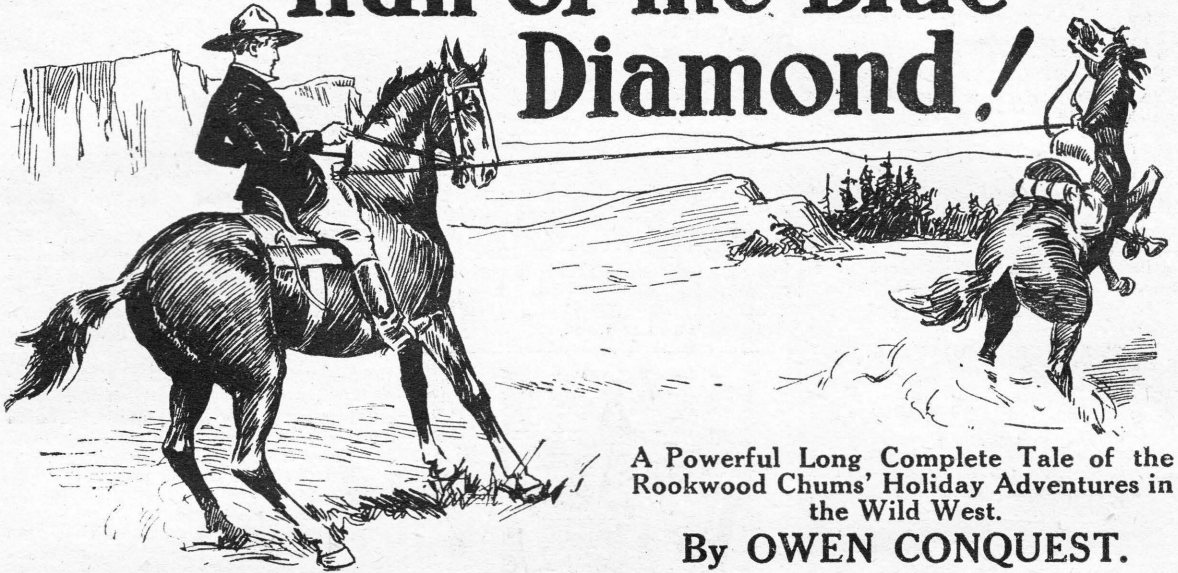


**A FORTUNE AT STAKE!** Across the wide, rolling prairie gallops a runaway horse, carrying with it a fortune, and behind it rides Jimmy Silver, determined on its capture!

# The Trail of the Blue Diamond!



A Powerful Long Complete Tale of the Rookwood Chums' Holiday Adventures in the Wild West.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

## THE FIRST CHAPTER. Hunted Down!

"SOMEbody in a hurry!" yawned Lovell.

"Sounds like it!"

Jimmy Silver sat up lazily in the grass and glanced round him. Arthur Edward Lovell, with the back of his head resting in his clasped hands and his Stetson hat over his face to keep off the sun-blaze, did not stir. He was tired and too comfortable to move.

The two juniors of Rookwood were resting by the edge of a wood of larches in sight of the Windy River, of Alberta. At a little distance Raby and Newcome could be seen on horseback, keeping watch on a bunch of steers that grazed along the river.

From the sunny prairie southward there came the sound of galloping hoofs—faintly at first in the distance, but rapidly growing louder and clearer. A horseman was riding up from the south at a breakneck pace.

Jimmy Silver sighted him as he sat up.

The horse, perspiring and steaming, was evidently fatigued, but the rider urged it on with whip and spur savagely. The rider, bent low in the saddle, cast hurried glances behind him every other minute as he rode furiously onward.

Over the high grass to the south three bobbing heads could be seen—the heads of three pursuing riders.

Jimmy Silver jumped to his feet.

"Wake up, Lovell! There's something wrong here!" he said hurriedly.

Arthur Edward Lovell yawned again and sat up.

"What's the trouble?"

"It's a chap with three horsemen after him," said Jimmy Silver. "He's coming straight on to us."

"By Jove!" said Lovell.

And he, too, jumped up.

The galloping horseman was quite close now. The juniors could see his face, streaming with perspiration, and marked by a deep scar along the cheek—the scar of a recent wound. He had

not seen the juniors yet. His attention was all given to the three riders behind.

His horse, a magnificent black, with white "stockings" on the forelegs, was straining hard, but the pursuers were gaining. As the juniors stared at the startling scene, a pistol-shot rang over the prairie, and the bullet, missing the fugitive, passed close by Jimmy and Lovell.

"What the thump—" ejaculated Lovell.

"He's riding for the wood to get into cover," said Jimmy Silver quietly, "and he's riding for his life. Hallo, he's seen us!"

The scarred man suddenly caught sight of the juniors standing in the larches. He swerved to the right to ride clear of them, and at the same time lifted his hand with a revolver in it and fired at them. The hurried shot flew wide of the mark, but it made the juniors jump.

The black horse panted on, swerving away from the spot where the startled juniors stood, and reached the trees. The scarred man sprang to the ground and led his horse swiftly into cover. A few moments more and he had disappeared from sight.

"Well, my hat!" said Lovell blankly.

They watched the three pursuers. The trio came on without a pause, heading for the spot in the thicket where the scarred man had disappeared.

They passed a score of yards from the juniors without heeding them.

In amazed silence Jimmy Silver and Lovell watched. From the thicket of larches came a ringing shot, and one of the horsemen, with a loud yell, pitched headlong out of the saddle.

His horse went careering away, leaving him in the grass.

"Phew!" gasped Lovell.

Heedless of their fallen companion, the other two riders dashed on and plunged into the thickets.

Five or six shots rang out in sharp succession scarce fifty yards from the spot where Jimmy and Lovell stood rooted to the ground.

Then out of the swaying larches came the big black horse, with tossing head and streaming mane, and reins dangling. It dashed past the juniors and galloped on across the plain.

Another shot rang out in the thicket, and another. It was evident that the scarred man, cornered by his pursuers, was fighting for his life.

"Come on, Lovell!" muttered Jimmy.

Lovell nodded, and they hurried towards the scene of the firing. What to make of the strange affair was a mystery to the juniors, but they felt that they could not stand idly by while the fugitive was done to death, though he had fired on them in passing.

A hoarse voice reached their ears as they plunged into the thicket.

"Where is it, Dave Tutt? Hand it over, or—"

The juniors came suddenly on the scene.

The scarred man lay crumpled up in the thicket, and the two pursuers were bending over him, each with a revolver aimed at the scarred face.

"We've got you, Dave Tutt! All the way from Montreal, and we've got you at the finish. Hand it over!"

"You'll never see it, Slimmy!" panted Dave Tutt. "You've got me, but you've not got the Blue Diamond. You'll never see it."

"Where is it?"

"Where you'll never find it."

"It's about him somewhere," interrupted the other man savagely. "Search through his clothes!"

There was a groan from the scarred man as the two handled him roughly.

"It might have been on the horse. Jeff."

"I guess he wouldn't part with it. Go through him, anyhow."

"You won't find it, Jeff Crow!" muttered the wounded man.

Slimmy jammed his revolver against the scarred face.

"Tell us where it is before I pull trigger!" he said, in a voice husky with rage.

"Stop that!"

Jimmy Silver's voice rang out sharply. He stepped on the scene, his revolver in his hand, and Slimmy and Jeff Crow sprang up and swung towards him, with startled exclamations. Jimmy Silver's revolver covered the two of them.

"Chuck it!" said the Rookwood junior quietly. "And keep your hands down, or—"

Slimmy was raising his pistol hand, and Jimmy Silver pulled trigger without finishing his warning. Slimmy gave a howl of agony as his right arm dropped to his side, broken by a bullet. He reeled back against a tree, his face suddenly white.

"Put up your hands, you!" rapped out Jimmy sharply. "Drop that pistol and put up your hands!"

And Jeff Crow, as the junior's revolver looked him full in the face, muttered savagely and obeyed.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Hard Hit!

JIMMY SILVER was master of the situation. His revolver did not waver as it bore on the savage, bearded face of Jeff Crow. The ruffian eyed him wolfishly, but he kept his hands above his head. From Dave Tutt there came a faint, mocking chuckle.

"You keep out of this, kid!" said Jeff Crow savagely. "This hyer ain't your funeral. You keep clear."

"Pick up that pistol, Lovell!"

"You bet!" grunted Lovell.

He picked up the revolver Crow had dropped.

"Now get a move on, both of you!" said Jimmy Silver coolly. "I don't know what your game is, or what that man has done, but—"

"He's robbed us," said Jeff Crow. "He robbed us in Montreal, and lit out for the West. We followed him on the railway as far as Red Deer, and he dodged us agin. Now we've got him we're not letting up."

"What did he rob you of?"

"That's my business."

"It's the business of the police, too," said Jimmy Silver. "If he's robbed you, there's a Mounted Police post at Red Deer, and you could have called there. You can go there now, if you like. Anyhow, you're going."

"I guess—"

"You're going!" said Jimmy Silver. "You're not going to touch that man again."

"There's your horse yonder," said Lovell. "Take it and go, and take your pal with you. Get a move on!"

And Arthur Edward Lovell flourished the revolver.

"Let's git, Jeff!" muttered Slimmy faintly.

"Are you going?" demanded Lovell, and he brandished the revolver again.

"Look out!" gasped Jimmy Silver.

Crack!

Arthur Edward Lovell really was not safe with firearms. His finger was on the trigger, and the revolver barked, much to his surprise. Fortunately, the bullet flew up through the larches.

"Let up!" yelled Jeff Crow, changing his tone quite suddenly. "Don't shoot a galoot with his hands up! I'm going, ain't I?"

And he went.

He ran for his horse and caught it, and led it out on to the plain. Slimmy tottered after him, calling to him for help. Jeff Crow turned back, and helped his wounded comrade into the saddle. Jimmy Silver followed them.

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revolver in hand. Crow stopped for a moment or two to stare down at the man who had fallen in the grass at the beginning of the fight; then he shrugged his shoulders and mounted. He gave Jimmy Silver a black look, and still seemed to hesitate; but a significant movement of Jimmy's revolver decided him. Slimmy was already riding away, his wounded arm hanging helpless at his side, and Jeff Crow rode after him.

"Scared them off, what?" grinned Lovell, as Jimmy Silver rejoined him. "That shot of mine fairly made that rotter hop. I dare say you think I pulled trigger by accident?"

"I don't think, I know!" grunted Jimmy Silver. "For goodness' sake, mind what you do with that pistol!"

"Bow-wow!"

Jimmy hurried back to Dave Tutt. The scarred man was sitting up in the thicket, his face ghastly pale. He stared at the Rookwood juniors strangely and curiously.

"I guess you've saved my life," he said.

"No guessing about that," said Lovell. "We have saved it. I'm not at all sure it was worth saving. Those chaps say you robbed them."

"They're gone?" asked the scarred man.

"Yes."

"All three of them?" asked Tutt. Jimmy Silver shook his head.

"Two of them are gone," he said. "The man you shot is lying in the grass yonder."

"Dead?"

"Yes."

"That's Hank Hanson," said the scarred man. "There were three of them—Jeff Crow, Slimmy, and Hanson. They've followed me all the way from Montreal to the West. I guess Hanson is out of the game now for keeps; and Slimmy won't be spry for a long time, with his arm useless. But Jeff Crow is the toughest of the gang. I wish you'd put a ball through Crow."

"Why were they after you?" demanded Jimmy Silver.

"I guess that's my business. You've seen my horse—the big black?"

"Yes. It ran past us."

"Is it in sight on the prairie?"

"No."

Dave Tutt gritted his teeth.

"I guess I've got to have that hoss back," he said. He staggered to his feet, groaning as he did so.

"You are wounded?" said Jimmy Silver.

"I guess they've winged me in two places," said Tutt. "But I ain't knocked out yet. Where's Hanson's horse?"

"Cleared off when you shot the man down," said Jimmy Silver curtly. "It's out of sight long ago."

"You 'uns have got hosses here, I reckon?"

"They're tethered yonder," said Lovell.

"You'll lend me one?"

"Not likely. We're five miles from Windy River Ranch. We're not hoofing it home to-night on your account."

Dave Tutt's eyes glittered.

"I've got to get arter my hoss," he said. "I can't run him down on foot."

"Don't you worry about your horse," said Jimmy Silver. "I'll try to rope it in for you. You're not fit to ride."

"I guess I'm fit enough. I guess I—"

The scarred man broke off, and reeled in the thicket, and crashed to the ground in a dead faint.

"Looks fit to ride, don't he?" grunted Lovell. "We shall have to do something for him, Jimmy."

Jimmy Silver nodded.

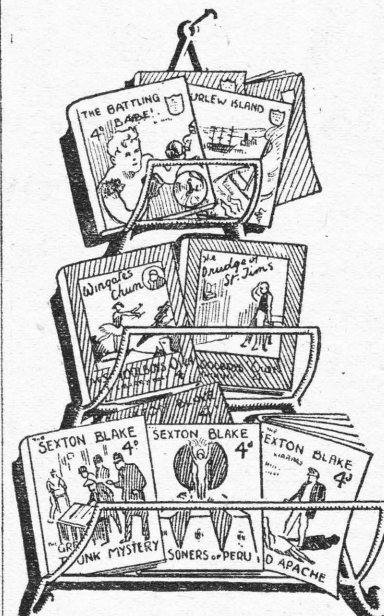
"Blessed if I can make head or tail of this affair!" he said. "Looks to me as if they're a gang of rustlers who've quarrelled among themselves. But we were bound to chip in. We'd better get this man to the ranch if we can. Raby and Newcome can look after the cattle."

Jimmy Silver bent over the insensible man. There were two bullet wounds—one in the shoulder, and one in the side. Jimmy Silver bound them up as well as he could, the scarred man lying like a log under his ministering hands. Then Lovell and Jimmy lifted him and carried him out of the thicket.

Jimmy's horse, Blazer, was tethered with Lovell's by the larches. Jimmy cast off the trail-ropes.

"We can't carry the man five miles, Lovell. You stay with him while I ride to the ranch for help."

"Right-ho!"



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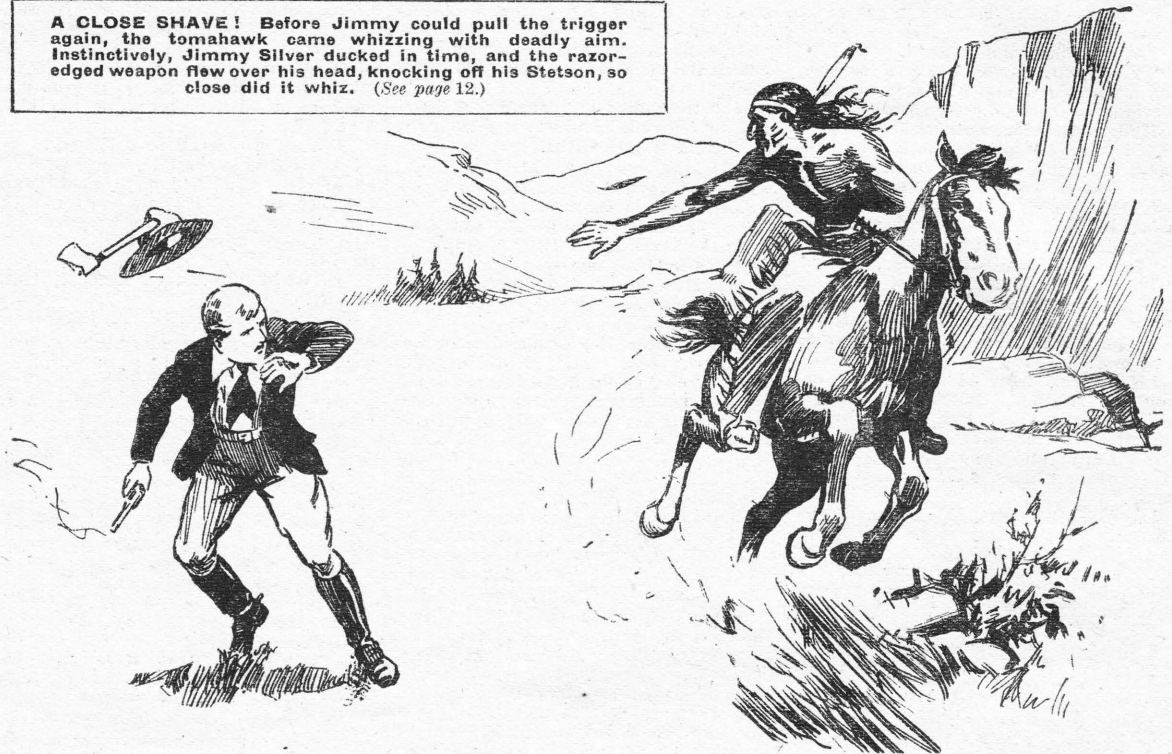
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**A CLOSE SHAVE!** Before Jimmy could pull the trigger again, the tomahawk came whizzing with deadly aim. Instinctively, Jimmy Silver ducked in time, and the razor-edged weapon flew over his head, knocking off his Stetson, so close did it whiz. (See page 12.)



And Jimmy Silver shook out his reins and put Blazer to the gallop, heading for the Windy River Ranch.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER. The Vanished Diamond!

**H**UDSON SMEDLEY was smoking his after-lunch cigar on the veranda of the ranch-house, and reading a two-days-old Montreal newspaper, when Jimmy Silver rode up, dusty and breathless. The rancher glanced down as Jimmy brought Blazer to a halt with a clatter of hoofs.

"Hallo! You back, Jimmy?"

"Yes."

"Nothing wrong with the cattle?"

"No. Raby and Newcome are with them," said Jimmy. "I've left Lovell looking after a wounded man, and there's a dead man to be seen to as well, Cousin Smedley."

The rancher stared.

"What's all that? What the thunder—"

Jimmy Silver dropped into a seat on the veranda, breathing hard. He had ridden like the wind back to the ranch. Succinctly he explained to his Canadian cousin what had happened.

Hudson Smedley started at the mention of Dave Tutt's name. But he did not interrupt the junior.

"So that's that!" Jimmy Silver concluded. "The man Tutt is hard hit, and if you can send the buggy—"

"I guess I'll do that," said the rancher. He turned into the house, and called out an order to Woo Sing, the chore-boy. Then he turned back to Jimmy Silver.

"I guess this is a queer business," he said. "That man Tutt is wanted by the Montreal police. The case is in the newspaper here."

"Oh!" exclaimed Jimmy, with interest.

"I'll have him picked up in the buggy and taken down to Kicking Mule, and

handed over to the Mounted Police," said the rancher.

"But what—"

"Here it is in the paper. Did you hear anything from him about a diamond?"

"The other fellows were after a diamond, from what I gathered," answered Jimmy Silver. "The Blue Diamond Tutt called it."

"That's it!" said Hudson Smedley. "You didn't see anything of it?"

"No. Tutt told them it was where they would never find it."

"He may have hidden it before lighting out for the West," said the rancher thoughtfully. "Clear enough, the four of them stole the diamond in Montreal, and Tutt had hold of it, and tried to rob his rascally friends of their share of the loot."

"So that was how it was?" exclaimed Jimmy.

"Sure! You can read it in the paper there while Woo Sing is bringing the buggy round."

Jimmy Silver picked up the Montreal paper, and read the report indicated by the rancher with keen interest.

It was a report of a robbery that had taken place in Montreal more than a week before. Louis Laroche, a Canadian millionaire, had returned from a trip to Europe, the owner of the famous Blue Diamond—a unique gem valued at a hundred thousand dollars. It transpired that he had been watched from landing in New York by four "gunmen" of that city, and followed to Montreal. In his mansion at Montreal he had been attacked and robbed of the diamond.

The Montreal police had the case in hand, and the names and descriptions of the New York gunmen were known and circulated. Dave Tutt, Jeff Crow, Hank Hanson, and Sam Smith, alias Slimmy, were the names, and the descriptions that followed tallied with those of the gang Jimmy Silver and Lovell had encountered on the prairie. Evidently Tutt, the leader of the

gang, had "double-crossed" his comrades and had escaped with the coveted gem.

The other three had followed on his track, and so the scene of the struggle for the Blue Diamond had been transferred to the Windy River section of North-West Alberta.

Jimmy Silver laid down the paper with a thoughtful brow.

He wondered what had become of the diamond—the famous Blue Diamond, as the newspaper called it, though Jimmy Silver had never heard of it before.

Jeff Crow had searched Tutt and failed to find it. Was the prize still concealed upon the wounded man? The thought of a gem worth a hundred thousand dollars was exciting.

The rascally gang had not benefited much by their rascality so far. One of them had been shot dead by Tutt; and Tutt himself was severely wounded and about to be handed over to the police. Another, Slimmy, had a broken arm. Only one of them—Jeff Crow—was still unscathed, and he would soon be hunted by the police—and he had not succeeded in getting his hands on the diamond.

But where was the diamond? That was an extremely interesting question to Jimmy Silver.

The buggy was led round by Woo Sing, and Hudson Smedley called to the Rookwood junior.

"Ready, Jimmy?"

"Right-ho!"

Hudson Smedley stepped into the buggy and took the reins. Jimmy Silver mounted Blazer and rode beside the vehicle as the rancher drove away.

The buggy rocked and bumped away over the prairie, Jimmy Silver leading the way to the spot where he had left Lovell. Arthur Edward was found keeping guard over the wounded man, who had now recovered consciousness. Lovell jumped up, revolver in hand, at the sound of hoofbeats.

"Oh, you, Jimmy!" he exclaimed.

"Seen anything of Jeff Crow while

"I've been gone?" asked Jimmy, as he drew rein.

Lovell nodded and grinned.

"Yes, rather! He showed up only ten minutes ago, and I fired at him as a warning to sheer off. He sneered."

Hudson Smedley cast a keen glance round over the plain. In the far distance the figure of a horseman could be seen, and it was easy to guess that it was Jeff Crow, though he was too far away to be recognised. The rancher descended from the buggy.

"Lend me a hand with him, Jimmy."

The wounded man looked savagely and suspiciously at the rancher.

"What's your game?" he muttered huskily. "What are you going to do with me?"

"Take you to Kicking Mule," answered Hudson Smedley. "You're known, Dave Tutt. I've read your description in the Montreal paper. I guess I'm handing you over to Sergeant Kerr of the Mounted Police, at Kicking Mule."

Dave Tutt groaned, and made an effort to rise. He sank back into the grass, and groaned again.

"I guess the game's up for me," he said faintly. "But you'll never get the diamond."

"Where is it?"

"That's my secret."

"I guess the police will get on to your secret," said the rancher. "Anyhow, it's their business, not mine. Bear a hand, Jimmy."

The wounded man was lifted into the buggy. Hudson Smedley drove away with him, Jimmy riding by the buggy, and Lovell rode away to join Raby and Newcome.

The wounded man groaned incessantly as the buggy rocked over the rough prairie. But the Mosquito trail was struck at last, and the buggy followed it to Kicking Mule. Jimmy Silver glanced back a good many times, catching glimpses of a horseman who followed at a distance—never venturing near. Jeff Crow, evidently, was keeping the diamond thief in sight.

But when the town of Kicking Mule was entered nothing more was seen of the gunman.

Jeff Crow did not venture to show himself in the town. Hudson Smedley drove on to the lumber building which was the post of the Mounted Police at Kicking Mule, where Dave Tutt was handed over to an astonished sergeant.

"Dave Tutt, by hokey!" ejaculated Sergeant Kerr, with great satisfaction. "Why, they're hunting for him and his gang all through Canada. I guess this is a prize."

"Especially if you find Mr. Laroche's diamond on him," said the rancher.

But when Dave Tutt, after his wounds had been attended to, was searched for the stolen diamond, no trace of it was found on him. Neither would the gunman utter a word on the subject.

Jimmy Silver made his statement as to what had occurred, and it was written down by the sergeant, and then Hudson Smedley drove away from Kicking Mule, and Jimmy rode off to rejoin his chums on the prairie. And while Jimmy Silver & Co. were "cowpunching" that afternoon, Sergeant Kerr and his men were hunting for Crow—but without finding him.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

##### Taking the Trail!

"HALLO, it's the giddy sergeant!"

Arthur Edward Lovell made that remark when the chums of Rookwood came out of the ranch—  
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house at Windy River the following morning.

Sergeant Kerr's khaki coat could be seen in the distance as he rode up to the ranch. The sergeant had evidently been in the saddle very early that morning, for Kicking Mule was a good many miles from Windy River.

"It's the sergeant, Mr. Smedley," called out Newcome, and Hudson Smedley came out of the ranch-house.

Sergeant Kerr dismounted, and came on to the veranda.

"I guess I've come to ask a bit of a favour, Hudson Smedley," he remarked, as he sat down.

"Go ahead."

"We're after the diamond that was stolen in Montreal," said Sergeant Kerr. "I've telegraphed the news that the gang had been run down in this section, and a detective is coming from Montreal to look for Mr. Laroche's diamond. I reckon I should like to rope it in before the man comes. For one thing, there's a big reward out; and, anyhow, I'd like to show them that we don't need help from Montreal detectives here in Alberta."

"Quite right!" assented the rancher.

"Any luck so far?"

"Some. Dave Tutt is in hospital, and laid up for a good long time. He knows where the diamond is, of course, but he won't let on. The dead man has been identified as Hank Hanson, but he's of no account to us. But we've got Slimmy. His arm's broke, and he was picked up wandering on the prairie. Jeff Crow had thrown him over and abandoned him. A precious gang all round."

"You've not got Crow?"

"Not yet; he's keeping clear. I guess we'll have him sooner or later, though, for I'm sure he won't quit this section while he thinks there's a chance of getting hold of the Laroche diamond. But we've had some talk from Slimmy. He's sure that Tutt had the diamond about him when he fled West, and he believes the man had it when he was run down on the prairie. He believes that, as it wasn't found on Tutt, the galoot must have had it in the fixings on his horse. It seems that Tutt had a good horse that he bought in Red Deer when he quit the railroad—a big black with white stockings. I dare say our young friends here saw it."

"Yes, rather!" said Jimmy Silver. "A fine horse, jolly nearly as good as my Blazer."

"It cleared off while they were scrapping," said Lovell. "I saw it galloping away towards the river."

The sergeant nodded.

"Well, that's the boss we want," he said; "and that's where you can help, Mr. Smedley, if you like. You've got men on this ranch who can pick up any kind of a trail."

Hudson Smedley looked thoughtful.

"That's so," he assented. "But, you know, it's the round-up at this time of the year, sergeant, and my foreman wouldn't spare a man for love nor money. We're up to our eyes in it."

"I s'pose so," assented the sergeant. "But we've got to have that horse. From what we know he's carrying a hundred thousand dollars hidden in his saddle, and any thief may rope him in and get hold of that diamond. I guess Jeff Crow is hunting him now. If your outfit could turn out to the job we'd have him in a few hours. But I reckon I'm not asking that. But if you'd lend me one man who knows the country and is good at trails—"

"I guess I'll have to do that much!" said Hudson Smedley, with a smile.

"You can have Skitter Dick. He's the best trailer on the ranch, and he knows the Windy River like he knows the back of his hand. And I'll lend you my Cousin Jimmy, too. He's nearly as good as a cowpuncher with the lasso now."

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Jimmy.

"There'll be a share in the reward for all hands if the diamond's found," said the sergeant. "I know Skitter Dick, and I'll be powerful glad to have him. You, too, young Silver. And the sooner the better."

"I'll saddle up Blazer at once," said Jimmy.

Jimmy Silver started for the corral, and Arthur Edward Lovell hurried after him.

"I suppose we're helping the cowpunchers while you're gone, Jimmy?" Lovell observed.

"That's so," assented Jimmy.

"Think I'd better go instead of you, old chap?"

"Eh?"

"Of course, I'm not thinking about the reward," explained Lovell. "But I should be a bit more useful on the trail, I think. What do you think, Jimmy?"

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"I think you're an ass, old chap."

"Now, look here, Jimmy—"

"Bow-wow!"

And Jimmy Silver went into the corral, leaving Arthur Edward Lovell speechless with indignation.

Ten minutes later Sergeant Kerr was riding away from the ranch with Skitter Dick and Jimmy Silver on the hunt for the black horse. Arthur Edward Lovell shook his head seriously as they went. Without his assistance Arthur Edward did not consider that success was probable, and he told Raby and Newcome so emphatically. And to Arthur Edward's exasperation, Raby and Newcome only chuckled.

#### THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

##### Run to Earth!

CRACK!

The report of a rifle rang out suddenly on the clear autumn air.

"I guess we ain't the only galoots on this hyer trail!" remarked Skitter Dick.

The three had been on the trail for some hours. From the spot where Dave Tutt had been run down by his vengeful comrades the day before, the trail of the black horse had been picked up. Jimmy Silver recalled clearly the direction in which the big black had dashed after breaking out of the larches, when Dave Tutt closed in the last fight with the gang of gunmen.

Skitter Dick picked up the trail, long hours old as it was, and followed it, with the sergeant and Jimmy Silver at his heels. Traces that were invisible to Jimmy, and even to the Canadian sergeant, were clear to the eyes of the Skitter, and he was seldom at fault. For some miles the black horse had galloped, evidently scared, but it had dropped into a walk at last, and cropped the grass. The three hunters came out on the bank of Windy River, ten miles or so above the ranch, where the stream was narrower, fresh from the slopes of the foothills. The river was gleaming ahead of them when the report of the rifle rang out from the bank.

Someone unseen had loosed off his rifle on the bank of the river, which ran low at this point between high, grassy bluffs.

The sergeant's party rode on towards the water, Sergeant Kerr holding his carbine ready for action. They rode

over the bluffs and looked down the grassy, bushy slope to the Windy River.

Then Jimmy Silver uttered a sharp exclamation.

"The black horse!"

There it was in full view.

The magnificent animal had been grazing along the river, but now it was standing with raised head and ears erect, alarm expressed by its look and attitude. The rifle-shot had startled it from its feeding.

Of the rifleman the three could see nothing. He was hidden from sight somewhere in the scrub along the banks.

"I don't see the galoot," remarked Skitter Dick, "and I guess I don't cotton on to what he was loosing off his rifle at."

"The black horse," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "Ten to one it's Jeff Crow, and he's trying to bring down Tutt's horse."

"The ornery goldarned worm!" exclaimed the cowpuncher indignantly.

"Shooting a hoss, and a hoss like that critter, too! I guess this is where we chip in!"

Crack!

The rifle rang again.

From the bluffs where they now sat their horses, watching, the three hunters could see the puff of white smoke that came from a clump of bushes by the river.

It revealed the hiding-place of the marksman.

There was no doubt now that the unseen rifleman was shooting at the black horse, which was pretty clear proof that he was Jeff Crow. Any prairie thief might have sought to rope in that magnificent creature as a prize, but no one could have desired to shoot it, save the man who believed that it carried a diamond worth a hundred thousand dollars.

The black horse with the white stockings gave a convulsive jump, and for a moment the watchers thought that it was hit. The bullet had gone very close, tearing a tuft of hair from the streaming mane.

But that the horse was not wounded was proved the next moment when it broke into a gallop. It came up the grassy slope of the bluff and sighted the three riders ahead of it, and swerved back again towards the river. A minute more, and it had plunged into the Windy River, and was swimming across to the northern side.

Sergeant Kerr raised his carbine, and sent a bullet humming into the clump of bushes from which the shots had come.

The ball cut away leaves and twigs in its passage, and evidently startled the hidden rifleman. A Stetson hat rose into view, and a dark, savage face glared round.

"Jeff Crow!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver.

It was the last remaining member of Tutt's gang of gunmen, and plainly he was on the track of the black horse ahead of the other hunters. They had arrived only in time to save its life, for undoubtedly Jeff Crow could have shot it as it swam the river, if he had been given time.

But he had no time.

The sergeant, having "located" his man, was galloping down the slope, right at him, and Jeff Crow's own liberty was now in danger, and all his attention was needed to save it.

"Hands up!" thundered the sergeant. Crow did not heed.

He sprang upon a horse that had been hidden in the thicket, and rode away down the river-bank at a reckless gallop.

For the present he was forced to abandon the pursuit of the black horse.

"Halt!" roared the sergeant.

The gunman did not even look back. Sergeant Kerr turned his head for a moment to Jimmy and the Skitter, who were riding after him.

"You uns, get after the black horse!" he shouted. "Leave this galoot to me!"

"Sure!" called back Skitter Dick.

"Rope him in if you can—shoot him if you can't!" were the sergeant's last words, as he galloped away on the track of Jeff Crow.

The gunman and the sergeant vanished from view in the irregularities of the river valley, though the echo of their horses' tread could be heard for some minutes longer.

"Rope him in if we can," said Skitter Dick reflectively. "I guess we'll do that, Jimmy."

"Yes, rather!" assented Jimmy Silver.

Blazer equalled the big black in point of speed. Blazer took to the water willingly, and in a few minutes Jimmy was scrambling up the opposite bank.

Skitter Dick joined him a few moments later. They rode together on the track of the black horse.

It was not a question of trailing now; the quarry was in sight, and all depended on speed.

But the black horse, obviously, had no intention of being caught if he could help it. He went right on at a terrific burst of speed, and Jimmy had to let Blazer "all out" to keep him in sight. In a few minutes he was dropping Skitter Dick behind. Skitter's horse was a good one, but not on a level with Blazer or the big black.

"Keep it up, Jimmy!" shouted the cowpuncher from behind. "I guess I'm dead in this hyer act. Keep it up, and don't forget what I've taught you about the rope."

"Right-ho!" shouted back Jimmy Silver.

And without looking back he galloped on, and the hoofbeats of Skitter Dick's horse died away into silence behind him.

Jimmy kept his eyes fixed on the bounding black.

A night's rest and a morning's grazing had refreshed the black horse, and he was in full vigour now. Once or twice he slackened, glancing back with gleaming, wicked eyes, and tore on again as he sighted Jimmy Silver riding behind.

"Go it, Blazer, old man!"

murmured Jimmy. So far, he was just keeping pace with the black horse, not more than a couple of hundred yards from the fugitive. He held his lasso in his hand, ready for a cast as soon as he should get near enough.

For a good hour he was riding hard, and still the black horse fled like a shadow before him. The Windy River was far out of sight behind him now, and the rocks of the bad lands loomed ahead. Jimmy urged on Blazer to greater efforts. Once the black horse had fled into the ravines of the bad lands it would be a question of picking up a trail again, when he was lost to sight, and Jimmy knew that the task would be a hopeless one. Unless he roped in the fugitive before the bad lands were reached the big black would escape, and with him probably all chance of recovering the Laroche diamond.

"Good old Blazer! Put it on!" breathed Jimmy.

He did not need to use the spur—his voice was enough for Blazer. The horse was straining every nerve now.

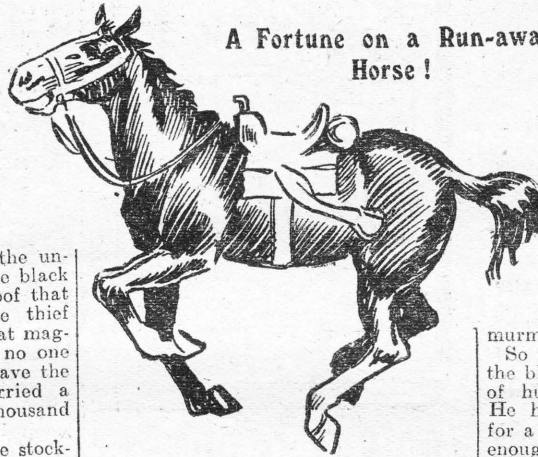
Jimmy was gaining a little at last, but the black was still almost holding his own. And the bad lands were close at hand now. The dark opening of a ravine showed ahead, and the black was evidently making for it.

Suddenly, in the opening of the ravine, a horseman appeared in sight. Jimmy Silver started a little as he sighted him—a Blood Indian, mounted on a shaggy pony.

There had been recent trouble with the Redskins of the Little Blood reserve, and though it was now over, Jimmy Silver was not anxious to meet a Blood warrior in the lonely recesses of the bad lands. But he did not pull rein. He did not intend to abandon the chase of the black horse, even if it brought an Indian fight upon his hands.

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### A Fortune on a Run-away Horse!



Jeff Crow, gunman, is after the run-away black stallion, on which is hidden a fortune, but he stirs up trouble when he tries his tricks with Jimmy Silver & Co. Read:—

## "THE HORSE-THIEF!"

By Owen Conquest,

next week's topping tale of the Rookwood Chums Out West.

"And shoot him if we can't!" said Skitter Dick. He closed one eye at the Rookwood junior. "I don't see myself shootin' a bit of horseflesh like that, Jimmy—not little me. I guess I wouldn't shoot him for all the diamonds that ever came out of Africa."

Jimmy Silver laughed. "Same here," he said. "But I fancy we can rope him in. He's in sight now, at any rate."

"Come on!" said Skitter Dick. The startled black horse had swum the shallow waters now, and clambered out on the northern bank of the Windy River. There he stared back with scared, dilated eyes, but only for a moment. Then he started again at a gallop, his tail to the river.

Skitter Dick put his horse to the water, and Jimmy Silver followed without hesitation.

Nothing would have induced Jimmy to fire on the black horse, even if the Blue Diamond itself had been the reward. But he was very keen on the chase, and he was fairly sure that

But, as it happened, the sight of the warrior upon his horse was enough for the big black. In the Indian he recognised a natural enemy—the warrior had a lasso in his hand, all ready for him, his cupidity tempted by the valuable prize. The black horse slowed down and tossed up his head and streaming mane, and then turned off to the left, swerving almost at right angles from his former course, and keeping to the plains.

"Oh, good!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

He swerved in the same direction, gaining now at every stride of Blazer, his hand gripping his ready lasso. There was a whiz as the rope flew through the air. Jimmy Silver had acquired great skill in the use of the lariat, and the cast he now made was worthy of Skitter Dick himself. The loop settled over the neck of the black horse, and the rope ran out to its full length. But the line was secured to Jimmy's saddle, and the black horse, though still fleeing fast, was a prisoner now.

### THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

#### The Fight for the Black Horse!

**B**LAZER stopped dead at a touch from Jimmy's hand. He stood like a rock, as he was accustomed to stand when a steer was roped in from his back, his legs braced to resist the coming shock. The rope tautened and sang, and the black horse, as if plucked by a giant's hand, came down with a crash into the grass.

With the loop tight round its neck, the black horse rolled over and over, screaming with rage and fright. Jerk after jerk came at the rope with terrible force, but Blazer stood the racket without flinching. And the big black, exhausted at last by its own struggles, lay panting in the grass.

Then Jimmy Silver began to coil in the lasso.

As he did so he became aware of the Indian horseman, whose existence he had almost forgotten during the last few exciting minutes. The Blood had ridden out of the bad lands, and was coming on towards the scene of the capture at a gallop.

He was not holding his lasso now, but a tomahawk gleamed in his dusky hand.

Jimmy Silver looked at him and slipped from his saddle. He had to take his attention from the black horse now, for he realised that his life was in danger. The black horse was too valuable a prize for the greedy Redskin to let it escape him without a struggle, and he could see that he had only a boy to deal with. But Jimmy Silver had not spent so many weeks in the Canadian West without learning to take care of himself.

He drew his revolver, and levelled it over Blazer's back, keeping his horse between him and the charging Indian.

"Halt!" he shouted.

The Blood still came on, his black eyes glinting at the Rookwood junior. But as Jimmy took careful aim over Blazer's back, the Blood slackened speed. He thrust his tomahawk into his belt again, and held up his hand in sign of friendship.

The Indian pointed to the black horse, still sprawling breathless in the grass.

"My horse!" he said.

Jimmy shook his head.

"Not at all," he answered. "Mine!"

The Blood edged a little nearer.

"Injun's horse," he said. "Little Red

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Elk lose horse, come look for him. Him belong Little Red Elk."

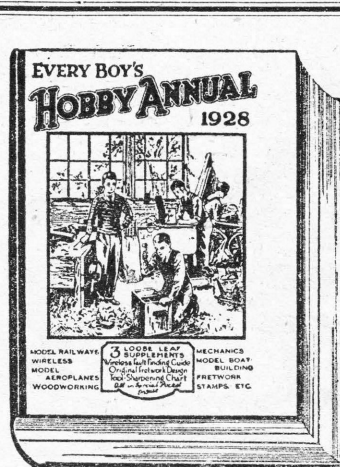
"I've found him for myself," said Jimmy. "You can cut it out, Little Red Elk. I'm keeping that horse, and you'd better clear."

"No can understand."

"Let the Little Red Elk ride back to his lodges," said Jimmy Silver. "Let him keep the white man's peace, or the Mounted Police will come again to the Blood reserve."

A flash of fire darted from the Indian's eyes. Evidently he had angry recollections of the recent "round-up" of the Bloods who had broken out of the reserve.

"Injun no ride to his lodge without horse," he said. "Let my little white brother give Injun his horse, and all friends."



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Jimmy Silver shook his head again. He was aware that a struggle was coming, but he hesitated to begin it. The Indian was at his mercy if he chose to pull trigger.

"Little white man say no, Injun take two horse," said the Blood threateningly.

"Can it!" said Jimmy. "I give you a chance to clear off. Get out of it, or I shall shoot!"

He made a motion with the revolver. The Blood hesitated; but the steady levelled barrel deterred him. He gave the Rookwood junior a black look, and reined his horse round.

"Little Red Elk go!" he said.

Jimmy Silver was glad enough to see him go. But he remained wary and

watchful, prepared for trickery; and it was well for him that he was prepared, for it came suddenly. Like lightning the Blood wheeled his shaggy pony again, and came at Jimmy Silver like the wind.

Crack!

Jimmy Silver pulled trigger hurriedly—so hurriedly that the bullet missed by a yard or more. The cunning Redskin had counted upon startling him, and he had succeeded. Before Jimmy could pull trigger again, the tomahawk came whizzing, with deadly, unerring aim. It was rather by instinct than design that Jimmy Silver ducked in time, and the razor-edged weapon flew over his head, knocking off his Stetson hat, so close did it whiz.

Crack!

Jimmy Silver fired again, with the Blood close upon him. There was a shrill squeal from the shaggy pony, whose tossing head received the bullet meant for the rider. The pony went over with a crash, and the Blood was hurled to the ground with a stunning concussion. Jimmy Silver ran towards him, and jammed the muzzle of the revolver fairly into the face of the half-stunned Indian.

"Now, you rotter—" panted Jimmy.

The Indian, expecting instant death, did not even close his eyes; he stared with grim, unwinking gaze at the tube that bore upon his face, and from which the death-dealing bullet would have sped at a touch of Jimmy's finger on the trigger.

Jimmy stepped back a pace or two.

"Get!" he said laconically.

Little Red Elk dragged himself to his feet. His horse lay dead in the grass—his tomahawk, his only weapon, lay at a distance. His life was in the "little white man's" hands, and he knew it. Jimmy watched him grimly over the levelled revolver.

"Injun light out!" he said. "No shoot if go quick! Savvy?"

"Injun savvy!" said the Redskin, with stolid dignity.

And he tramped away without another word. The fight for the black horse was over, and Jimmy Silver had won.

### THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

#### Still Missing!

**J**IMMY SILVER watched the Blood warrior till he was a speck in the distance towards the bad lands.

Then he returned the revolver to his belt, and gave his attention to the black horse.

He coiled in the lasso. The big black was on his feet now, subdued and obedient. Jimmy Silver mounted Blazer, leading away the black horse at the end of a dozen feet of rope.

The Rookwood junior, tired and breathless, but triumphant, headed for the Windy River.

He had covered many a long mile in his chase of the black horse, and the sun was sinking towards the west, when he came in sight of the Windy River again. He kept his eyes well open for Skitter Dick, and sighted the curly-haired cowpuncher by the river. The Skitter rode up to him with a genial grin on his sunburnt face.

"You've got the goods?" he remarked.

"Looks like it," said Jimmy Silver cheerfully.

"I guess I lost sight of you, but I reckoned I'd pick you up coming back," said Skitter Dick. "Good man! I guess I'd like to own that black horse. He'd be the best of the bunch if we had him at the ranch—excepting Blazer,

(Continued on page 13, col. 2.)

## A WORD WITH YOUR EDITOR!

### FUNKY!

**T**HIS week's mail brings a long letter from "Fred," of Yorkshire, who is mighty worried. It appears that he has quarrelled with his chum, and that certain school-mates of his are constantly urging him to have a serap with "X." Now, Fred is no funk, I'm sure of it, but he states quite frankly that he doesn't want to fight with his former chum. Neither does "X" want to fight, either. "What should I do?" asks Fred. Well, Fred, I should stick to your guns. There's something repugnant in fighting with a chap who was once your best pal, especially as the quarrel has grown "cold," so to speak. Never mind what your schoolmates say about it. You and "X" have mutually decided to drop each other. Let it go at that. Moral courage is an admirable quality, and I know it takes some moral courage to stand and listen to the gibes of fellows who taunt you with being a funk. But take comfort; I expect these same fellows are trying a similar game with "X." I'm not a prophet, but I venture to say that if these "fighting fans" persist in their gibes you and "X" will come together again. That would settle the whole matter, wouldn't it? And no one would be more pleased to hear of it than your editor.

### KEEP SMILING!

A loyal chum of mine from Oxford has been thrugging a pretty worrying time this last three months. To quote his own words, "everything has gone wrong." Illness, unemployment, and petty domestic squabbles have had the effect of making my correspondent feel very much down in the dumps. But he mustn't let this fit of depression take a strong hold of him. Smile, old chum; it's the smiler who wins through every time. And you'll win through, take it from me. Your next letter's going to tell me that, I feel sure.

### NEXT TUESDAY'S PROGRAMME.

#### "THE HORSE THIEF!"

Another stirring yarn of the Rookwood chums out West.

#### "STANDING BY THE OUTCAST!"

A splendid story of Tom Merry & Co., the chums of St. Jim's.

#### "CAPTAIN JACK—HIGHWAYMAN!"

More adventures of this famous knight of the road.

#### "HELD TO RANSOM!"

Featuring Jack Drake and Ferrers Locke, the world-famous detective.

#### "THE HONOURED QUEST!"

And last, but not least, another fine tale of Harry Wharton & Co., the chums of Greyfriars. Order your POPULAR early, chums—saves disappointment.

Your Editor.

## "The Trail of the Blue Diamond!"

(Continued from previous page.)

of course. I guess that fire-eater, Dave Tutt, hasn't any use for him, Jimmy, and he ought to belong to you, as you've caught him."

"We'll get him to the ranch, anyhow," said Jimmy, with a smile. "If he's not claimed—"

"Then I guess he'll be your loss." "Seen anything of the sergeant?" asked Jimmy, as he rode on towards the river with the cowpuncher.

"Nary a sight. I guess we may hear news of him at the ranch."

It was sundown when the two riders arrived at Windy River Ranch, with the black horse led at the end of Jimmy Silver's lasso. Lovell and Raby and Newcome were the first to greet them; and Lovell stared at the black horse in great surprise.

"You've got him!" he exclaimed. "Either him or his ghost!" assented Jimmy Silver, with a laugh.

"Well, my hat!" said Lovell. "I shall always believe in future that there's such a thing as fool's luck!"

Hudson Smedley came out of the ranch-house with the sergeant. Sergeant Kerr was not looking in the best of tempers, but he brightened up at the sight of the black horse.

"Did you get Jeff Crow, sergeant?" called out Skitter Dick.

"Nope!" grunted the sergeant. "But you've got Dave Tutt's horse, Dick." "Jimmy Silver got him," answered the cowpuncher, with a grin. "I guess I was left behind."

"Well, whoever got him, I guess I'm glad to see him," said the sergeant. "There's a hundred thousand dollars hidden about that gee somewhere. You ain't searched him yet?"

"Nope." "Then hold the critter while I go through him."

Saddle and girths were taken off, bridle and reins and stirrups. Every article was searched by the sergeant with the most meticulous care. It was evident that Mr. Kerr fully expected to find the great diamond hidden in some recess of the black horse's trappings. But as the search proceeded his bronzed face grew less hopeful in expression.

The search was thorough enough. The saddle was cut into pieces to reveal any hidden recess, and every fragment, every fragment was searched by one or another of the crowd after the sergeant had finished. But there was no sign of the Blue Diamond.

"I guess he's got me beat, after all!" said the sergeant grimly.

The horse itself was carefully searched—its ears, its mane scanned and groped. But the diamond was not there.

"I give it up!" said Sergeant Kerr at last. "I reckon Dave Tutt must have chucked the thing away when the gunmen got him cornered. Maybe it's lying around on the prairie now. Anyhow, it ain't on the hoss, and I'm through here."

"And I reckon the hoss belongs to the galoot who roped it in," said Skitter Dick. "Is that law, sergeant?"

"I guess he can keep it, unless it's claimed by the authorities," said the sergeant. "Dave Tutt won't be free to claim it for ten years to come, anyhow. I guess you can hang on to it for the present, young Silver, and I'll let you know later."

"Good!" said Jimmy Silver. "I'll keep him safe."

And the sergeant, disappointed, rode away to Kicking Mule; and the black horse was turned into the Windy River corral.

"But where's the jolly old diamond, I wonder?" Arthur Edward Lovell remarked at supper.

"Echo answers where!" said Jimmy Silver.

It was an interesting and puzzling question; and the chums of Rookwood little dreamed—just then—how close at hand it was; no farther off than the black horse, after all, if they had only known it!

THE END.

(More thrilling adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co. out West, in next Tuesday's bumper issue, boys. Order your copy of the POPULAR in advance.)



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