jutting ledge Jimmy was a little startled. He found himself a good sixty feet above the level of the camp, with the open drop on his left, the rising wall of the hillside on his right. The ledge was nowhere more than three feet wide.

"By gum!" murmured Jimmy. "If there's a scrap in a place like this—"

Below the ledge, at this point, the stream flowed, splashing close to the hillside. The waters danced and rippled fairly under Jimmy Silver as he looked down the ledge.

Suddenly the half-breed came in sight ahead.

He had stopped. Pequod was facing round towards his pursuers, with savage animosity and despair in his coppery face.

Jimmy Silver wondered why he had stopped; but he soon perceived.

The half-breed had reached the end of the ledge.

It ended abruptly where the rocky hillside bulged out and closed all further progress.

Above Pequod's head rose the steep rock, with no hold on it for hand or foot. One desperate attempt the fugitive had made to climb, but he had fallen back, and almost pitched off the ledge into the river below.

Now he had faced round, despairing, desperate.

"I guess I've got the galoot now!" said Trooper Bright, and he pushed his carbine forward.

He advanced slowly and cautiously along the dangerous ledge, his carbine held in advance ready for a rapid shot.

"Hands up!" he rapped out. The half-breed eyed him. He had seized a fragment of rock in his sinewy hands, and stood in desperate defiance. The trooper coolly took aim at the savage figure.

"Drop that rock, Pequod, and put up your hands!" he shouted. "I'm having you, dead or alive."

Jimmy Silver's heart throbbed. "Surrender, Pequod!" he called out. "You can see that you've got no chance."

Jimmy shuddered at the thought of the death-shot ringing out. But it was death or surrender for the breed—a struggle on that dizzy ledge would have been fatal to all taking part in it.

"Last time!" said Trooper Bright, carefully taking aim.

"Pequod!" shouted Jimmy. There was a snarl from the cornered ruffian, and he raised his hands, hurling the fragment of rock at his pursuers.

It fell short, and the attack was instantly followed by the crack of the carbine.

Pequod le Couteau threw himself down with lightning swiftness, and the bullet whizzed over him, glancing off the rocks.

A fearful howl from the breed followed.

He had escaped the bullet, but he had lost his balance on the dizzy precipice, and even as the echoes of the shot thundered among the hills Pequod le Couteau plunged downward from the ledge.

Jimmy Silver caught a glimpse of

