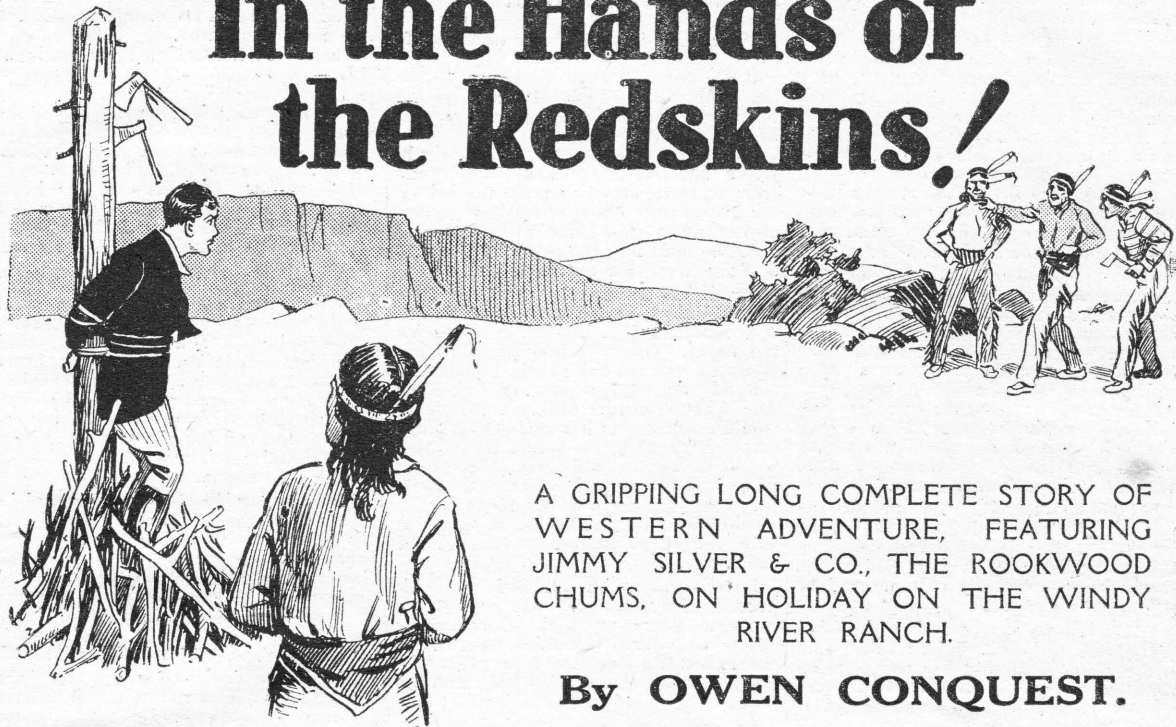


THE REDSKINS' SCHOOLBOY PRISONER!

With Redskins on the warpath it is not safe to leave the precincts of the Windy River Ranch, but Lovell thinks otherwise, and in consequence rides head first into terrible peril!

In the Hands of the Redskins!



A GRIPPING LONG COMPLETE STORY OF WESTERN ADVENTURE, FEATURING JIMMY SILVER & CO., THE ROOKWOOD CHUMS, ON HOLIDAY ON THE WINDY RIVER RANCH.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Left Behind!

"WHAT about us?" asked Lovell. Hudson Smedley's answer was brief.

"Nothing about you."

"But—"

"No time to waste, I guess. Get a move on, Jimmy!"

Hudson Smedley strode out of the Windy River ranch-house, slinging on his rifle as he went.

Jimmy Silver gave Lovell a sympathetic glance. Raby and Newcome smiled. Arthur Edward Lovell breathed hard with indignation.

"Nothing about me!" he said. "Well, my hat! As if I shouldn't be as much use as you, Jimmy—more, in fact!"

"Mr. Smedley doesn't seem to think so," murmured Raby.

"He's an ass!"

"Oh!" said Newcome.

"Just an ass," said Lovell, with emphasis. "I'm sorry to say it about your cousin, Jimmy, but he strikes me as being just a silly ass!"

"You see—" murmured Jimmy.

"If he left us all behind it would be fat-headed," said Lovell. "But to take you and leave me—well, it's asinine."

"It's barely possible that Mr. Smedley knows what he's about!" suggested Newcome.

"It's pretty plain that he doesn't," answered Lovell.

Pete Peters, the foreman of the ranch, looked in.

"You going with the outfit, Jimmy?" he asked.

"Yes, rather!" answered Jimmy Silver.

"They're starting!"

"Right-ho! Good-bye, you chaps!" said Jimmy Silver hurriedly. "I'm sorry you're not coming."

Jimmy Silver hastened out of the ranch-house. Lovell and Raby and Newcome stood in the doorway to watch the outfit start.

Six sturdy cowpunchers had mounted with Hudson Smedley, and Jimmy Silver jumped on Blazer and joined them. Jimmy waved his hand to his chums as he rode away with the cowpunchers, and Raby and Newcome waved back; but Arthur Edward Lovell was too indignant to do anything but frown. He frowned portentously.

With a thudding of hoofs, the party disappeared over the prairie. Pete Peters watched them out of sight, and then turned to the three juniors.

"I guess you 'uns are well out of it. It won't be a soft trail in the foothills after Lone Wolf and his gang."

Lovell snorted.

"No reason why we shouldn't go," he said. "I suppose we should be useful in a scrap with the Indians."

"We'd like to join up," said Raby. "But I dare say Mr. Smedley knows best."

"You bet he does!" said the foreman of Windy River. "The boss knows best. There'll be some hard trailing and tough scuffling before Lone Wolf is roped in. He's got a dozen of the Blood braves with him, and they mean business."

Pete Peters strode away, leaving Arthur Edward Lovell still frowning. Lovell felt it very keenly that he was left behind. Lovell had a fixed belief that he would have been very useful in the party; much more useful than Jimmy Silver, as a matter of fact.

But on that point the rancher's word was law, and there was no gainsaying it. Lovell took it out in grousing, as it were.

There had been trouble in the Windy River section with the Indians of the

Little Blood reservation. A cargo of smuggled firewater had stirred up the younger "bucks" of the tribe, and an outbreak had followed.

There had been some days of excitement at Windy River, and a contingent of the Canadian Mounted Police had ridden up from Red Deer to deal with the matter—promptly and effectually. The warlike "bucks" were rounded up or driven back to the reserve, and the "trouble" ended as suddenly as it had begun. There had been danger for a time of the movement spreading to the Great Blood Reserve farther south. But it had been dealt with too promptly; and Leaping Elk, the chief of the Little Blood Reserve, had received a visit from the Mounted Police, and bowed his grey old head to their commands, and delivered up what remained of the smuggled firewater in the Indian village.

But a dozen of the Bloods, more desperate and more guilty than the rest, persisted in defiance, and they had fled to the foothills. Peace was restored on the prairie, but in the rocky recesses of the foothills, under the shadow of the mighty Rockies, the gang of outcasts lurked—a constant danger to the cowpunchers and their herds on the grassy plains below.

For which reason contingents were gathering from the various ranches in the section to hunt down the outcast gang. Hudson Smedley had ridden away to the rendezvous with half a dozen of his men, and he had taken Jimmy Silver as a recruit.

It was a busy season on the ranch, and Pete Peters was left short-handed to carry on. So Jimmy came in useful as a recruit in the place of a cowpuncher. But Hudson Smedley did not

deem it advisable to take Lovell and Raby and Newcome into danger. Jimmy Silver was a splendid rider and a crack shot, and quite useful in the outfit; but the rancher did not look on his comrades as equally useful. Which was exceedingly exasperating to Lovell, though Raby and Newcome admitted that the Canadian rancher probably knew what he was about.

As a matter of absolute fact, Arthur Edward Lovell would probably have been in the way; but he was far from admitting it. It was a little weakness of Arthur Edward's to believe that he could do anything that another fellow could do—and do it, indeed, a little better than the other fellow. He liked Jimmy Silver immensely, but he could not somehow see that Jimmy could ride harder and shoot straighter.

Raby and Newcome looked at Lovell's frowning face and smiled a little. They would have liked to ride with the outfit, but they knew well enough that they were not so tough as Jimmy, and much more likely to "crack up" on a hard trail in the foothills.

"Anyhow, we can make ourselves useful here," remarked Raby, after a long silence. "The cowpunchers have plenty to do, and they're short-handed now. We can help with the cattle."

Snort from Lovell. Arthur Edward was not keen on helping with the cattle.

"We'd better join up and do something, if it's only helping Baldy, the cook, when everybody else is hard at it," urged Newcome.

"You fellows can go and wash dishes for Baldy, the cook, if you like," said Lovell sarcastically. "I'm not gone on washing dishes, personally. But don't let me stop you from enjoying yourselves."

"Well, I'm going to ask Mr. Peters what I can do, anyhow," said Raby. "I'm not going to slack while everybody's at work. You coming, Newcome?"

"Yes, rather! Come on, Lovell!"

"Oh, rats!" said Lovell crossly. Raby and Newcome walked over to the foreman's hut, leaving Arthur Edward Lovell alone with his indignation. There was plenty of work to be done, and they soon forgot about Arthur Edward Lovell. But when they came into the ranch-house to dinner Lovell did not appear, and Woo Sing, the chore-boy, did not know where he was, save that he was not in the house.

"Tinkee gonee lidee," said Woo Sing. "Me see takee hoss."

"Gone riding," said Raby. "Well, he must be an ass to miss his dinner."

And in the afternoon Raby and Newcome rejoined the cowpunchers and made themselves useful again, and did not think any more about Lovell till they came in to supper. And at supper Arthur Edward Lovell was still conspicuous by his absence.

"My hat!" said Newcome. "He can't have been ass enough to go after the outfit—"

Raby shook his head. "Even Lovell wouldn't be ass enough for that," he said uneasily.

"I wonder!"

"Anyhow, he would be bound to miss them, and then he would come back," said Raby.

"He might miss the way back, too."

"Oh, my hat! He might!"

The night fell; and Arthur Edward Lovell had not returned. And Raby and Newcome, anxious enough now, scanned the starlit prairie from the ranch-house, and wondered where he was.

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THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Lovell's Luck!

"THE silly dummies!" said Lovell. He was referring to the outfit.

The shades of night were falling on the plains and the foothills, and Arthur Edward Lovell was quite alone.

"The silly chumps!" he said aloud. "The duffers!"

It did not occur to Lovell that he was the duffer in the case. He had missed the outfit, and he did not attribute that misfortune to himself.

Lovell was aware that the Windy River party was to meet contingents from other ranches at a point farther up the river, where the whole body, numbering more than fifty men, were to take the trail into the foothills in search of Lone Wolf, the outcast Blood.

Lovell had borrowed a rifle from Pete Peters' cabin, and mounted his horse, and ridden away, intending to follow the outfit. Once he had joined them, many miles from the ranch, Lovell considered astutely, that Mr. Smedley would not send him back. The rancher would be faced, as it were, with a "fait accompli"; and the accomplished fact would be too much for him. He might be angry; but as his concern was chiefly for the junior's safety, obviously it would be safer for Lovell to continue with the outfit than to return to the ranch alone.

Lovell was quite satisfied with his process of reasoning. He was in no hurry to join up with the riders, as he sagely considered that the farther from the ranch the juncture took place, the less chance there was of Hudson Smedley sending him back by himself.

So, after getting clear of the ranch, he rode at a leisurely pace, and did not reach the place of rendezvous on the upper waters of the Windy River till late in the afternoon.

That did not matter, he considered; the outfit, of course, would be gone on, but Lovell would follow their trail into the foothills. Fifty horsemen would leave a trail on the prairie that could almost be followed by a blind man.

Lovell reached the rendezvous, and found plenty of traces of the horsemen who had gathered there from various ranches. As he had anticipated, a broad and trampled trail led away westward from the winding Windy River.

Lovell trotted cheerfully on the trail. His idea was to come up with the outfit just before sundown; which would make it absolutely impossible for him to be sent back, as assuredly he could not have found his way back to the ranch after dark from the distance.

His cheery and satisfied face grew a little more serious, however, when the broad-marked trail turned from the plain into the bad lands.

In the bad lands that stretched along the foothills the soil was sandy and rocky, and gave little trace of the passage of horsemen, and it occurred to Lovell that he might miss the trail here.

That misgiving was soon realised.

He came to a halt in the bad lands, in a rocky ravine, with the happy knowledge that he had not the faintest idea in which direction Hudson Smedley and his men had ridden—and an equal ignorance of his own way back to the Windy River Ranch.

Lovell had plenty of dogged pluck, and he was not scared at finding himself alone in the bad lands with night falling. But he was very considerably dismayed.

He was exasperated, too. He had not foreseen this; though, really, he might have foreseen it.

"The silly chumps!" he said a dozen times. "The stupid owls! I shan't find them now, that's a cert! The dummies!"

Slanging the missing outfit relieved Lovell's feelings a little. But it did not help him on his way.

He set his horse in motion again at last.

In which direction to ride, he simply could not guess; and he left it to the horse, hoping that the animal's instinct would lead him to take the direction where there were other horses.

This was as likely to lead the horse back to the ranch as after the outfit; but Lovell would have been quite pleased to find himself back at the ranch by that time.

He did not realise that he had acted with utter reckless thoughtlessness; but he did realise that he was in a scrape.

The night fell, and shadows deepened over the bad lands, as Lovell's horse trotted on with him by ridge and ravine.

The horse stopped at last by the bank of a rippling stream, doubtless one of the head-waters of the Windy River. Lovell let him drink, while he pondered on the situation anew.

By following the stream downward he thought that he might reach the Windy River, and by following the river, the ranch. But he discovered, on observation, that at a little distance the stream plunged in a cascade over a rocky precipice, where certainly a horseman could not follow.

"Nothing doing!" said Lovell aloud.

He drew his horse away from the stream at last and rode on, following a deep and shadowy ravine, over which the pine-trees tossed strange shadows in the starlight.

The hoofs of his horse struck eerie echoes from the rocks as he rode. The ravine widened into a great canyon, and it dawned upon Lovell that he was leaving the bad lands behind and entering the foothills.

It was into the foothills that the outfit must have ridden, in search of Lone Wolf and his gang, and Lovell hoped that his horse's instinct was, after all, leading him on the track of the outfit. It was a slender hope, but it was all Lovell had to cling to.

He listened to the echo of his horse's hoofs, coming eerily back from the rocks and pines, and it occurred to him after a time that the echo was stronger before him than behind him. From that it slowly came into his mind that there was an echo of other hoofs within his range of hearing—that some other horseman was riding through the dusky canyon in advance of him.

He drew in his horse to listen. As he sat motionless in the saddle, with his head bent to listen, he heard the sound distinctly.

It was distant, but it was clear, and Lovell's face brightened as he heard it. Somewhere in advance of him, in the shadowy canyon, was a horseman, and he had no doubt that it was a member of the outfit; probably a rear-guard riding behind the main body. Lovell started again, and urged on his tired steed to a gallop, heedless of the rough rocks in his path.

Now that his attention was drawn to it, and he was listening carefully, he could distinguish the stranger's hoof-beats from his own. Suddenly the hoof-beats ahead stopped.

"He's heard me," murmured Lovell. "He's stopped! I'll jolly soon be up with him now!"

He rode on cheerfully, and shouted as he rode.

"Hallo! Hallo!"

His voice rang with thunderous echoes among the rocks.

"Hallo!"

The echo came back from a dozen directions, echoing and re-echoing; but there was no answering voice. Neither was there any further sound of the stranger's hoof-beats.

"Hallo!" shouted Lovell again.

Then the answer came unexpectedly. A shadowy figure leaped from the rocks, and before Lovell knew what was happening, a sinewy hand grasped him and he was dragged from the saddle.

"What—" gasped Lovell.

In the starlight he caught a glimpse of a coppery face, with red ochre

He stared up at the Indian brave with dilated eyes. The drawn knife still threatened him, as the Indian, with his left hand, took away the rifle. Lovell made no resistance. He was at the mercy of the Blood, and he realised, too, that it was not the Red man's intention to dispatch him.

Keeping his sinewy knee planted on the hapless Lovell, the Indian seemed to listen. The heavy echoing of the rifle-shot died away, and was followed by deep silence. For a full minute no sound broke the tense stillness of the starlit hills.

Then the Indian spoke at last, in English:

"Little white man alone?"

"Yes!" gasped Lovell.

"Where you come?"

came entirely by folly, and he suspected a trap of some kind.

But the dead silence seemed to reassure him at last.

"You go to join white man's outfit?" he asked, after a long pause, his black eyes glittering down at Lovell.

"Yes."

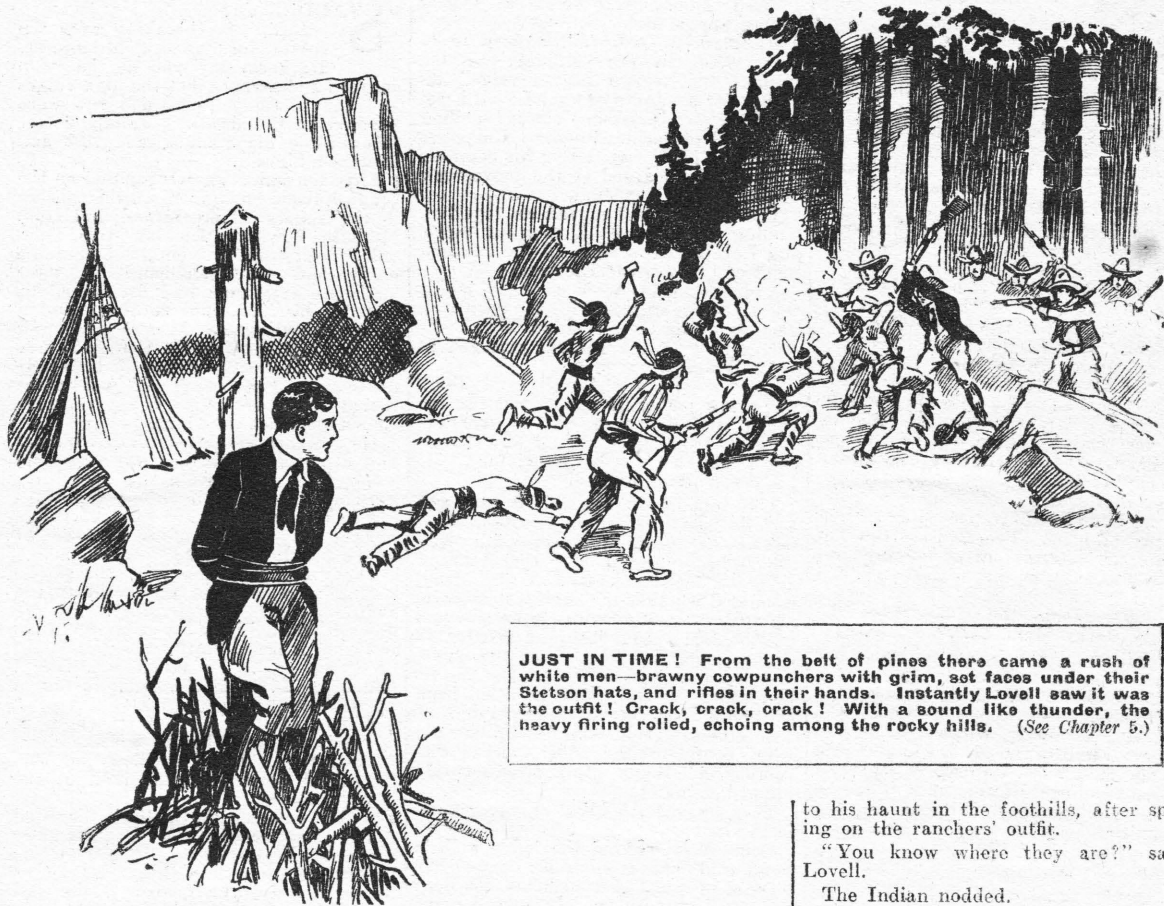
"You know where find?"

"No."

"Me know," said the Redskin. "Me watch! Me scout!"

Lovell comprehended now how the Redskin came to be alone in the foothills. He guessed, too, that the outfit must be at some distance, or the cautious Indian would never have allowed his horse's hoofs to be audible.

Doubtless the Redskin was returning



JUST IN TIME! From the belt of pines there came a rush of white men—brawny cowpunchers with grim, set faces under their Stetson hats, and rifles in their hands. Instantly Lovell saw it was the outfit! Crack, crack, crack! With a sound like thunder, the heavy firing rolled, echoing among the rocky hills. (See Chapter 5.)

daubed on it, and a pair of flashing black eyes.

His heart almost died in his breast.

It was not a member of the rancher's outfit that he had been following. It was no friend in need to whom he had shouted. It was one of the Blood Indians—one of the desperate gang of outcasts who had fled into the foothills to escape the Mounted Police!

Lovell sprawled on the rocks, staring at the Redskin who had dragged him down. His rifle was still in his hands.

By chance, rather than by design, the startled junior pulled the trigger, and the report of the rifle rang in thunderous echoes among the rocky foothills.

The bullet flew yards from the Redskin. The next moment the Blood had planted his knee on the fallen junior, and his knife gleamed in the starlight.

Lovell gave himself up for lost.

But the blow did not fall.

"I came from Windy River Ranch."

"You lose way?" said the Redskin, comprehending.

"Yes."

"You tink me white man when you call?"

"Yes."

"Little white man great fool!"

The Redskin spoke with contemptuous scorn. Certainly no Indian youth would have rushed recklessly into terrible danger as Arthur Edward Lovell had done.

Lovell winced. By that time he did not need telling that he had acted foolishly. He realised it clearly enough. Perhaps he realised, too, that Hudson Smedley had had good reason for leaving him out of the Indian hunting outfit.

The Redskin still listened intently. He seemed hardly able to believe that Lovell's reckless proceedings had been

to his haunt in the foothills, after spying on the ranchers' outfit.

"You know where they are?" said Lovell.

The Indian nodded.

"Let me go, and—and—"

The Redskin removed his knee.

"Fool, get up!" he said.

The "fool" got up. The Redskin returned his knife to his belt, and, taking a strip of hide, bound Lovell's hands together.

"You come with Lone Wolf!" he said.

Lovell gave a start.

"Lone Wolf!" he exclaimed. "You are Lone Wolf?"

"Me Lone Wolf—great chief of the Bloods," said the Redskin. "Take little white man to lodges in the hills—tomorrow, burn him at stake! I have spoken!"

He remounted his horse, which came at his call, and leading Lovell's horse, with the bound junior mounted upon it, pursued his way into the depths of the foothills.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Trail!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL sat his horse in stony silence. His heart was like lead in his breast.

The Indian had attached his trail-ropes to Lovell's horse, and the latter followed a couple of yards behind Lone Wolf.

Lovell's hands were bound together at the wrists, and it was hopeless to think of escape. He could have thrown himself from the saddle upon the rocky ground at the cost of a painful concussion, but it was useless to think of flight on foot from a mounted Indian.

The threat of Lone Wolf had chilled the blood in Lovell's veins. His life had been spared, in order that he might perish at the stake, and he knew that Lone Wolf was in earnest. The gang of Redskin outcasts had thrown off the white man's rule, when they abandoned the reservation and fled to the hills; and in doing so they had reassumed the old habits and customs which had had to be abandoned in the reserve. With the war-hatchet and the scalping-knife came the torture-stake, and the hapless Lovell was to be the first victim.

Somewhere in the foothills there was help; but it was far away. The outfit were hunting for the Indian outcasts, but Lovell knew that it might be days, perhaps weeks, before they hunted the gang down in the trackless wilderness. Sooner or later Lone Wolf and his gang would be brought to book; but not in time to save the life of the reckless junior who had fallen into their hands.

Even if the ranchers' outfit came by this very canyon, there was no trail on the hard rocks to tell that the Indian had passed that way.

But in the depth of despair a glimmering came into Lovell's mind—a glimmering of hope. The Redskin did not even look back at him as he rode on; his attention was given to the rough and rocky way he was following, deeper and deeper into the shadows of the mighty Rocky Mountains.

Lovell could not free his hands; but he could use his fingers. When the idea glimmered into his mind at last, he acted on it at once.

Slowly, cautiously, silently, he moved his bound wrists, and got his fingers into his pocket. With his fingers he drew out his handkerchief and let it fall.

The handkerchief fluttered to the ground, and was at once left behind by the horse.

Lovell's heart beat almost to suffocation.

If Lone Wolf should glance round, the white speck on the ground in the starlight would be certain to catch his hawkish eyes. And then—either a savage thrust from the Indian's knife, or more secure bonds. But the Redskin did not glance at him, and the riders moved on, and the handkerchief, lying on the rocks, disappeared from view behind.

After that, Lovell's fingers did not remain idle long.

There was a loose button on his jacket, and he worked it off, and let it drop.

Faint as the sound was that the button made in falling, it caught the keen ears of the Indian, and he glanced back.

But the button was invisible on the ground, and doubtless Lone Wolf attributed the sound to some loose stone clinking under the hoofs. He gave Lovell one look, and turned his gaze forward again.

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Lovell's heart beat faster.

He was leaving a trail—little enough, but sufficient—for the keen trailers in Hudson Smedley's outfit, if they came that way. At least, it was something.

Several times Lovell succeeded in dropping articles to the ground—a button from his shirt-cuff, an old letter from his pocket, a stump of pencil, a little leather purse.

He was working with his fingers to loosen another button, when Lone Wolf halted and dismounted.

The Blood took the reins of both horses, and led them through a thicket of stunted pines. Lovell heard the murmur of rippling water in the gloom.

A voice called from the shadows, and Lone Wolf answered in the dialect of the Blood tribe.

From among the rocks a second Indian appeared.

He glanced at Lovell, and spoke to Lone Wolf in the language of the Indians. The two braves talked together for a minute or two, Lovell hearing their words without comprehending a syllable of them. But he could guess that Lone Wolf was telling his comrade what he had learned of the movements of the ranchers' outfit.

The two Indians moved on together, leading the horses. A moment more, and Lovell was in sight of the encampment of the outcast Bloods.

A dozen lodges were grouped beside the mountain stream, with the dark hills looking down on all sides. From the lodges nine or ten Indians emerged as Lone Wolf came up.

They surrounded Lovell, and there was a low jabbering among them in the Blood dialect. One of the warriors drew his tomahawk, and made a threatening motion towards the prisoner.

Lone Wolf interposed.

The tomahawk was withdrawn, and Lovell breathed again. Lone Wolf talked for several minutes, addressing the Indians, and finally there was a general "Ugh!" of satisfaction. Lovell wondered whether the chief was explaining that the prisoner was to be reserved for the torture-stake on the morrow.

The junior was lifted from the horse, and led into one of the lodges. If he had hoped that he would be freed from his bonds now, he was disappointed.

Several of the Redskins examined the hide bound round his wrists, and another hide thong was knotted securely round his ankles.

Then he was left lying on the ground in the lodge.

Lone Wolf entered the lodge a little later, and rolled himself in a dirty blanket to sleep. Lovell heard his deep and steady breathing only a yard away in the darkness and silence of the night.

But there was no sleep for Lovell.

Through cracks in the branches of which the lodge was built came gleams of starlight, which gradually faded into the grey of dawn.

Lovell closed his eyes, but he could not sleep.

Faintly the murmur of the stream came to his ears, and faint sounds from the Indians' horses, during the long and weary watches of the night.

As he lay, with limbs numbed by the thongs of hide, with despair in his heart, he thought of the ranch, where his chums would be wondering what had become of him; he thought of Jimmy Silver, riding with the outfit in search of the Bloods, little dreaming that his comrade was a doomed prisoner in the hands of the Redskin outcasts. He thought, too, of Rookwood, the old school he was never to see again.

The dawn came at last.

As the sun rose higher, and there

were sounds of movement in the Indian encampment, Lone Wolf rose and threw aside his blanket.

He glanced down at Lovell and strode out of the lodge.

The junior was left alone.

And then, at last, exhausted by long, weary watching, the hapless junior slept.

How long he slept he did not know, but he was awakened at last by the sound of voices and the grasp of rough, dusky hands. He started from slumber, dazed and confused, and his eyes fell on savage, dusky faces and glittering eyes, and he knew that the hour had come.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

"Sign!"

SADDLE UP!" Dawn was breaking over the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Darkness lay yet in the deep canyons and arroyos, but the high ridges and the feathery pines and firs were silvered in the dawn. Jimmy Silver threw aside his blanket, and rose and stretched himself.

Fifty horsemen were encamped on the rough hillside—men from all the ranches in the Windy River section, and from Mosquito Town and Kicking Mule. Hudson Smedley was in command, and the outfit had full confidence in their leader. Every man had his horse, his blanket, his rifle, and revolver, and a week's provisions. It was hard and rough work upon which the outfit was engaged, as Jimmy Silver had already discovered. But Jimmy was glad he was there; his only regret being that his chums were not with him.

He ate his breakfast of dried meat and drier bread, washed down by cold water from a mountain stream, with a keen appetite. Hard riding and trailing in the foothills gave an edge to his hunger that he had never dreamed of in the old days at Rookwood School.

There was no camp fire; the smoke would have betrayed the outfit to the Redskins they were hunting. In the dawn it was chilly in the rocky foothills, but the Alberta cowpunchers did not heed the cold. Breakfast was frugal and brief, and then the order to saddle up was given.

Skitter Dick and six or seven other cowpunchers had already left the camp to scout. So far, the outfit had not succeeded in getting on the trail of the gang of Bloods.

Before entering the foothills they had found many traces of the desperate gang of outcasts—tracks of stolen steers driven off into the hills, tracks of moccasined feet by prairie pools; but in the foothills, on hard, rocky soil, all trails had been lost.

Lone Wolf and his gang were hidden somewhere in the barren hills, but the rocks told no tale.

But Hudson Smedley was quietly determined. That the gang were not very distant he was certain, for the raids on outlying herds of cattle were almost incessant since the quelling of the Indian rising. Lone Wolf was keeping in touch with the ranches; indeed, it was upon stolen cattle that he and his followers were subsisting. Sooner or later Hudson Smedley was sure that his scouts would pick up "sign"; and, once the Bloods were run down to their hidden lair, the rest would be simple. Lone Wolf was known to have no more than a dozen braves with him, desperate bucks, who had refused to submit to the law when the tribe was rounded up into the reservation by the Mounted Police. And there were fifty men in Hudson Smedley's outfit, all hard riders and dead shots.

During the night a rifle-shot had been heard in the camp, faint and distant, from the shadowy hills. Jimmy Silver had heard it, little dreaming that it was Lovell's rifle that he heard. So far as he knew, Lovell was still at the ranch with Raby and Newcome.

Hudson Smedley had noted the direction of the shot, and when the outfit saddled up at dawn that was the direction taken. Jimmy Silver rode beside his Canadian cousin as the horsemen trotted through the rugged paths of the hills. In the brightening sunlight Skitter Dick appeared ahead of the outfit, and waved his hand.

"Dick's found something," remarked Hudson Smedley.

"Somebody was shooting hereabouts last night," said Buck Williams, of the Sunset Ranch. "I guess it wouldn't be a white man wandering around on his lonesome, with the Injuns up. A red shooting a loose steer for the meat, I guess."

"Very likely," said Hudson Smedley.

The outfit halted, and Hudson Smedley called to Skitter Dick.

"What is it, Dick?"

"I guess there was a red around hyer last night, boss," said Skitter Dick. "There's been a tussle, I reckon."

The rancher dismounted, and Jimmy Silver followed his example. Skitter Dick was standing by the spot where Lovell had encountered Lone Wolf under the stars.

The Skitter held up a feather that had evidently belonged to an Indian's head-dress. In his other hand he held a flattened bullet between finger and thumb.

"I guess Mr. Somebody loosed off his rifle," said Skitter Dick. "He hit that big rock yonder; you can see the mark, and that's where I picked up the bullet. The red got him hyer"—he tapped the rocky ground with his boot. "There was a bit of a tussle, and that there feather came off the Injun."

Jimmy Silver scanned the rough rocks keenly. Dick, with a smile, pointed to a fragment or two of what looked like grey thread, evidently rubbed from a rough tweed jacket on sharp edges of rock that cropped from the ground.

"There's a sign yonder where a hoss was left standing," went on the cow-puncher. "I figger it out that the Injun left his horse there, and laid for the other galoot just here, among the rocks, and jerked him off his horse. The galoot fired and missed. The Injun didn't kill him; no sign of him hyerabouts. Maybe he got away—maybe he didn't."

"A white man?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"I guess he would be a white man, as he was scrapping with a red," said Skitter Dick. "Some goldarned tenderfoot, I reckon, or he wouldn't have been caught napping like that. Any man in the Windy River outfit wouldn't have missed the Injun with his rifle."

"I guess not!" said Spike Thompson, with a nod.

"It's odd that a tenderfoot should be riding here at night, when the Indians are up," said Hudson Smedley.

"Fools rush in where angels fear to tread," said Jimmy Silver, little dreaming of the identity of the tenderfoot.

"That's so. And what after that, Dick?"

Skitter Dick shook his head.

"I guess you've got me beat, boss. There ain't nary a sign to be picked up arter that. The rocks don't bear the ghost of a trail."

Hudson Smedley looked along the great canyon, which led like a corridor into the heart of the foothills.

"You don't figure out which way the Indian was going—up into the hills or down to the plains?" he asked.

"Not even that, boss. There ain't nary a sign."

"I guess some will be found," said Hudson Smedley, and he gave directions.

A dozen scouts left the outfit to search above and below the spot for sign.

"I guess that Indian was one of Lone Wolf's gang," said the rancher. "The tribe are being kept pretty strictly to the reserve now. If we get hold of that buck we shan't be far from the rest of them."

Jimmy Silver went up the canyon with Skitter Dick and Spike Thompson, walking the horses, and scanning the surrounding rocks for possible signs. But the rocks told no tale of the passing Indians and his prisoner.

But suddenly Skitter Dick uttered an exclamation, and made a dive for a speck of white that showed among the boulders.

He came back holding a handkerchief in his hand.

STILL
IN THE
WILD
WEST!



Another thrilling adventure of
Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rook-
wood, in the Wild West next
week, entitled:

**"PETE PETERS'
VISITOR!"**

By Owen Conquest.

LOOK OUT FOR IT!

"I guess Mr. Somebody came this way, and dropped his nosebag," he remarked, with a grin.

Spike Thompson looked at the handkerchief.

"Tenderfoot, right enough," he said. "That ain't a cowboy's goods!"

Jimmy took it in turn. The colour changed in his face, and he uttered a startled exclamation.

"That's Lovell's!"

"What?"

"It's Lovell's—look!" Jimmy Silver pointed to the initials, "A.E.L.," worked in a corner of the handkerchief.

"Young Lovell's!" said Skitter Dick in amazement. "But young Lovell was left at the ranch."

Jimmy drew a deep breath.

"It's Lovell's!" he said. "Of—of course, he might have lost it another time—the wind may have blown it about—"

"That hanky ain't been in the open air long," said Spike Thompson. "I guess it would be another colour if it had been blowing about in the hills for days."

"But Lovell couldn't—"

Jimmy Silver paused, his heart sinking. Only too well he knew his obstinate and reckless chum, and he knew how Lovell had felt being left behind by the outfit. It was only too probable that Arthur Edward Lovell had taken the bit between his teeth, as it were, and followed the outfit without leave. That he had fallen in with the Redskins instead of the outfit was a natural enough consequence.

"Lovell! And the Indians have got him!" muttered Jimmy, his face white.

"Looks like it!" said Skitter Dick.

The Skitter mounted his horse and dashed back along the canyon at a gallop to rejoin the outfit with the news. In a very short time the whole force was gathered on the spot. Hudson Smedley examined the handkerchief, and his bronzed face was grim.

"The young fool!" he said. "Heaven knows what has happened to him! But this proves that the Indian made him a prisoner and brought him this way, I should guess. The young ass couldn't have got away when once the Blood had him in his hands."

"And I guess it proves that the Injun was heading for the hills, boss, and we know the way to foller," said Skitter Dick.

"That's so. Ride on!"

Fairly certain of their direction now, the outfit rode at a trot up the great canyon, deeper and deeper into the wilderness of rocks and pines. Skitter Dick and the other scouts were watching with hawk-like eyes for "sign," and "sign" was to be found now. There was a shout from Red Alf, as he pounced upon a button among the rocks.

A dozen of the outfit examined the button eagerly. Torn threads still attached to it showed that it had been jerked from a garment. Hudson Smedley's eyes gleamed.

"This cannot be chance," he said. "First the handkerchief, and then this button. Lovell is not such a young fool after all. He must have dropped them on purpose to leave a trail."

"Hadn't brains enough, that young jay," said Spike Thompson.

"Well, it looks like it. Keep on, and watch for something of the kind again," said the rancher.

"You bet, boss!"

Jimmy Silver's face was pale and troubled as he rode on with Hudson Smedley. He had no doubts now that his reckless chum had followed the outfit, and missed them, and fallen into the hands of the outcast Bloods. What had happened to him since then?

That was a torturing thought to Jimmy. That the Redskin had not killed the tenderfoot was clear—there was no sign of the body to be discovered. But long hours had passed since Lovell had been led away a prisoner into the rocky wilderness, and the desperate outcasts were not likely to spare any white man's life.

"Keep a stiff upper lip, Jimmy," said Hudson Smedley. "We're on the track, at least, and we can hope—"

"You think Lovell's still alive?" asked Jimmy, his lip trembling.

"I hope so. Anyhow, he was not killed at once, and that is something," said the rancher.

"Why should they have taken him prisoner instead?"

The rancher did not answer.

"You—you think"—Jimmy remembered what he had heard of the customs of the "wild" Indians. "Is it possible that—that—that he would be tortured before—"

"I'm afraid so," said the rancher reluctantly. "They would not spare a white man's life, in the present state of things, for any other reason that I know of. But there's still hope, Jimmy, and at all events, Lovell has left a trail that may guide us to the hiding-place of the Bloods."

"But—if we come too late—"
"We must hope for the best."

Jimmy was silent, with an aching heart. He longed to break into a gallop, to ride at top speed to the rescue of his chum, but that was impossible. It was necessary to pick up the trail step by step; and then it was only by the greatest skill and keenness that the task could be performed.

More than one of the smaller articles that Lovell had dropped, had been lost in fissures of the rocks, and escaped even the keen eyes of the cowboys. But Buck Williams came up with a letter in his hand, after a time—and Jimmy, looking at it, saw that it began: "Dear Arthur"—it was a letter of Lovell's, evidently dropped by him to mark the trail and guide a possible rescuer.

"That young tenderfoot ain't the fool he looks," said Skitter Dick. "He's leaving a good trail—and he's done it without the Injun spotting him, either. I guess that with luck we shall run right into the den of Lone Wolf."

Half a mile farther on a little leather purse was picked up—Jimmy recognised it as Lovell's. The outfit rode on, with rifles at the ready, keen eyes watching for a foe. Suddenly, from in advance, came two rifle-shots, so close together as to be almost blended into one. Skitter Dick clapped his hand to his head, whence a bullet had torn away his Stetson hat. From a thicket of pines, a dusky figure in a tattered blanket reeled, and crashed down in the sunlight.

It was an Indian in war-paint.

"I guess I got him as he was pulling trigger," said Skitter Dick. He rubbed his curly head. "But it went close. We're on them, boss—that there Injun was a sentry."

Jimmy Silver's heart thumped. The Indian, who lay stretched by the rocks, with Skitter Dick's bullet in his heart, had been keeping watch in the pines—a sentinel set by the outcast gang of Bloods. The lair of Lone Wolf was close at hand.

With grim faces, the outfit dismounted from their horses, and rifle in hand, plunged through the pines.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

At the Stake!

ARTHUR EDWARD LOVELL blinked in the sunshine, as he was dragged out of the lodge in the midst of the Indians.

He knew that his hour had come and that there was no hope. His wild glance swept round the Indian encampment, shut in on all sides by high rocks and ridges and thickets of pines and firs. Round him surged the throng of braves, a dozen of them, hideous in their war-paint.

In the midst of the circle of lodges a stake had been set up in the earth, and round it brushwood was piled. Lovell shuddered as he saw it. He knew what it meant.

The Redskins bore him to the upright stake, and the hapless junior was bound to it with thongs of hide.

Then the brushwood was stacked more closely round him.

It seemed like some terrible dream to Lovell. He could hardly believe

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that the scene was real—the wild desolate rocks, the nodding pines, the savage, dusky faces of the Indians, the staring, merciless, glittering eyes. It was like some fearful nightmare, from which he felt that he must soon awaken in his room at the ranch or in the old dormitory at Rookwood.

Bound to the stake, with the fuel piled round him, he stared dazedly at the savage crowd.

Lone Wolf was talking, and the Indians, their attention turned from the prisoner for the moment, stood round their chief, listening to his address. Lovell understood no word of the Blood dialect, but he could see that the braves were deeply moved by their chief's eloquence. In the dramatic fashion natural to the Redskin, Lone Wolf was making oratorical capital out of the wild scene. In his guttural but not unmusical tongue he spoke of old days when the great land of Canada, from the mighty mountains as far as a horseman could ride towards the rising sun, was the hunting-ground of the Red man. From that historical retrospect Lone Wolf jumped to the recent rising, when the smuggled fire-water had inspired the younger and more reckless bucks to make their desperate attempt to throw off the white man's yoke. Then he spoke of the coming of the Canadian Mounted Police, and the collapse of the rising, and the tame yielding of the braves who had returned to their reservation at the order of the troopers. Then he dwelt on the heroism of his few followers and himself, who had fled to the hills rather than bury the hatchet so recently dug up. And so he came to his own exploit in capturing one of the hated palefaces, upon whom the outcast Bloods could wreak the vengeance due to their many and overwhelming enemies. And at that point a ferocious yell burst from the listening braves, and they turned from the orator towards Lovell.

A dozen hands were raised and a dozen tomahawks were flung, and Lovell closed his eyes in expectation of instant death. But the tomahawks flew by him, grazing him in several places, even cutting his clothes, but doing him no injury. He opened his eyes again, his heart throbbing. He realised that this was only the beginning of the torture, and that he was not intended to die by so easy a death.

Two of the gleaming axes stuck in the high stake where it rose above Lovell's head, and hung quivering there.

For ten minutes or more the tomahawk play went on, and the hapless junior almost hoped that one of the glittering, whirling weapons would strike him and put him out of his torment. But the play ceased at last, and one of the braves kindled a brushwood torch to light the pile round the prisoner.

It was the end at last—the terrible end. But as the smoke was rising from the kindled torch there came a sudden cracking of rifle-shots, echoing among the rocky hills, and a yell—the death yell of a fallen Redskin.

Lone Wolf spun round towards the belt of pinewood that screened the Indian encampment from the open canyon.

It was there, at the only spot where the encampment could be approached by an enemy, that the sentry had been set, and that wild, ringing yell told that the sentry had fallen before a bullet.

There was a wild outburst of excla-

mations among the Bloods, and the braves rushed for their rifles.

For the moment the prisoner bound to the stake was forgotten.

Lovell, unable to move hand or foot, watched the strange, wild scene dizzily. He saw the Red braves clutch up their weapons and rush across the rocky ground towards the belt of thickets. The enemy was at hand, and the Redskins knew it. They had no time for the torture of their prisoner now.

Was it the outfit? The trail he had left when Lone Wolf led him, a prisoner, into the mountains—had the outfit found it and followed it? Was it rescue at hand?

Lovell's heart beat almost to suffocation.

The brushwood was still stacked round him, the sun blazed down on his face. At a little distance the torch lay on the ground, smoking, where it had been dropped in the moment of alarm.

Was it rescue?

From the belt of pines there came a rush of white men—brawny, cow-punchers with grim, set faces under their Stetson hats and rifles in their hands.

It was the outfit!

Crack, crack, crack!

With a sound like thunder, the heavy firing rolled echoing among the rocky hills.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

At the Eleventh Hour!

JIMMY SILVER was one of the first through the thickets, with Hudson Smedley and Skitter Dick. He saw the encampment of Indian lodges close by the rippling mountain stream. He saw the crowd of desperate Bloods rushing to defend their lair, and he loosed off his rifle without an instant's pause. For some minutes the firing was hot and heavy, and shrieks and groans filled the air. Jimmy Silver saw Lone Wolf spring at Hudson Smedley with brandished knife, and saw the rancher parry the stroke with the barrel of his rifle. The next instant Lone Wolf and the rancher were grappling in a desperate struggle.

Hudson Smedley's foot slipped on the rocks and he went down, the Indian upon him, clinging like a panther. A yelling buck dropped almost at Jimmy Silver's feet—whether by Jimmy's own bullet, or another, the Rookwood junior never knew. Jimmy rushed towards the struggling rancher, clubbing his rifle.

Lone Wolf's knife gleamed in the air over the head of Hudson Smedley.

But before the blow could fall Jimmy's rifle-butt reached the Indian, and Lone Wolf, with a fearful cry, rolled from his victim and lay senseless on the rocks.

"Good for you, tenderfoot!" panted Skitter Dick.

Hudson Smedley struggled up dizzily. "Good man, Jimmy!" he said.

Jimmy Silver ran on towards the lodges.

The handful of Bloods had scarcely stemmed the onward rush of the cow-punchers. Half of them were down, and the rest broke into flight as Lone Wolf fell, scattering wildly among the rocks, pursued by the victorious cow-punchers.

Jimmy Silver found himself on the track of a fleeing Indian as he ran among the lodges. The Blood turned on him, snarling, knife in hand—and Skitter Dick's rifle rang behind Jimmy, and the Redskin pitched over and lay still.

(Continued on page 27.)

IN THE HANDS OF THE REDSKINS!

(Continued from page 12.)

Scarcely heeding him, Jimmy Silver ran on, thinking only of his chum. Was Lovell there? Was he living?

"Jimmy!"

A husky voice panted out his name.

Jimmy Silver stared round. For the moment he did not see Lovell. Then he saw the white, strained face that looked at him over the top of the pile of brushwood stacked round the torture-stake.

"Lovell!"

"Oh, Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver tore away the brushwood, and in a moment his knife was busy in Lovell's bonds.

The prisoner staggered away from the stake, and Jimmy caught him as he fell. Lovell leaned on him heavily.

"Lovell, old man, you're hurt!"

"No; stiff, that's all!" gasped Lovell. "I'll be all right soon. I'm numbed! I've been tied up a long time."

Jimmy Silver helped him to a boulder, where he sat down. For long minutes Lovell sat in silence, with a strained face, tormented by the pain

of the restored circulation in his numbed limbs.

Jimmy stood and watched him, heedless of the scattering shots and yells along the rocky hillside. The last two or three of the outcast Bloods were being run down, to surrender or die desperately fighting. By the time the last shot died away in a thousand echoes among the hills Lone Wolf and his gang had been completely wiped out—dead or prisoners.

"I—I say, Jimmy!" Lovell spoke at last.

"Yes, old chap."

"You knew I was here?"

"Yes."

"You—you found the trail, I left?"

"The cowpunchers found it, old chap," said Jimmy Silver. "Thank Heaven they did! We didn't get here any too soon."

"That's a fact, and no mistake!" said Lovell, with a faint grin. "Hallo, here's Mr. Smedley, and he doesn't look very good-tempered."

Hudson Smedley surveyed the rescued prisoner with a grim brow.

"So you're safe?" he said.

"Quite, thanks!" said Lovell. "Only a bit stiff."

"I guess you've had a close call."

"As close as ever I want to have, Mr. Smedley," said Lovell.

"Well, I guess I'm glad you've come through," said the rancher. "But if ever a silly young fool deserved to have his scalp raised, you deserved it, Lovell. Why did you leave the ranch?"

"You've just said it," said Lovell. "Because I was a silly young fool. I'm sorry."

"Oh!" said Hudson Smedley. "Well, if you see it in that light I'll say no more about it, I guess, though I've been promising you a trail-ropé well laid on. As it turns out, you've helped us round-up the Bloods and saved us a long trail in the mountains. But if you ever play such a game again, Master Lovell, you go on board the first train running out of Alberta!"

And the rancher turned away. "So that's that!" said Lovell. "I was rather an ass, Jimmy! I admit it!"

"You were!" agreed Jimmy Silver. "And I've a good mind to punch your silly nose!"

To which Lovell replied:

"Rats!"

THE END.

(There will be another thrilling long story of Jimmy Silver & Co. out West next week, entitled: "Pete Peter's Visitor!" Don't miss it!)

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