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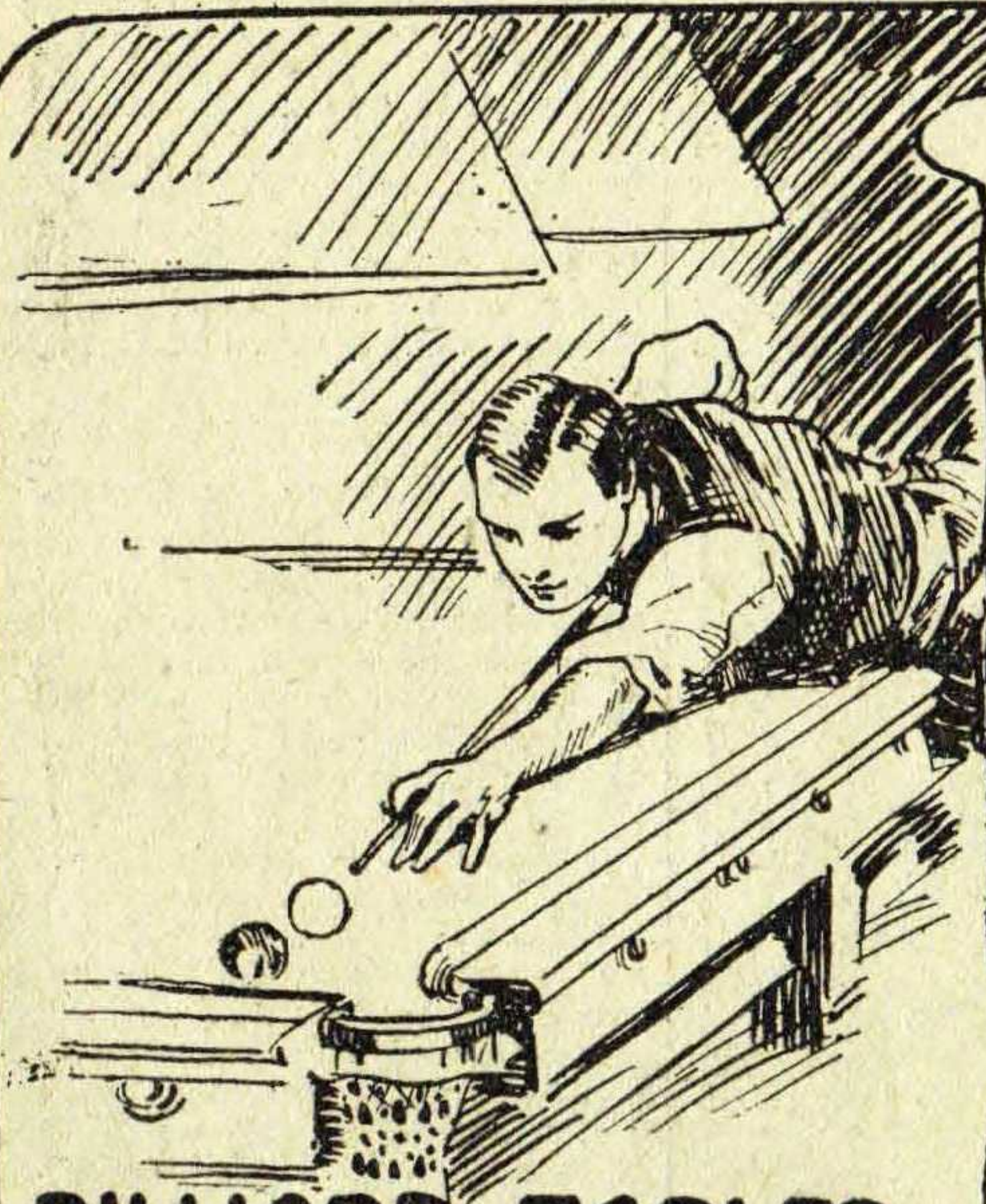
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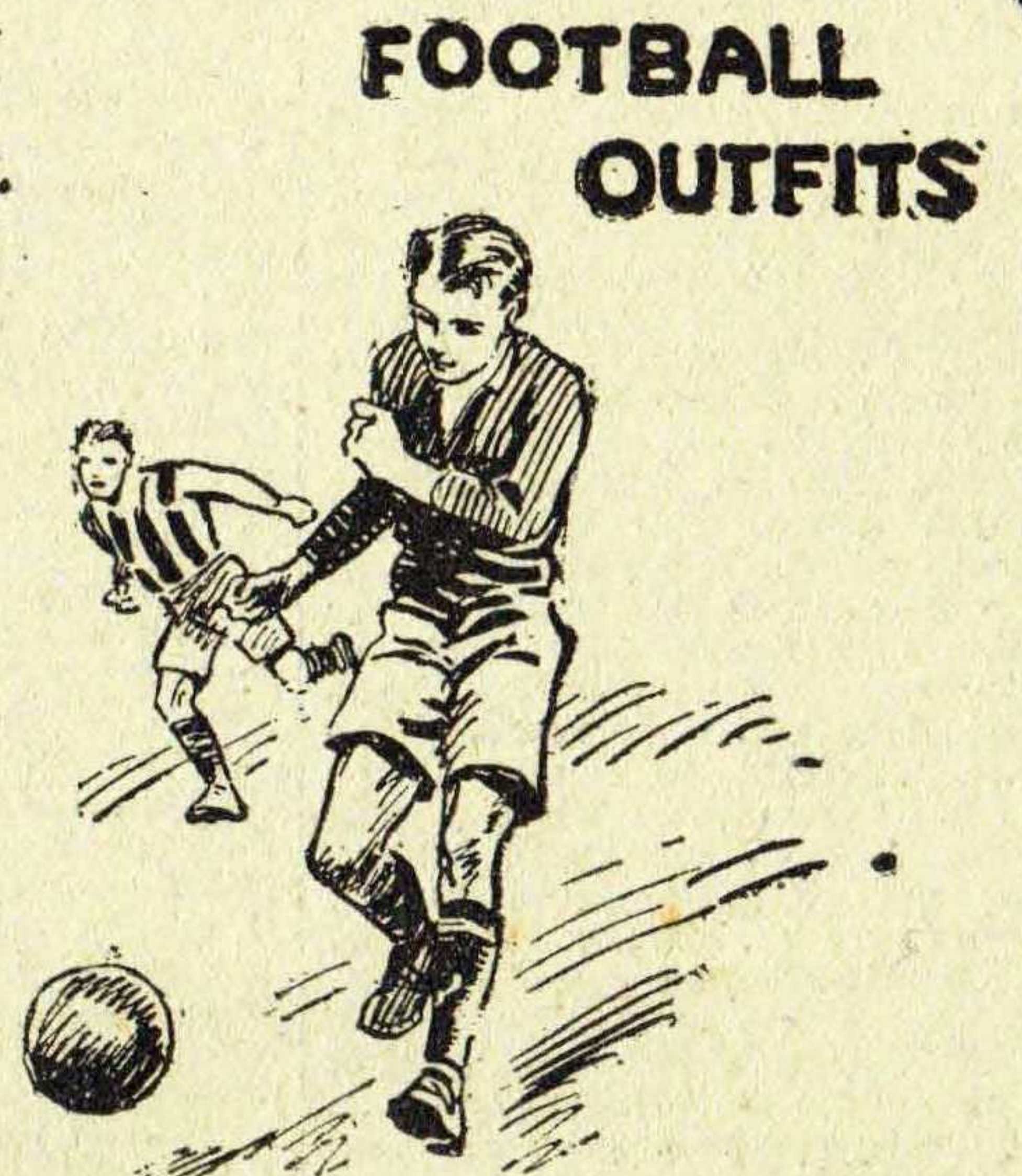
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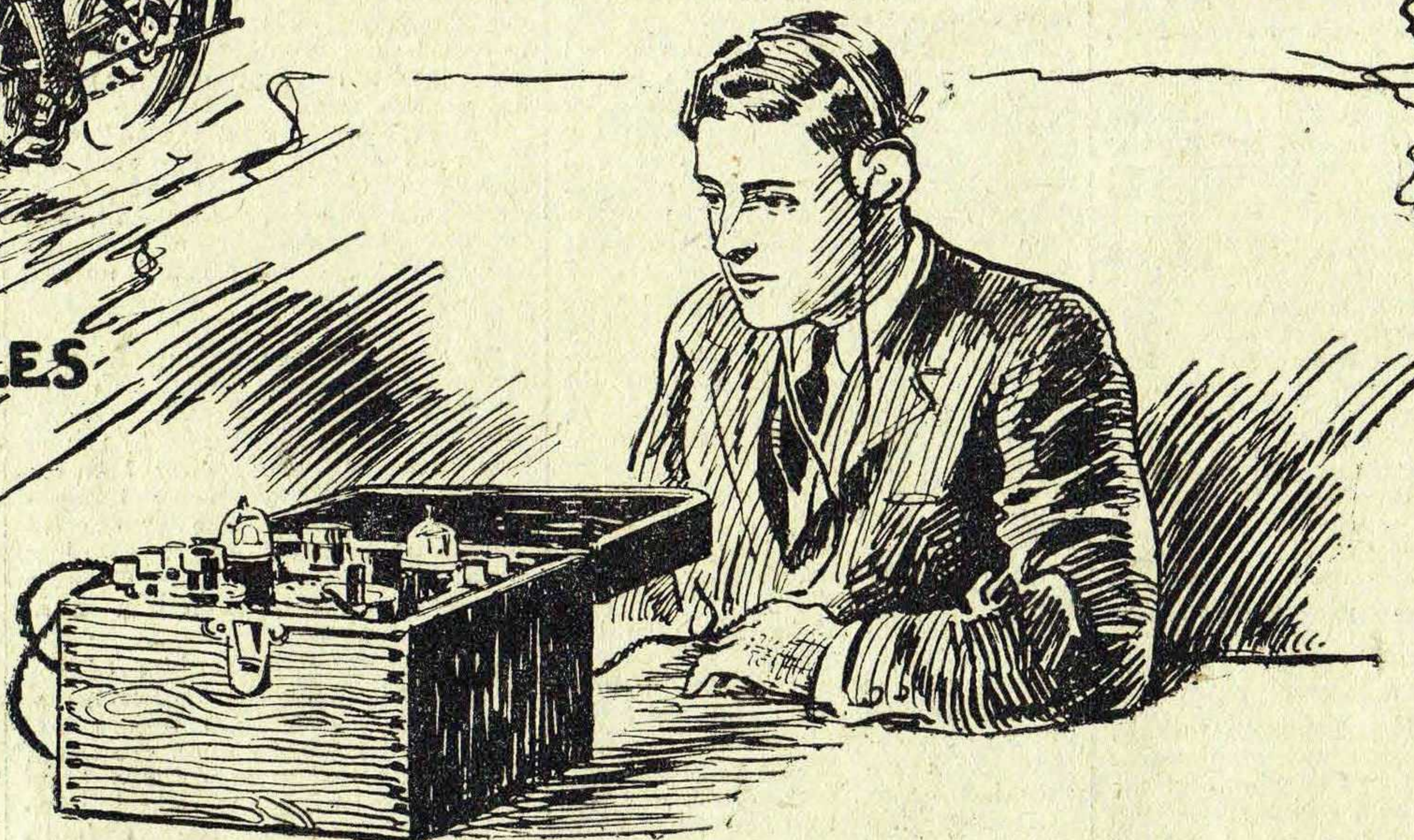
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The Hunting of Black Prince!

By OWEN CONQUEST.

(Author of the Tales of Rookwood appearing in the "Popular.")

All attempts to rope in Black Prince
prove futile!

The 1st Chapter. In the Foothills.

Skitter Dick pulled in his horse. "I guess we're thar!" he remarked.

Jimmy Silver reined in Blazer, and pushed his Stetson hat back from his perspiring brow. He had ridden twenty miles from the Windy River Ranch without drawing rein.

"So this is the place?" grunted Sergeant Kerr.

"Sure!" Jimmy Silver looked about him. The grassy prairie had been left behind, and the riders had halted in a rocky canyon of the foothills of Alberta. Low hills and rocky ridges, split with innumerable canyons and ravines, stretched away westward towards the mighty range of the Rocky Mountains.

"And where's that gol-darned gunman, Jeff Crow, hiding?" asked the sergeant.

Crack! As if in answer to the Canadian sergeant's question, the report of a rifle rang out, echoing among the rocks and pines.

It came from a narrow gulch that split the rocky slope of the canyon side. Skitter Dick grinned.

"I guess that's Pike's shooter," he said. "I left him watching the gunman, and I reckon he's got his eyes peeled. You'll have to leg it from here."

Skitter Dick dismounted, and threw his reins over his arm. Jimmy Silver and the sergeant followed his example.

Leading the horses, they entered the gulch. Great rocks, with here and there a jutting stunted pine-tree, shut them in on both sides. A long-limbed cowpuncher rose from among the boulders, with a rifle in his hand, and nodded a greeting. It was Pike Potter, of the Windy River outfit.

"It was you pulled trigger?" asked Skitter Dick.

"Yep! I saw his hat," said the cowpuncher. "I guess I let daylight through it."

"A pity it wasn't his head!" growled the sergeant.

"I guess his head wasn't in it. He stuck his hat on the end of his gun to draw my fire," said Pike. "Wanted to know if I was still hyer, I reckon. Waal, he knows now."

"Keep in cover, Jimmy," said Skitter Dick. "I guess Jeff Crow will loose off his rifle if he sees a head to shoot at. He's cornered now, and he's got a hundred thousand dollars to fight for."

"You bet!" said Jimmy.

Keeping in the cover of the boulders, Jimmy Silver looked up the rocky ascent beyond. Nowhere were the rocky walls of the gulch more than six or seven feet apart—it was like a huge fissure splitting the hillside, the work of volcanic action long ages ago. Somewhere among the rocks up the narrow gulch, Jeff Crow, the desperate gunman, was cornered, with the black horse he had stolen from the Windy River Ranch—and the hunters of Black Prince barred his only way of escape. The gunman was cornered, but laying him by the heels was another matter. The hunters could not advance farther up the gulch without exposing themselves to his fire, and Jeff Crow was armed and desperate. Sergeant Kerr surveyed the situation coolly.

"You reckon there's no way out beyond?" he asked.

"I guess I know these foothills like a book," answered Skitter Dick. "We cornered a grizzly in

this hyer gulch once. There ain't any way out from that end, unless he lays hold of the leg of a buzzard and gets a lift."

The sergeant grinned. "And he's got the black horse with him?"

"I guess I've seen it. He's got the animal in cover now, but we saw it," said Pike Potter.

"Then we've got him, sure, sooner or later," said the Canadian sergeant. "I reckon his stunt was to make a break across the Rockies into British Columbia, but he's slipped up on it. The Laroche diamond is as good as ours."

"And the reward!" said Pike, with a grin of satisfaction.

"There's five thousand dollars offered by the Montreal millionaire," said the sergeant, "and I guess it's ours when we get hold of the black horse."

Jimmy Silver had a rather troubled look.

It was Jimmy who had roped in the black horse, after the animal had been turned loose on the prairie by Dave Tutt, the thief of the hundred-thousand-dollar diamond. He had named him Black Prince, and expected to keep possession of him. The discovery that Dave Tutt had concealed the stolen diamond by forcing the black horse to swallow it, was a shock to Jimmy Silver. For the hapless animal's fate was sealed by the fact that the stolen diamond could only be recovered by his death.

Jimmy Silver would not have had the splendid animal slaughtered for the sake of a dozen diamonds. But the matter was not in Jimmy's hands.

Jeff Crow, knowing now where the missing diamond was, had stolen the black horse, and escaped upon it. It was possible that he had already killed the animal to search for the swallowed diamond.

"Could he get away on foot, Dick?" Jimmy asked.

The cowpuncher shook his head.

"Not unless he's got wings, sonny," he answered. "I've been over every foot of this ground, and I guess I know it. He ain't got any way of getting out unless he can pass us and get back to the canyon. I reckon he figured it out that this gulch was a safe corner to camp in, but he never allowed we'd trail him to it. I guess when he gets desperate he's going to make a break, and he'll come down the gulch on the horse at top speed. It's his only chance."

"Then he won't have killed the horse yet, if he knows that," said Jimmy Silver.

"I guess he knows it; he's no fool. But I reckon he will want a nerve to try that game!" chuckled Skitter Dick. "He won't try it till after dark, anyhow, and then he won't get through. He'll get riddled with balls unless we've forgot how to shoot."

Crack! From up the gulch came the ring of a rifle, and a bullet chipped the rock. A fragment of rock struck Jimmy Silver's cheek, and he started.

"Keep close," said the Skitter. "He's bound to make a break sooner or later," said Sergeant Kerr. "I guess he won't catch us napping. That's all he's got to bank on, and it ain't worth shucks!"

And the sergeant sat down, his carbine across his knees, prepared to wait with the patience of a Red Indian, till, in desperation, the cornered gunman should make his attempt to escape.

The 2nd Chapter. Neck or Nothing!

Jimmy Silver, stretched at rest on his blanket among the rocks, looked up as there was a sound of hoof-beats in the canyon behind. Three juniors of Rookwood came into the gulch, leading their horses. Lovell and Raby and Newcome grinned at Jimmy.

"What do you kids want?" the sergeant grunted.

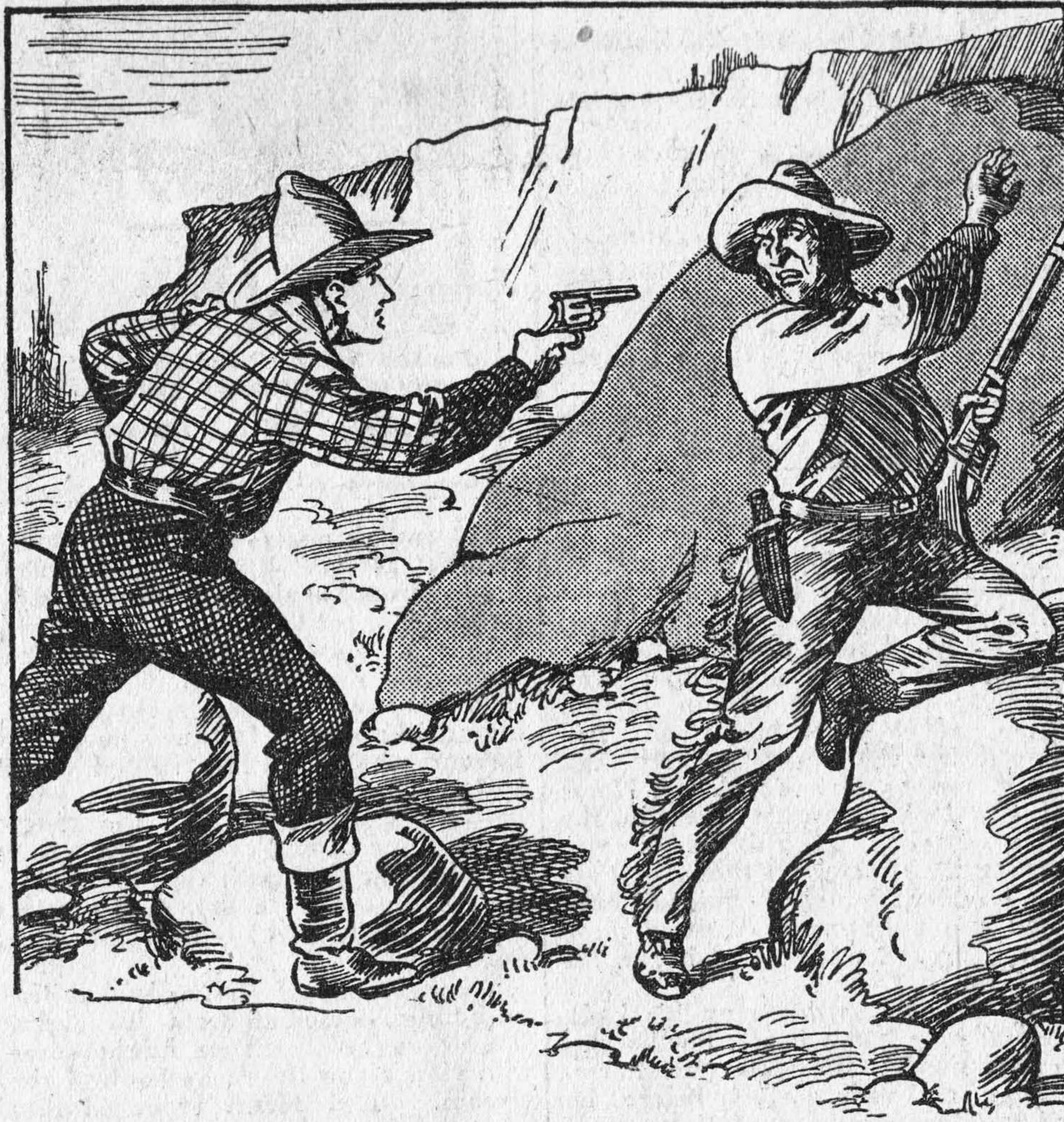
"We're going to help!" explained Arthur Edward Lovell.

Grunt from the sergeant. Evidently he did not expect much useful aid from the heroes of Rookwood.

"Well, the more the merrier, you know," said Raby. "We want to be in at the death."

"It may be your own death, if you're not pesky careful!" said the sergeant.

"We're chancing that," said Newcome cheerfully. "We're not afraid of the jolly old gunman!"



CORNERED! Red Henri was still waiting for the rush when a voice sounded in his ears behind him. "Hands up, you critter!" Red Henri spun round and found himself face to face with Skitter Dick who was covering him with a revolver.

"Why don't you go for him now he's cornered?" asked Lovell.

Sergeant Kerr grunted, and did not trouble to reply. Skitter Dick and Pike Potter grinned.

"What about rushing him?" persisted Lovell.

"You jay!" said the sergeant. "Well, that's what I'd do!" said Lovell.

"Fathead!" said Jimmy Silver. "The man up there could pick us off one after another, without showing himself, if we went beyond these boulders!"

"A quick rush—" said Lovell.

"Can it!" said Skitter Dick.

Arthur Edward Lovell gave a sniff, and stared out from the screen of boulders up the gulch. Beyond the rocks lay a clear space, with a steep ascent, and a score of yards farther on, a stack of rough rocks, behind which Jeff Crow was in cover.

Crack!

Jimmy Silver grabbed Lovell, and dragged him down just in time. The hat flew from Lovell's head, carried away by a bullet, as Jimmy dragged him into safety.

"You ass!" gasped Jimmy.

"Ow!" Arthur Edward Lovell sprawled on the rocky ground, and there was a chuckle from the cowpunchers.

Lovell sat up in wrath.

"You silly ass, Jimmy!" he stutted. "Where's my hat? What did you knock my hat off for, you chump?"

Raby picked up the hat and handed it to Lovell. Arthur Edward blinked as he saw the round bullet-hole through the Stetson.

"Oh crumbs!" he murmured.

Lovell realised that it was a bullet that had knocked off his hat, and that he had had a narrow escape. After that, Arthur Edward was a little more careful to keep in cover, and he did not again propose to "rush" the lair of the gunman above.

The sun sank lower and lower in the west, and the dusk deepened in the narrow gulch.

So long as daylight lasted the hunters watched through crevices in rocks, prepared to shoot the gunman down if he showed himself—which Jeff Crow was too wise to do so long as there was light.

When the sun was gone, the sergeant and the cowpunchers became even more alert.

Jeff Crow had long ago realised that there was no escape for him from the "blind" gulch, excepting by the way he had come, and there was no doubt that he was waiting for darkness to try a desperate break. It was his only chance, for he could not hold out in his present position indefinitely. Sooner or later he must have slept, and that would have placed him at the mercy of the hunters. Indeed, Skitter Dick and Pike Potter were debating the chance of creeping up the gulch under the cover of darkness, and coming to close quarters with the gunman.

undoubtedly, he knew more than Lovell about the rising of the moon. From above there came no sound save the sigh of the wind in the pines. At any moment there might come the crashing of horse's hoofs, with the gunman charging down the rocky gulch, and with tense nerves the hunters waited for the alarm.

Clatter, clatter! "Hyer he comes!" yelled Skitter Dick.

Crack, crack, crack! "Shoot!" roared the sergeant. Crack, crack!

Clatter, clatter! came the crashing hoofs on the rocks. The hunters fired into the darkness before them, but the charging horseman came on. A black shadow rose dim in the darkness, and there was a terrific crash as the horseman leaped over the screen of boulders and came down among the hunters. Jimmy Silver felt something shove him and hurl him away; it was the shoulder of the black horse. There was a yell of pain from the sergeant; a roar from Pike Potter. Flashes of a revolver lit the gloom. For the moment it was like pandemonium, the narrow gulch echoing and rolling with thunderous sound.

Then the crashing hoof-beats passed on. The horseman was riding on madly into the canyon below.

Clatter, clatter, clatter!

A yell floated back. "Shoot!" panted the sergeant. "Shoot the horse down— Oh!"

A groan followed the words. Crack, crack, crack!

Another yell came from the fugitive. Skitter Dick leaped to his horse. The desperate rider was through; whether wounded or not, the hunters could not guess. The Skitter threw himself upon his horse and rode furiously after the gunman, invisible in the darkness. At every step the desperate man had taken his life in his hands, but his luck held good; the black horse kept its feet. But Skitter Dick was not so fortunate. His horse plunged over a rock and fell, and the Skitter rolled on the ground.

He sprang to his feet, blazing away with his revolver in the direction taken by the horseman ahead. But the bullets flew at random in the darkness.

Skitter Dick, bruised by his fall, and gritting his teeth with rage, turned back.

"He's through!"

"Oh!" gasped Lovell, in bewilderment. "He—he's gone! He's got through, you chaps!"

Jimmy Silver picked himself up. He was shaken, but not hurt, and he pulled himself together and struck a match.

Sergeant Kerr was stretched on the rocks, his bronzed face white. A hoof of the leaping horse had crashed on his leg and the limb was broken.

Pike Potter was leaning against a boulder, coolly binding up a bullet-wound in his arm. One of the gunman's wild shots had found a billet. The match went out.

From the shadowy canyon came an echoing of horse's hoofs. The echo died away. The cornered gunman, with every chance against him, had got through; the very desperation of his attempt had brought it success. He was gone, leaving two disabled men behind him—gone with the black horse and the hundred-thousand-dollar diamond. The hunting of Black Prince had only begun.

The 3rd Chapter. The Trail of Blood!

"Well, my hat!" said Lovell.

Raby and Newcome breathed hard. They had not been touched by the desperate charge of the gunman, but they were dazed and bewildered. The sergeant groaned.

"I guess I'm out of this!" he said. "My leg's broke! Any of you 'uns hurt?"

"I reckon I've stopped a bit of lead!" drawled Pike Potter. "I guess I want to see Doc Jones afore I worry any about Jeff Crow!"

"You, Dick—"

"All hunky!" said Skitter Dick. "My hoss has broke its neck! I say, boyees, that gunman is some bulldozer! I reckon he took a thousand chances to one, and he got through!"

"He may have been hit," said Jimmy Silver.

"Like enough, with so much lead flying around," said Skitter Dick. "And I guess it's likely the black horse stopped a shot or two. It would be a pesky miracle if he got through untouched!"

(Continued overleaf.)

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The Hunting of Black Prince!

(Continued from previous page.)

"He's got away, and the Laroche diamond with him!" growled the sergeant. "It's darned luck for us—a chance in a thousand, and the pesky chance agin us. I reckon Satan looks after his own sometimes. It's up to you now, Skitter."

"You want looking after, sergeant, if your leg's broke—"

"Gol-darn my leg!" said the sergeant forcibly. "You get after the gunman, and leave me here!"

"I guess I'll fix you up first," said Skitter Dick; "and it ain't much use looking for that fire-eater till the moon's rose. A Blood Injun couldn't pick up his trail till then."

Jimmy Silver struck matches, while the Skitter attended to the Canadian sergeant's injured limb as well as he could. Sergeant Kerr bore the pain with stolid fortitude, though his face was white. There was a glimmer in the dark sky of the rising moon.

"You'll get back to the ranch, Pike," said Skitter Dick. "You ain't any use with your fin winged, old pard. You'll get help here for the sergeant by morning. Send Doc Jones if you can. The boys can stay with him till then—except young Silver, who's coming along with me—if you're still keen, Jimmy?"

"Yes, rather!" said Jimmy, with emphasis.

"Good man!" said the Skitter. "I'll take your hoss, sergeant—you won't want him now."

"Don't lose a minute," said Sergeant Kerr. "The moon's coming up."

"I guess I've only got to put my saddle on him."

Pike Potter, with his wounded arm tied up, rode away, to carry the news to the ranch. The sergeant was made as comfortable as possible, and he uttered no complaint. He seemed almost to forget his injury, in his anxiety that the gunman should not escape with the stolen diamond.

Raby and Newcome sat down, to keep the disabled sergeant company till morning. But Arthur Edward Lovell did not join them. He whispered to Jimmy Silver while Skitter Dick was saddling the sergeant's horse.

"I'm coming with you, Jimmy."

"Hain't you better stay with the other fellows, old chap?" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"Two will be enough to stay with Kerr."

"Yes; but—"

"I'm coming," said Lovell decidedly. "There'll be a scrap if Jeff Crow is run down. Think I'm not useful in a scrap?"

"Yes; but—"

"And I may be able to help Skitter Dick pick up the trail, if he's at a loss," argued Lovell.

Jimmy Silver suppressed a chuckle. "Ready, Jimmy," called out Skitter Dick. "I reckon we can see our way now."

"I suppose Lovell can come along?" asked Jimmy.

"He won't be any use."

"Look here—," began Lovell hotly.

Skitter Dick grinned. "Oh, you can come! Perhaps you'll be able to stop a bullet that's meant for a better head than yours," he said.

"Oh!" ejaculated Lovell. "Come on, then, old chap," said Jimmy.

And leaving Raby and Newcome with the sergeant, the two juniors, leading their horses, followed Skitter Dick into the canyon. Jeff Crow had ridden down the rocky gulch at a breakneck gallop; but, as a matter of fact, it was necessary to pick the way cautiously on foot. The gunman had been driven to take desperate chances, and it was amazing that he had got through without a fall. In what direction he had fled, in the wild hills, the juniors could not guess, but they relied on Skitter Dick.

High over the foothills the moon was sailing now, and a silvery light streamed down on rock and pine. Skitter Dick, leading his horse, proceeded almost at a snail's pace, searching the rocks with his keen eyes as he went. Several times Jimmy and Lovell heard him mutter a sound of satisfaction.

"You've got the trail?" asked Lovell, wondering what traces the Skitter could possibly have picked up on the hard, rocky soil, in the dim, uncertain light.

"I guess so, for sure. The black hoss was hit," said the Skitter.

Jimmy Silver felt a pang. "Black Prince—wounded?" he exclaimed.

"Yes; and I guess it was luck for our crowd," said the Skitter. "He's left a trail that a tenderfoot could follow. Look!"

Jimmy shuddered a little, as the cowpuncher pointed out the traces of blood on the rocks.

"I reckon that's some trail," said Skitter Dick. "Like enough the gunman was hit, too. Anyhow, the hoss stopped the lead, and you can read his trail like a book. Come on, you uns!"

And the three pressed on, on the trail of blood.

The 4th Chapter.

Red Henri in Luck!

Red Henri, the half-breed, threw his dirty blanket aside, yawned, and rose lazily. Dawn was flushing the rugged slopes of the foothills, and gleaming on the mountain torrent beside which the half-breed had camped for the night. Dirty, unkempt, unshaven, morose, Red Henri did not look a pretty sight in the rising sunshine. He rubbed his eyes, rubbing the sleep from them, and sat on a boulder, pulling a chunk of hard bread and a fragment of dried meat from a ragged wallet, and began his breakfast.

Red Henri was down on his luck. Generally he had a horse, but he was on foot now. His trade was horse-stealing, and only a week before, he had been in possession of three good

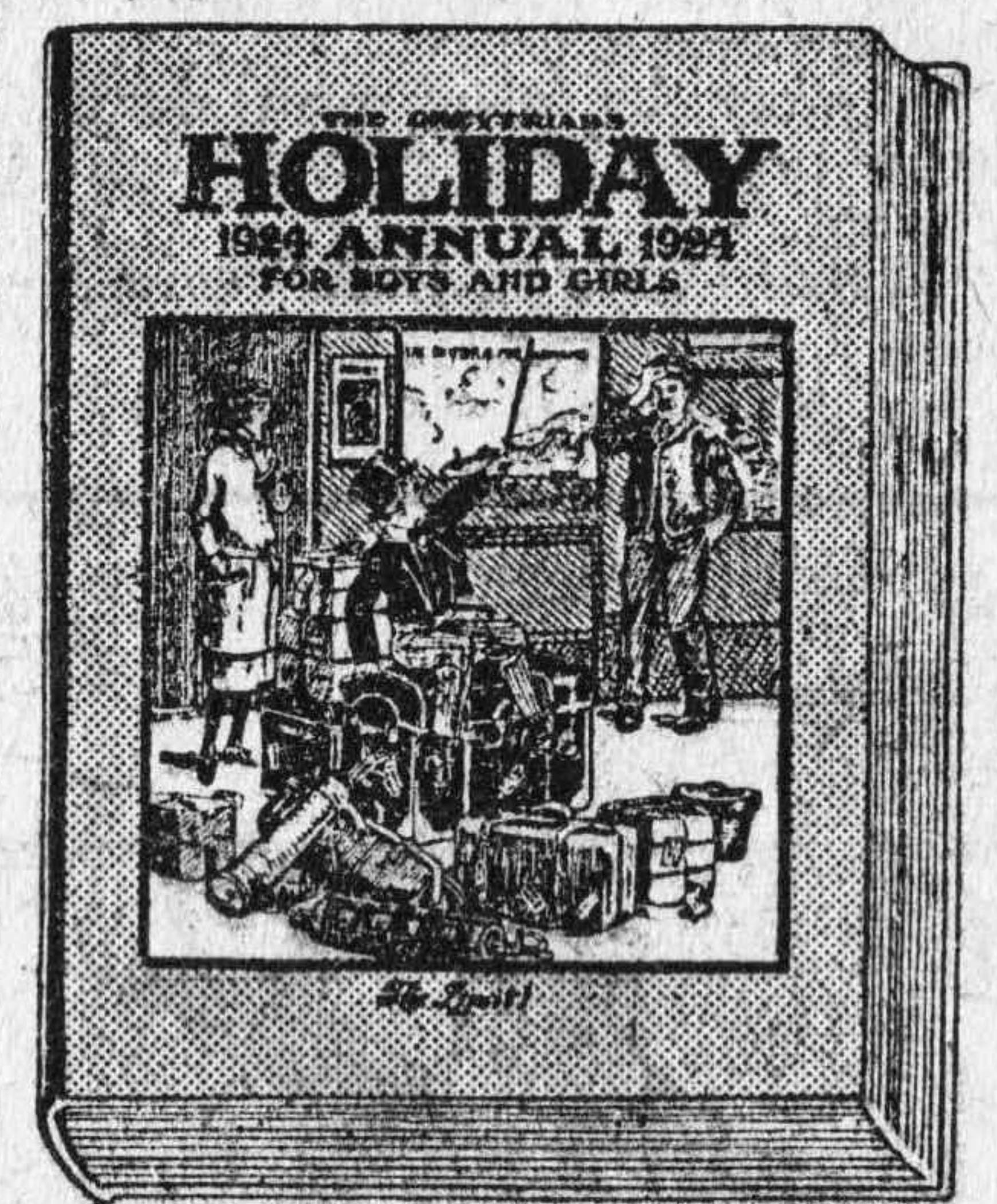
animals, none of which belonged to him. He had lost them over a dirty pack of greasy cards, gambling among the gang of half-breeds to which he belonged, and with them he had lost his rifle. Cleaned out, Red Henri was now on the warpath, like a lion seeking what he might devour. Anything that came in Red Henri's way was fair game—a stray horse or steer, an unguarded miner's cabin, a trapper sleeping by his camp-fire—all was grist that came to the mill of the outcast half-breed.

But nothing had come Red Henri's way, so far—nothing but a severe "quirting" when he had ventured too near a ranch corral, in search of a horse. The marks of the cowpuncher's quirt were still on Red Henri's back, and he had deemed it wise to give the ranches a wide berth for a time. But in the foothills his luck did not befriended him; no lonely trapper or "fossicker" fell in his way, and for days he had stolen nothing—which was quite a record for Henri.

As he sat munching his frugal breakfast, he started and pricked up his ears like a startled coyote. A sound had come to him—the sound of a horse's hoofs clinking on hard rock. Red Henri grinned.

A horse was his chief want; and evidently a horse was coming his way. That horse was destined to pass into Red Henri's possession, unless the rider was armed and on the alert. Red Henri missed the rifle he had lost over the cards; but he fingered the hunting-knife that was stuck in his belt. He rose from the boulder, and stared about him, seeking to "place" the sound he had heard.

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It came again—close at hand, though as yet the horseman was hidden from his sight. The mountain torrent—one of the head-waters of the Windy River—flowed and foamed through a rocky canyon in the foothills, between high, rocky slopes almost like walls. On one side of the torrent, where Red Henri stood, there was foothold about six feet wide between the torrent and the steep, rocky slope of the canyon-side. And it was along that path that the horseman was coming, at a walking pace, as Red Henri could tell by the footfalls.

The winding of the rocks hid the oncoming horseman from his sight, but at any moment he might come into view along the rocky bank of the stream. Red Henri crouched into cover.

His knife was his only weapon, if it came to a struggle, and that weapon was useful only at close quarters. Red Henri's hand closed on a jagged chunk of rock to use as a missile, when the right moment came. Like a crouching beast of prey, he lay among the rocks, and watched the path by the torrent.

His black eyes glittered from his hiding-place at the rider as the latter came into view.

He grinned again. The horse he saw was a magnificent black—such a prize as awakened all the greed of the horse-thief. The animal looked fatigued, as if it had been ridden hard; and at the second glance Red Henri could see that it had been hurt. Dark stains mingled with the sweat on the tired, throbbing flanks.

The horseman, keeping on, would have passed within a few feet of the half-breed's lurking-place, and Red Henri's clutch was tight on the chunk of rock, ready to hurl it, and strike the unsuspecting man into unconsciousness. But at that point the rider halted.

Red Henri's grip on the rock loosened again—the moment had not yet come. He eyed the horseman curiously. He had never seen Jeff Crow, the gunman, before, but he could recognise the ruffian as one of his own kind.

That made no difference to the half-breed's intentions. The maxim that "dog does not eat dog" had no foundation in fact, so far as Red Henri was concerned. He was prepared to knock over and rob anyone who came his way, from an honest trapper to a slinking horse-thief or gunman.

But his curiosity was aroused. The horseman dismounted and hitched his reins over a stunted sapling by the torrent, to secure the black steed. Then he trod back a few paces, the way he had come, and stood for some minutes staring steadily down the course of the stream.

Red Henri could guess that he was looking for pursuers. But the man seemed satisfied at last, and came back to the horse. He was still too far from the half-breed for a cast of the stone to be an assured success, and Red Henri still bided his time, watching like a lynx.

Jeff Crow stooped by the stream and dipped in a tin pannikin and drank greedily. The tethered horse was making efforts to reach the water, but the gunman did not heed the animal's evident desire to drink.

He took his rifle from the saddle and examined it carefully. That action made the hidden half-breed doubly cautious.

To Red Henri's amazement, the newcomer retired a few paces from the horse and levelled the rifle at the animal. For some reason, inexplicable to Red Henri, he intended to shoot the steed that had carried him into the heart of the foothills.

But the man's intention changed before the trigger was pulled. He lowered the rifle with a muttered exclamation.

"Fool! They would hear the shot."

The muttered words reached the half-breed's ear.

Jeff Crow leaned the rifle against a rock, a proceeding that caused the watching half-breed the liveliest satisfaction. He was glad to see the firearm placed out of reach of his prospective victim.

Not for an instant did Jeff Crow suspect that he was watched, that there was anyone beside himself in that lonely waste of rock and pine and torrent. He knew that foes were on his track, but he never dreamed that he had ridden almost into the hands of a still deadlier foe. Not a sound came from the crouching half-breed to warn him.

The gunman drew a knife from his belt and stepped towards the horse. He had finished with Black Prince now.

He knew that on the Alberta plains he had no chance of escape, and he had taken the desperate resolution of attempting to pass the Rocky Mountains into British Columbia. It was the only way of escape open to the gunman, with the whole country up behind him. Black Prince was useless to him on that rugged trail, for he was nowhere near one of the regular passes over the mountains, and by the trails where he hoped to slink into safety a horseman could not ride. Black Prince had outlived his usefulness; it remained only to slaughter the horse and recover the diamond that had been so strangely hidden. That was the explanation of the action that so completely perplexed the watching half-breed.

There was a shrill squeal from the black horse as the knife glittered in the sun. The ruffian's murderous intention was plain enough to the unfortunate animal. Black Prince kicked and strained at his tether in wild terror and excitement, but the deadly thrust of the knife would have found his throat, but for an unexpected interposition.

Red Henri rose silently to his feet, the jagged rock gripped in his hand. He was not likely to watch idly while that valuable prize was slaughtered before his eyes.

Jeff Crow's back was to him. The half-breed's hand rose in the air and his black eyes gleamed as he aimed the rock.

Whiz!

Jeff Crow caught the sound of the whizzing rock, and half-turned in alarm.

Before he had fairly turned, the missile struck him on the temple, instead of the back of the head as Red Henri had intended.

One faint cry came from the gunman as he sank to the ground in a heap, stunned by the terrible blow.

With a bound like a panther Red Henri came at him, his knife in his dusky hand now.

But the knife was not needed. Jeff Crow lay at his feet stunned and senseless, the blood flowing freely from his temple where the rock had struck.

The half-breed gave him a searching glance, and then shrugged his shoulders and returned the knife to his belt. As Jeff Crow had done, Red Henri trod back to the bend of the canyon and looked for a sign of the gunman's pursuers. But there was no one in sight.

He returned to the spot where the gunman lay senseless.

Coolly and methodically the half-breed went through the insensible man's pockets, taking from him everything of value. He picked up the rifle, and drew the black horse loose. With a grin on his dusky, unwashed face, the half-breed mounted the black horse and rode up the rocky path by the torrent. It was a wild and rugged path, and Red Henri would have preferred to take the downward trail to the plains; but he was aware that that might land him into the arms of the gunman's unknown pursuers. But Red Henri knew the foothills well, and he knew of another route ahead, by which he could turn out of the river canyon and ride down to the plains. Munching the remnant of his breakfast as he went, the half-breed rode up the bank of the torrent, leaving Jeff Crow where he had fallen, utterly regardless of the gunman's ultimate fate. Red Henri's luck had been good that morning, and he grinned with satisfaction as he rode away, little dreaming, however, that he was riding on a hundred thousand dollars!

The 5th Chapter.

A Surprise on the Trail!

"I guess we want to keep our eyes peeled now."

Skitter Dick made that remark, as he looked about him in the rising sunlight.

"Lost the trail?" asked Lovell. "Sure not. I guess I could follow that critter across the Rockies, and right on to the Pacific, if I wanted."

"Then why—"

The Skitter grinned good-humouredly.

"Some tenderfeet always will be tenderfeet," he remarked. "But I dare say you've noticed that the sun's rose."

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£300 Awarded to Readers.

In this competition twenty-one competitors correctly forecasted the order in which the seventeen County Cricket Clubs finished up at the end of the season. The First Prize of £100 has therefore been divided among:

Rosa Aeworth, 8, Crieff Road, Wandsworth; G. Bees, 80, Old Street, Clevedon, Som.; Leslie S. Brown, 16, Fulham Street, Beeston, Leeds; Arthur J. Collison, 70, St. Olave's Road, East Ham, E. 6; B. Cook, 17, Greenhill Avenue, Allerton, Liverpool; L. F. Dalby, 7, Spring Road, Ipswich; H. Edwards, Westminster Bank, Fishponds, Bristol; W. Fincher, 10, Bishop Street, Wolverhampton; William Hibbert, 9, Hardwick Street, Hunslet Carr, Leeds; Arthur F. Jones, 60, Beversbrook Road, Tufnell Park, N. 19; Jack Kirk, 2, Westwood Terrace, Far Headingley, Leeds; Wm. Milnes, 30, Dolly Lane, Newtown, Leeds; L. Oakley, 215, Warwick Road, Sparkhill, Birmingham; S. S. Perkes, 37, Back Street, Dudley; F. G. Pickwick, 9, Cicely Road, Peckham, S.E. 15; Arthur E. Tomlinson, The Common, West Hallam, near Derby; Charles Walter, 10, Curzon Road, Maidstone, Kent; Robert Ward, Old Post Office, Penrhydyrun, near New-

port, Mon.; Miss D. Welch, 103, Chesterfield Road, Bristol; A. N. Well, 95, College Avenue, Gillingham, Kent; F. Whittington, The Cambria, Cambria Road, Loughborough Junction, S.E. 5.

So many competitors qualified for the third and fourth grades of prizes that division amongst them of the amounts offered was impracticable. The Second Prize of £50, the Third Prize of £30, and the hundred and twenty prizes of £1 each have therefore been added together and divided among one hundred and sixty-seven competitors whose forecasts contained two errors each. The full list of names and addresses of these prize-winners can be seen at the "Boys' Friend" offices.

CORRECT ORDER OF FINISHING:

- (1) Yorkshire, (2) Nottinghamshire, (3) Lancashire, (4) Surrey, (5) Kent, (6) Sussex, (7) Hampshire, (8) Middlesex, (9) Somerset, (10) Derbyshire, (11) Gloucestershire, (12) Warwickshire, (13) Essex, (14) Leicestershire, (15) Worcestershire, (16) Glamorgan, (17) Northamptonshire.

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Next Week—"The Stranger's Secret!" Another great story of Jimmy Silver & Co. Out West!

"Of course," said Lovell, with a stare.

"And the pesky gunman we're arter has got a rifle, and knows how to use it," said Skitter Dick. "I guess there may be a bullet from behind any rock we pass, now that the sun's up. That's all."

"Oh!" said Lovell, with a quick glance round him.

"You'll come in useful, bub, if you stop the first bullet instead of we 'uns," grinned Skitter Dick. "Try!"

And the Skitter led on his horse, Jimmy Silver following him grinning, and Arthur Edward Lovell frowning.

The trail had been at a walking pace for long hours; but on the rocky track it was fairly certain that the fugitive, too, was proceeding at a cautious pace, especially with Black Prince wounded. More than once Skitter Dick found sign that showed that they were not very far behind the fleeing gunman.

And once, at a distance, he sighted a horseman ahead, riding a black horse, through an opening in the ragged pines. It was only a moment's glimpse, but it was enough for Skitter Dick.

"That's the guy!" he said.

"Where?" asked Lovell.

"He's out of sight again now," grinned the Skitter, "but I reckon I can hit the trail now without looking for sign. He's heading for the Rockies, that's sure. Now I know where to place him we can put on a little more speed."

And Skitter Dick strode on at a pace that the Rookwood juniors found rather hard to equal.

They struck the mountain torrent half a mile below the spot where Jeff Crow had halted. Leading their horses carefully over the rough rocks, they pursued the path up the rocky bank of the stream. Skitter Dick kept ahead, and his keen eyes were never at rest. He had sighted the quarry once, and he knew that it was possible that the quarry, looking back, had sighted the hunters. At any minute it was possible that the gunman might turn at bay. Every rock, every clump of ragged pines might hide a watchful rifle, finger on trigger. The danger was real and close, but there was no help for it. It had to be risked unless the gunman was to be allowed to escape. Where the trail led the pursuers had to follow.

Skitter Dick looked a little puzzled now.

The rocky path up the torrent's side was a favourable spot for an ambush, and the gunman could have turned on his pursuers, in cover, and held the way against them. He could have counted on picking off at least one of them, and halting the pursuit, and then he could have fled again, having gained time and ground. The Skitter was puzzled to guess why the gunman did not try that game.

"I guess his nerves is rattled," he said at last. "If he ain't rattled he's got the chance of a lifetime now. I guess we're sure asking for it, and he ain't handing it out."

But another explanation occurred to the Skitter a little later as he saw a vulture wheeling over the torrent, to descend with a sudden whoop, and disappear from sight.

Skitter Dick whistled.

Another vulture came sailing out of the blue, and shot down after the first.

"Gee-whiz!" ejaculated the Skitter.

"I guess there's dead meat about somewhere."

"Jeff Crow—"

"He may have tuck a tumble on these hyer donicks, and broke his neck," said the Skitter; "or he may have killed the hoss and taken to legging it. I guess the hoss wouldn't be much more use to him the way he's going. Anyhow, them vultures mean dead meat."

"Let's hope it's the gunman and not the horse," said Lovell.

The trio pressed on.

As they came round a bend in the

rock wall of the canyon they came suddenly on the gunman.

Skitter Dick's rifle was ready, but it was not wanted. Jeff Crow lay motionless on the rocks that were stained with his blood, and round him three or four vultures were sitting, watching him with unwinking eyes. That was enough to tell the Skitter that Crow, motionless as he was, was still living. The carrion bird will not touch his prey till life is extinct.

The hideous birds were sitting round the insensible man, waiting, as sometimes they do round a hurt steer on the prairie, watching for the moment to begin the obscene feast.

With a swing of his rifle-butt Skitter Dick drove the birds away, screeching.

Then he knelt by the side of the gunman.

"I guess he got it hard," he remarked. "But he ain't petered out. He'll come to, I reckon. Take his hat and fill it with water, Jimmy."

"The horse must have thrown him," said Lovell.

"You reckon so, sonny?"

"Looks like it. And the fall

Prince, and lit out with him. And I guess we're going arter that somebody!"

There was a groan from the injured man. His eyes opened with a wild stare.

"He's coming to," said Lovell. "Perhaps he can tell us about the other man."

Jeff Crow stared wildly at the cowpuncher, and made a sudden clutch at his belt for a weapon. The Skitter grinned.

"Let up, old pard," he said. "You've been cleaned out. You ain't got a toothpick left. And this hyer gun is ready to talk if you give any trouble. Your game's up, Jeff Crow!"

"Who—what—" stammered Jeff Crow. He dragged himself into a sitting posture, and stared about him in bewilderment. "Oh, my head! Where's the black horse?"

"Where you won't see him agin, I reckon. That's what we want to know."

"Who was it struck you down?" asked Jimmy Silver.

The gunman groaned.

torrent. But there was no time to waste on the disabled gunman. Every minute was precious if the unknown thief was not to escape with his prize. It was clear that some horse-thief had struck down the gunman and robbed him of the horse, and it was that horse-thief who was now the quarry. The hunters hurried on their way, and Jeff Crow's groaning died into silence behind them.

The 6th Chapter. Brought to Book!

"Halt!" Red Henri, the half-breed, gave a violent start.

His black eyes swept round in a savage, startled glance. The sudden shout broke the silence of the mountains, utterly unexpectedly to the half-breed horse-thief.

The half-breed had left the canyon and the torrent far behind. He was leading the black horse down a steep hillside, picking his way among scattered boulders and stony ridges and gullies, en route for the plains to the

away when it came to getting into touch with him. The cowpuncher and the two Rookwood juniors had emerged from a belt of scrubby pines high upon the rocky hillside, fifty feet or more above the level of Red Henri's head, a couple of hundred yards to the left of the half-breed. Between them the hillside broke away in a precipice, down which only an active man could have clambered, and certainly not a horse.

But from the top of the precipice Skitter Dick aimed his rifle at the half-breed. He was out of reach, but within easy range for the dead-shot cowpuncher.

"Halt!"

Red Henri halted, and stared up at his pursuers. The three of them looked down on him. All three recognised the black horse at a glance, though the half-breed was a stranger to them.

"That's the durned hoss-thief!" said Skitter Dick, as he glanced along his rifle. "He's got Black Prince!"

Red Henri glared round him for cover. He whipped behind the black horse at once. Keeping Black Prince between him and his pursuers, he stared up at the cowpuncher.

Skitter Dick's task since the meeting with Jeff Crow had been a difficult one. There was no longer the trail of blood to guide him, and the rocks held few traces. But he was not far behind the horse-thief at any time, and several times he had sighted Red Henri from the higher ground. To keep on the horse-thief's trail on the trackless rocks was impossible, but Skitter Dick had succeeded in getting within effective rifle-range.

"Hands up, you gold-darned hoss-thief!" shouted Skitter Dick, his powerful voice booming clearly from the distance.

Red Henri gritted his teeth. He was not disposed to give up his prize without a struggle.

With a sudden movement, he threw up Jeff Crow's rifle and fired at the cowpuncher. The hasty shot flew yards wide of the mark, and Skitter Dick pulled trigger instantly.

A yell from the half-breed answered.

He was almost entirely covered by the black horse, which he kept between him and his enemies; but the Skitter's aim was unerring. The bullet grazed the head of the half-breed, cutting away a lock of hair and a strip of skin. The blood ran down over Red Henri's dusky, unwashed face.

"Hands up, you!" shouted Skitter Dick.

The half-breed leaped away from the horse before the cowpuncher could fire again, and plunged into cover behind a boulder. There he lay in safety, panting, while he reloaded his rifle.

Skitter Dick watched, rifle in hand, for him to show himself again. The black horse stood free and uncontrolled. Far in the distance, where the sloping hillside ended, there was a glimpse of the plains for which Red Henri had been heading.

Black Prince stared round him, and broke into a trot down the hillside.

"He's going!" exclaimed Lovell.

Skitter Dick nodded.

"I guess it's the hoss we want, not the hoss-thief!" he remarked. "I could drop him from here—easy as falling off'n a log!"

Dick made a motion with his rifle, but lowered it again. The fate of the black horse was sealed when the hapless animal was captured and handed over to the authorities. The strange hiding-place Dave Tutt had found for the stolen diamond made that certain. But it went against the grain with the cowpuncher to shoot a horse, and especially a splendid animal like Black Prince. Skitter Dick shook his head.

"I ain't drawing a bead on that horse!" he said. "I don't care if he's stacked with dollars! I guess I'll rope

(Continued on page 272.)



BLACK PRINCE'S GETAWAY! Directly Red Henri dropped into cover behind a boulder Black Prince broke away down the hillside.

stunned him," said Lovell. "The horse is gone on without him, anyhow."

"Is that all you figure out?" asked Skitter Dick, in a bantering tone.

"Well, isn't it, so?" demanded Lovell.

"Sure not!"

Skitter Dick dashed a hatful of water into the insensible man's face. There was a flicker of returning consciousness.

"I guess this galoot ran into trouble hyerabouts!" remarked Skitter Dick. "Look at that donick—"

"That what?" asked Lovell.

"That rock," said the Skitter, indicating the missile with which Red Henri had struck down the gunman.

"There's blood on it, and it's a yard away from him. I guess that was the donick that knocked him over, and it was pitched powerful hard, too."

"Somebody chucked it at him?" asked Lovell, puzzled.

"Sure!"

"But who? There's nobody here."

"I guess there was somebody hyer when this pilgrim got his ticket for soup!" answered Skitter Dick. "And that somebody has roped in Black

"I never saw him! Something crashed on my head—"

"This hyer donick," said the cowpuncher, with a nod.

"I—I was going to kill the horse, but—but I was struck down!" groaned the gunman. "I was stunned, I suppose. Has the horse been taken?"

"Sure!"

Jeff Crow made a feeble effort to rise. His aching head swam, and he fell back groaning. Skitter Dick rose to his feet.

"I guess your trail ends hyer, Jeff Crow," he said. "We ain't got the time to rope you in, but the Mounted Police will pick you up soon enough. I reckon you won't get far."

The gunman did not answer, save with a groan. He sank back half-unconscious. His trail was ended with a vengeance. His last chance of the stolen diamond was gone. Into whatever hands it fell—those of the hunters or those of the half-breed—there was no chance left for the gunman, who had sought it so long.

Jimmy Silver gave the wretched man a compassionate glance as he followed Skitter Dick up the bank of the

north of the Windy River. Until that shout rang on his startled ears Red Henri had been in a mood of great satisfaction. He had examined the wound of the black horse, and found that the bullet was not in Black Prince's body. It had grazed the horse's flank, cutting a gash, and Henri had washed and bandaged the hurt—not from motives of humanity, but because his prize was of value. Once he had the big black safely out of the section where it was known, Red Henri had no doubt of being able to sell him for some hundreds of dollars—without a suspicion that he would also be selling the hidden diamond that was worth thousands.

The order to halt rang on his ears with unpleasant distinctness. He had already guessed that the gunman whom he had struck down had stolen the horse, and was pursued; and he now realised that the pursuers were on his own track.

For a moment or two he did not see the man who shouted. But a waving rifle caught his eye.

Skitter Dick was not two hundred yards from the half-breed, in a direct line. But he was a good distance

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THE HUNTING OF BLACK PRINCE!

(Continued from page 269.)

him in if I can, but I ain't plugging lead at him!"

Jimmy Silver drew a breath of relief. Jimmy would not have been sorry to see Black Prince make his escape, diamond and all.

"Good!" said Jimmy.

And Lovell nodded.

"I guess we're going to rope him in, as we fixed it up with the sergeant," said Skitter Dick. "We're bound to do that. But when it comes to drawing a bead on him, I guess it ain't in my line!"

Black Prince trotted away, his hoofs ringing on the rocks. Behind the boulder, Red Henri heard him go, but he dared not emerge to make an effort to keep his prize. He knew that the watchful cowpuncher on the top of the cliff was waiting for him to show himself.

The half-breed lay low, muttering savage exclamations.

"I guess we've got to leave the hosses here," said Skitter Dick. "You take my rifle, Jimmy, and watch for that durned thief. Plug him if he shows as much as an eyelid! I'm going down the rocks to get at him."

"Rely on me!" said Jimmy.

He took the cowboy's rifle and threw himself down, watching from the cliff-top.

Skitter Dick swung himself down the rocky declivity.

As he clambered down he was fully exposed to fire from below, and his life was in Jimmy Silver's keeping.

Jimmy watched anxiously.

Dislodged stones, falling on the rocks below, warned the hidden half-breed of the cowpuncher's descent of the cliff.

Jimmy, watching anxiously, saw a dark face peering round the boulder, and pulled trigger instantly.

Red Henri backed into cover, with a howl, as a bullet clipped his ear. Jimmy watched grimly.

But the half-breed did not venture to peer out again from his cover, and Skitter Dick finished his perilous descent and dropped on the lower hillside from the cliff.

He had to cross a wide, open space to reach the boulder behind which the half-breed had taken cover. Red Henri waited savagely for him to come, satisfied that he would have the first shot when the cowpuncher rushed his position.

But Skitter Dick was in no hurry. Instead of advancing upon the half-breed's cover, he worked his way

down the hillside, making a wide detour. He kept in cover as he moved, and hardly a sound came from him to warn the watching half-breed.

Red Henri was still waiting for the rush when a voice sounded in his ears behind him.

"Hands up, you durned breed!"

Red Henri spun round. He found himself looking into Skitter Dick's grinning face and a levelled revolver.

He realised—rather too late—that the wary cowpuncher had circled round his position, creeping among the rocks with the stealthiness of an Indian brave. The revolver covered Red Henri now, and Dick Lee's finger was on the trigger.

With a muttered exclamation, Red Henri dropped the rifle and put up his dusky hands.

"That's sensible, breed!" remarked Skitter Dick, as he advanced upon him with the revolver at a level. "I guess I should have plugged you for keeps, and it wouldn't have been any loss to Canada, I reckon! Keep your paws up!"

With his free hand Skitter Dick plucked the knife from the half-breed's belt, and then picked up the rifle. Red Henri watched him, with a black scowl of rage.

"That lets you out, breed!" said Skitter Dick cheerfully. "I guess I don't want to be bothered with you now your pesky teeth are drawn! You can git!"

A savage string of words answered him.

"Git!" said the Skitter, making a motion with the revolver. "Light out while you're safe, breed! It's a gol-darned powerful temptation to let the daylight through you!"

Red Henri took the hint. He scuttled away at a run, and vanished among the rocks and pines of the hillside. Skitter Dick waved his hand to the two juniors on the cliff-top.

"All's clear now!" he sang out. "I guess we can go ahead!"

The cowpuncher rejoined his comrades, but it was a good hour before the horses could be led down by tortuous paths. By that time the black horse, rejoicing in his newfound liberty, was long out of sight. On the lower hillside Skitter Dick sought for traces of him, but he sought without much hope of success. But the hunters of the black horse pushed on, guided here and there by faint and doubtful sign. It was late afternoon when they came out on the

plains that stretched northward from the "bad lands" north of the Windy River. There the Skitter, shading his eyes with his hand, stared across the boundless plain and shook his head.

"Lost the trail?" asked Lovell.

The Skitter grunted.

"I guess there wasn't any trail to lose," he answered. "That hoss may be half-way to Mackenzie by this time, or he may be half-way to the Saskatchewan River. I guess he left a trail when he struck the grassland, and we've got some dozens of miles to choose from looking for it!"

Jimmy Silver smiled.

"We'll try!" he said.

"Oh, sure—we'll try!"

And Skitter Dick did try. The rest of the day was spent in hunting for the trail, and the three camped that night on the prairie. But there was no sign to be picked up of the black horse. Free as air, his own master now, Black Prince had fled into the boundless North-West, and the task of trailing him down was a hopeless one. Jimmy Silver, at least, was glad that Black Prince had escaped the fate destined for him, and probably Skitter Dick shared his feeling; but duty was duty, and the Skitter did his best. But there was "nothing doing," and the following day the three hunters took the home trail for the Windy River Ranch.

At Windy River they found the sergeant, lying up with his damaged leg, and attended by Doc Jones, of Mosquito. Sergeant Kerr grunted when he heard the news; but he was consoled somewhat by the capture of Jeff Crow, who was picked up by the Mounted Police the same day. The whole gang of gunmen who had stolen the diamond in far-off Montreal had now met their punishment, but the Montreal millionaire waited in vain for news of the Laroche diamond.

Whether Dave Tutt had spoken the truth, whether the diamond had in fact been forced down the throat of Black Prince for concealment, was uncertain; but, at all events, there was no other news of it. And if the gunman had spoken the truth, somewhere in the wild North-West there wandered a black horse that was worth a hundred thousand dollars to capture, but which was never likely to be captured now. The hunting of Black Prince was over.

THE END.

"The Stranger's Secret!" is the title of next Monday's grand story of the further adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co. out West. Don't miss it! Order your BOYS' FRIEND in advance.)

In Your Editor's Den



Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers upon any subject. Address your letters to: Editor, "Boys' Friend," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

AN EXTRA SPECIAL NUMBER.

In this week's splendid representative number of the BOYS' FRIEND you will find the second set of pictures in the record Football Competition, about which everybody is talking. This "Footballers' Names" Competition goes much further, and is altogether more interesting in every way than anything we have had in the past. Get your solutions ready, and keep them carefully until the time comes along for sending in the entries. There is a special feature in this issue for the exclusive benefit of new readers, who come in week by week. I do not want anybody to be left out of this competition just because the first set of pictures has been missed. For that reason I am giving this week a small reproduction of the first set of pictures. New-comers can, therefore, start this week right away. No surprise need be felt at the sensation created by the wonderful offer of substantial money prizes, motor-bikes, "James" cycles, and a magnificent array of other useful and attractive prizes. There is the plain fact to be taken into account that this is the competition of competitions. The wonderful offer is unique. So get busy and see whether some of the handsome prizes do not come your way.

"THE GREAT GETAWAY!"

Michael Poole supplies an amusing mystification in next week's number of the BOYS' FRIEND. This is another of those sparkling yarns about Jolly Roger and St. Katie's. This talented author always comes up smiling with the goods. There is a cheery twinkle in every line of his latest story, and as you read you get to like the various characters more and more. They are all well drawn, and stand out prominently. Lincoln Beck figures again next Monday. It is a yarn that leaves a bright memory behind it, and makes you want something more about the school presided

over by the genial gentleman with the piratical nickname.

"FED-UP WITH FOOTBALL!"

Next Monday's instalment of this great serial is full of snap. From the start I felt certain that John W. Wheway's story would enjoy a sweeping success. This confidence has been more than justified by results. It is a real footer yarn, full of the fighting spirit, and with real flesh and blood characters.

"THE STRANGER'S SECRET!"

This is another treat for the next issue. It tells of the further adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co. in the West, and a very peculiar situation indeed comes in for deft handling by Mr. Owen Conquest. Who is this stranger, and what is the secret in question? All that will be set forth in the coming tale, which is a real corker.

"RESCUED BY RADIO!"

Jack Crichton's wireless story for Monday is great stuff, with a thrill running right through it. Jim Bold comes on the scene here, and the mystery of it all is pretty dark and deep. Stories about radio work have a double appeal these days, and this author certainly knows how to work up a captivating theme.

INTERESTING POINTS.

There is much more I should like to say concerning next week, but it will have to keep, though there must be a word about "The Bullies of the Bombay Castle," by Duncan Storm, also the excellent articles on Football, by "Goalie," and Health and Sport, by Percy Longhurst, all tried features which never fail.

Your Editor.

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