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**S.P.B. MAIS**



# Moonlight Stampede!

The maddened beasts broke into a furious charge which no human power could stop . . . but amongst them rode the Rio Kid, determined to outwit the rustlers

By  
**RALPH REDWAY**

## The Night Prowler!

THE Rio Kid tilted his head and listened. Balled in his blanket, in the thick black shadow of a clump of pecans, the Kid was invisible to all eyes, though within a few yards the moonlight glistened on the waving grass of the boundless prairie, turning it to shimmering silver. The Kid had been sleeping. A slight stir of the grey Mustang at his side had roused him. He knew that Side-Kicker did not stir without cause. He stretched out one hand to touch the Mustang's glossy neck and enjoy silence; the other closed on the butt of a six-gun.

Sounds of the night came to the Kid's ears—the faint murmur of two hundred Lazy S cows over whom he was keeping watch and ward, the wind from the Hatchet Hills stirring the high grass, the tinkle of the Lariat river. There was another sound, so faint that only the keenest ear could have caught it—a stealthy footfall on the prairie.

Many and many a time had the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande listened, in deep secrecy, to the footfall of an enemy. There were few places in the far-flung state of Texas where the Rio Kid could ride without danger. But here, on the cattle-ranges of the Lazy S Ranch, he was a puncher in Morris Hall's bunch, and no man knew him as anything else.

A shadow moved in the moonlight. The Kid saw a figure in shape and station hat, and his face grew grim.

A dozen yards from the pecans, the grass was crumpled under what looked like a sleeping form. It was a cowboy's slicker, rolled round a long pine log. But to the eye, in the dim moonlight, it was a sleeper. The Kid had fixed it up before he turned into his blanket under the trees. He had reckoned that he would be trailed that night.

Slightly he sat up and watched.

Of the man who crept almost soundlessly round the trees, and stopped to stare at the form in the grass, he could see only the outline. But he knew who it was—Handsome Harris, of the Lazy S bunch. The man with

whom the Kid was on duty for a week, fifteen miles from the ranch, who the Kid strongly suspected was in league with the Scar Face gang of rustlers who haunted the Hatchet Hills. For which reason the Kid had left the stockman's hut to Harris, and camped on the prairie on his lone-some. The Kid had heaps of nerve, but he did not figure on turning into a bunk in the hut, with a man who would pull a gun as soon as his eyes were closed.

For long, long moments, Handsome stood there, watching and listening. Then a six-gun glistened in his hand. It was aimed full at the recumbent figure before him.

Bang! The sudden roar of the six-gun awoke a thousand echoes on the silent prairie.

Handsome Harris fired point-blank at the figure only ten feet from him—the figure that, he had not the slightest doubt, was that of Carlos, as the Kid was known at the Lazy S. The bullet tore through the slicker, and crashed into the pine log rolled inside it. The shot was followed by more. As fast as Handsome could pull trigger, he pumped bullets, rattling the slicker and the log with hot lead till the gun was empty. Then he ran forward.

"I guess you got yours!" The Kid heard his jubilant voice. "Dog-gone you, you sure beat off the gang at the hut, but I reckoned I'd get you, and I done it!"

Laughing aloud, the puncher bent over the still form, and dragged the slicker away. Next moment he gave a yell of rage and astonishment as his eyes glared at the lead-spattered pine log. At the same moment a figure in goldskin chaps stepped out of the dark shade of the pecans, and a cool voice drawled:

"Put 'em up, feller!"

Harris spun round and looked at the gun in the hand of the Rio Kid. He stood as if transfixed.

"I guess," remarked the Kid, in his cool Texas drawl, "that I said put 'em up, hombre! I ain't waiting."

Slowly, staring at the Kid like a man in a dream, the puncher put his hands above his head. The Kid stopped nearer to him, gun still levelled, eyes glancing over it.

"You sure are some gunner, Hand-some!" said the Kid. "I reckon if I had been packed in that slicker, like you figured, I should never have known what hit me. You're the most pizenest skunk I've ever struck, and ain't you fairly shouting for me to let drive a bullet through your calico? I should smile."

The colour wavered in the face of the man who stood with his hands above his station. Death was looking him in the face. The merest pressure of the Kid's finger, and he would have rolled lifeless over the log he had riddled with bullets. And why the Kid did not shoot was a puzzle to him.

"Dog-gone you!" breathed Harris hoarsely. "You know—"

The Rio Kid laughed.

"I sure did suspicion you a whole heap, feller," he asserted. "I guess some guy put the Scar Face gang wise that I was at the hut, for them to hop around so lively, and I sure figure that that guy's name was Harris. Why, you knowed me, and I knowed you'd trail me to-night, just as plain as if you'd whispered it in my ear afore I left you at the hut. And I reckoned I'd surprise you some."

"You got me!" muttered Handsome, between his teeth.

The Kid laughed again. Handsome had figured that it was pie to trail down a boy puncher in the dark, and shoot him up without giving him a chance. He would hardly have figured that it was so easy had he known that Carlos, of the Lazy S, had been known in other parts of Texas as the Rio Kid, the boy outlaw—was hard to catch napping as the wisest weasel.

But the Kid had no intention of letting Handsome know of his former adventures. A steady job as a puncher was what he wanted these days.

"I reckon," said the Kid, "that my best guess is to make it last sickness for you, feller! If the boys at the Lazy S knowed the game you've played to-night, they'd string you up over the corral gate. But I guess I didn't come a-shooting when I hit the Lazy S, and I ain't no bunch to ride home and tell Mister Hall that I've left one of his men for the turkey-buzzards. Nope! Where'd you leave your critter?"

"Staked out by the Lariat, half a mile back," muttered Handsome, his eyes fastively watching the Kid. "What you aim to do, dog-gone you?"

"I guess you'll see if you live long enough," answered the Kid. "Hed it ahead of me, and keep clearing so it that if you put your pants down, you got yours! Bout it?"

The puncher tramped away through the grass, his hands still above his station, and the Rio Kid, gun in hand, followed him.



### The Kid's Way!

**T**HE black bronco staked on a trail-roped by the glimmering waters of the Larist looked round as his master approached. Handsome Harris halted by the tethered horse, and under the shadow of his steers his eyes burned at the smiling Kid. What the boy puncher's object was in taking him back to his cayuse he did not know, but he hardly dared hope that he was to be allowed to mount and ride.

"What's your game?" he muttered. "Git on that cayuse!"

Handsome put his hand to the saddle.

"Not that-a-way!" said the Kid. "You ain't going to ride into the Hatchet Hills to-night, feller, and call the Scar Face gang on a visit to this baby! You're going back to the Lazy 8. I guess your horse knows his way home. You're goin' to sit that bronc with your face to the tail, and I'm sure going to rape you on."

The puncher's dark face was convulsed with rage.

"I guess not!" he panted. "I guess—"

"Just as you like," said the Kid. "I'd just as soon shoot you, hombre. I reckon you're the kinder guy that ought to be wiped out like you was a rattler. It's your say-so!"

The Kid had lowered his gun, but it came level again.

"Let up, dog-gone you!" cried Harris. "I guess you got the goods on me."

He clambered on to the bronco's back, his face to the tail.

The Kid untied the trail-ropes, and with one end of it he tied the puncher's feet under the bronco. With the other end he roped his hands together behind his back. Handsome did not speak during that process, but his eyes spoke volumes. Only too well he knew the laughter and

The Kid threw himself on his horse's flank and fired. The rustler went hurtling backwards over his bronco's tail!



derision that would greet him when he rode into the Lazy 8 tied up, with his face to his horse's tail. The Kid was grinning now. He knew as well as Handsome how the bunch were likely to greet that strange-looking rider.

"I guess," remarked the Kid, "that you'll make the boys smile a few! If they want to know, you can tell them that you trailed a prairie rabbit and found that he was a cougar, all teeth and claws. You can tell Old Man Hall that I'll ride this range on my lonesome. I don't want any double-crossing phony palooka of your left riding it with me!"

"Dog-gone you—"

"Pack it up!" said the Kid. "I'm chewing the rag, and I don't want any help. You can chew it a whole lot when you hit the ranch. You sure got a heap of nose for Old Man Hall. I guess you can tell him, if you like, how come that the rustler shot up his foreman—seeing that you was putting in for the job! You only got to open up, and you can tell him where to hit Scar Face's hideout in the hills. Now git!"

The Kid took the black bronco's handle and led him a little distance in the direction of the far-off ranch. Then, with a smart slap on his flank, he set the horse galloping. The bronco knew his way home, and he galloped away in a bee-line for the Lazy 8.

Horse and rider disappeared into the shadows of the night, and the beat of the galloping hoofs died into silence.

The Kid turned and tramped back to the clump of pears. For some minutes he stood in the shadow of

the trees, looking over the moonlit prairie. But all was peaceful, and he rolled himself in his blanket again, and lay down to sleep.

### Riding for his Life!

**T**HE Kid dreamed of old days on the Double Bar before a false charge had made him an outlaw; of a stampede in which he had ridden amid a sea of tramping horns, his life in his hands. And it seemed to him that in his dream he heard again the thunder of hoofs, the bellow of frightened cattle, the squealing of broncos—and he came suddenly out of slumber to realize that it was not all a dream.

Hoofs were thudding on the prairie, and the Kid was on his feet in a single bound. Something was afoot in the herd—no longer slumbering peacefully in the thick grass. One word leaped to the Kid's lips:

"Rustlers!"

He knew it before he looked. The saddle was on his Mustang and the Kid was in the saddle in lightning time. He pushed out from the trees, his eyes gleaming under the rim of his steers. The moon was growing old; already in the far east was a faint glimmer that told of the sun coming up from the distant Gulf of Mexico. But it was darker than it had been when he had chased Handsome, and the rolling prairie was a mass of shadow, pocked out here and there with shimmering gleams.

Cows were on the hoof, lumbering and mumbering in the grass, unwilling to stir. Four or five figures of horsemen loomed like dim ghosts. Two of them were between the Kid and the herd. Both of them pulled in, veining round towards the Kid as he rode out from under the branches.

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## Moonlight Stampede

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"You, Handsome?" called out a voice.

"You got that goldarned puncher?" called the other.

The Kid's face was grim. If he had needed proof that Handsome pulled with the Sear Face gang, he had it now. He rode towards the two, a gun in his hand. The Kid's business on the Hatchet range was to drive cows from pasture to pasture, but if rustlers were at work, it was up to him to defend his herd.

"I guess you heard your gun talk, Handsome," went on the first voice. "You sure gave that guy the whole package!"

The Kid chuckled grimly. Had Handsome got away with it, two hundred head of cattle would have been missing from the Lazy S ranges in the morning, driven off to the rustlers' hideout in the hills. But the Kid was not lying in the grass,iddled with lead—he was here on the spot, very much alive, with a six-gun in his hand!

He dashed at a gallop towards the two cow thieves—and there was a hoarse shout from one of them.

"Say, that ain't Handsome!"

The speaker's hand rose, with a Colt in it, as he shouted to his companion.

"You said it, feller!" called back the Kid. He fired as he spoke, and the rustler crumpled headlong into the grass.

The other cow thief was firing the next second. But the Kid was burning powder faster. The rustler's bullet missed him as his own struck, and the cow thief crumpled over his horse. With a wild clatter of hoofs, the horse dashed away, the wounded man clinging to its neck.

Half the herd were already in motion, and the rest stirring, under cracking quirts wielded by five or six shadowy riders. The Kid reckoned that he had a man-size job to save Hall's cows for him; but he reckoned that he was going to make the grade. He rode with his knees, a gun in either hand, and as a shadowy horseman loomed among the following cows, he fired. The half-seen rider pitched down amid crashing hoofs, and a riderless bronco ran with the cows.

With a clatter and a jingle, a horseman rode by him in the gloom. An angry voice shouted almost in his ear:

"Can it, you grek! What you burning powder for? You want to stampede the herd, dog-gone you?"

It was one of the rustlers, taking the Kid for one of the gang. In the darkness recognition was impossible—dim-seen figures in straws and chaps were as like one another as peas. The Kid reckoned that he had the advantage in that—if he was alone against a crowd, at least he knew that every guy who stopped a bullet was an enemy. He swung round in the saddle towards the horseman riding and cursing at his side.

"Feller!" grinned the Kid. "I got

to risk stampeding one here, with rustlers around!"

With the words, his heavy gun struck the rustler across the face, the man went backwards out of his saddle as if he had been shot, and the Kid rode on. A shout warned him that the rustlers had got wise to it that an enemy was riding in the gloom.

From four or five directions bullets whizzed. The Kid rode on unshaken. If his own eyes, keen as a mountain hawk's, could not pick out a face in the murk, he reckoned that the rustlers would find it hard to single him out. Random bullets buzzed in the air like harrows, and the Kid fired at the flash of a gun, and a horse yell told him that his head had not been wated.

From the herd, alarmed by the roar of the guns, came loud howling and the thunder of hoofs. Huge lumbering forms careered wildly on.

Nothing, as the Kid knew, was easier to start than a stampede; and nothing harder to stop, once it had started. But it was better to stampede the herd than to leave the Sear Face gang to drive it off into the hills. Eyes gleaming, horns tossing, staggery shoulders bumping round him, told that the stampede had started. All that he could do now the longhorns were on the run, was to ride with the stampede, keeping the herd together as much as possible, and waiting for the beasts to tire.

The rustlers, after the first blaze, ceased to fire. They, like the Kid, were caught in the stampede, and could only ride with it. Cracking quirts on the outskirts of the thundering herd told that they were endeavouring to head it off towards the hills.

Heaving cows crushed the Kid's legs to his mounting's sides. Again and again a long horn grazed him, and tore his gaitskin chaps. He had to pack his guns and ride for his life, knowing that he would be lucky if he came through alive.

### The Kid Makes the Grade!

UP from the rolling prairie came the sun. The Rio Kid looked round him at a sea of heaving backs. The herd were tiring now, the mad rush slowing down. Now that it was light, the Kid reckoned that he had a chance of winding out of the herd, getting on its flank, and heading it off from the hills. But with the light came the danger from which the dark had covered him—and the wind of a bullet by his ear apprised him that it was coming.

How many of the Sear Face gang had started that raid, the Kid did not know; but he knew that some had gone down under his fire, and he did not doubt that others had gone down in the stampede. His eyes spotted three riders—all that remained to be seen.

One of them, packed among the cattle like the Kid, was quite close at hand—the other two riding behind the herd, content to see it heading for the hills. The man close at hand

was spotted the man, and was already losing off head. He was behind the Kid, and had the advantage there.

As the first shot came unpleasantly close, the Kid threw himself on his horse's flank, clinging to the saddle with his left hand, at the risk of being torn away by a tossing horn. A second shot passed over him. But a gun was in the Kid's hand now, and the rustler had no chance of pulling trigger a third time. The Kid fired as he swung and the rustler's Colt flew from his hand as he went backwards over his horse's tail.

"I guess you got yours, feller!" murmured the Kid, as he swung into the saddle again.

From a distance, ever leaving backs, came the whin of hot lead. The two rustlers in the rear of the herd were firing, but the range was long, and the Kid hardly heeded it. All his efforts were bent on getting out of the path of the herd now that the cows were slowing, and it was light enough to see.

At length he was free, and riding on its right flank. He wheeled his mounting to ride back. He had to head off that stampede from the hills if he was to save Master Hall's cows for him. But he reckoned that the two rustlers riding behind had to be dealt with first.

He came round the tail of the herd, with his guns up, and both blazing.

There was a spatter of hasty shots from the two rustlers, then both reined round their cow ponies and dashed away. They vanished in the distance, and the Kid laughed and bolstered his guns.

The boy puncher had ridden through the night in close company with death, but he gave no thought to dangers escaped, to fatigue or weariness, or to deflected loas. The herd, though slowing down, was still stampeding towards the hills, less than a mile away now, and he had to turn them, if he could.

Gun-play was over, the last of the cow thieves vanishing on the horizon, and the Kid took his quirt in hand and set himself to cowman's work. Stopping the stampede was beyond human power, but guiding it and heading it was possible now that he was free to devote himself to that task.

Riding on the flank of the herd, with cracking quirt and shouting voice, the Kid gradually deflected it, urging the rush more and more to the left, away from the line of hills. So long as he it lasted the cows would rush on, but in what direction they cared nothing. The Kid's voice and quirt drove them more and more leftward, till, after a grim hour of incessant labour, he had them heading southward, the line of hills parallel to their new course. Then the Kid was content to ride with them, and wait for them to tire out.

An hour more, and the rush had dropped to a lumbering trot, and the Kid had his cows in hand. By that time many of the tired brutes would have lain down in the grass; and the Kid's quirt was needed now to keep them in motion. It was a man's work, under the blaze of the Texas sun, in the dry dust kicked up by

hundreds of hoofs, and the Kid ached with fatigue. But he galloped after stragglers and drove them back to the main herd, rounding up wandering cow after cow, and keeping the whole herd in motion till the new pasture was reached. Then the weary lead was allowed to rest.

But if the herd rested, content to wallow in rich grass and feed, there was no rest for the weary Kid. Two hundred cows had tramped in the stampede, and a dozen at least had fallen and been trampled to death. But the Kid's eyes, calculating, figured the herd now at a hundred and fifty head. Thirty or forty cows, lost in the rack, were wandering loose over the plains, and not till every longhorn of them had been driven back to the herd was the Kid going to rest.

While the herd rested and fed, the Rio Kid was riding, hour after hour, in the hot sun, bounding up stony corns.

### Mr. Carfax—Foreman!

**C**OLORADO JIM, horse-wrangler at the Lazy S, stared, rubbed his eyes, and stared again. Then he roared:

"Say, you'uns! You want to see this?"

It was morning at the Lazy S, Colorado had saddled up Mr. Hall's horse for the rancher to ride, and was leading him at the gate, when that strange sight from the prairie dawned on his astonished eyes. Straying up the trail from the prairie was Handsome Harris' cayuse. Sitting on his back was a man who, no doubt, was the horse's owner, but his face was not to be seen as he approached.

It was the first time the Lazy S wrangler had ever seen a puncher riding in backwards, and he roared at the sight. Five or six punchers came running down to the gate as the wrangler shouted, and they all stared at the strange-looking rider.

"I guess that'll be Handsome, what was riding the Hatchet range with young Carfax," said Bill Saunders. "What's he hit the horse trail for? And what's he riding that way for?"

"He's sure tied on that critter," grinned Colorado. "I guess Handsome ain't doing it for fun. Maybe he's had trouble with young Carfax. He sure had a big grinch agin that young guy."

Grinning, the punchers watched the black horse's slow approach. The rider, twisting his head round, saw them, and showed his teeth in a savage snarl.

"What's all this?" Rancher Hall came down from the house, holed and spurred for riding. He stared with knitted brows, but every other face wore a grin as Handsome Harris was led in at the gate, his back to his boss.

"Cut that greek loose!" rapped Hall.

Colorado crossed through the tail-rope with his bowie-knife. The third puncher slipped from the back of the bronco, and leaped, panting, on the gate, surrounded by mocking faces.

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**This Issue Contains**

## A Free Packet of Foreign and Colonial Stamps

—more next week!

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The rancher stared at him with bent brows.

"You figure you're a clown in a Mexican circus, or what?" he snapped. "Who fixed you up that-way?"

"I guess the hombre had a gun on me!" muttered the puncher. "That darned kid ruther that shot up your foreman, and that you took on trust—"

"Cut all that out!" snapped Hall.

"That kid puncher never shot up the foreman—he get him away from the Sore Face gang and saved his life, and you're as wise to it as I am, Harris. You got a grinch agin that kid because you pulled on him and he bent you to it. You been having trouble with him on the Hatchet range?"

"It sure looks like it!" grinned Colorado; and there was a chuckle from the bunch.

"I tell you he got a gun on me and tied me up that-way!" muttered Handsome. "He's in with the rustlers to drive off the cows—and him alone on the range!"

"Aw, can it, Handsome!" said Yuba Dan. "That kid Carfax is sure a square hombre."

"Maybe you'll say so when you ride out to the Hatchet range and miss the cows!" sneered Handsome. "I guess he had a reason for getting out of me."

And with that he slouched away to the bunkhouse, anxious to get out of sight of the grinning bunch and to rest his weary, aching limbs.

Harris Hall did not like Harris; neither did he trust him ever much. But young Carfax was a stranger to him, and it was true that he had taken him on trust because of the services he had rendered to the wounded foreman. Left alone on the Hatchet range, fifteen miles from the ranch, the new puncher had the herd at his mercy, if there was any grain of truth in what Handsome alleged. The rancher very quickly made up his mind.

"Saddle up your cayuse, Colorado—and you, Saunders," he said. "I guess we're riding out to Handsome's range, to give that kid Carfax the once-over. I sure do trust him, but saddle up, pronto."

From the bunkhouse Handsome Harris watched the three ride away. The kid puncher had beaten him, but had he beaten the gang of rustlers

due to run off the herd in the night? Handsome did not reckon so. He figured that Hall would find his cows missing, and the boy puncher, if he yet lived, would be under strong suspicion of having driven Handsome off the range, to get away with the coast-guarding unwatched. If it came to a show-down, it was one guy's word against another's, and Handsome reckoned that his word was as good as that of a new man in the outfit.

Hall, Colorado, and Saunders did not draw rein till the stockman's hat came in sight. They found the hat deserted—Carfax was not there, or in sight on the prairie. Leaving the lot, they rode along the bank of the Lariat. Very soon the signs of the stampede in the night met their eyes. Hall's eyes glittered angrily under his knitted brows, at the broad, trampled trail of the herd, leading away to the hills. The cows were leading for the hills where the rustlers had their hide-out, and there was grim suspicion in the rancher's face now.

"I guess that kid Carfax is sure white, boss!" Colorado ventured.

"Huh on!" rapped Hall.

They rode on the trail of the stampede—here and there pausing the bones of some cow, trampled in the rout, and picked clean by the buzzards. But the bones picked by the obscene birds were not all those of cows, and Colorado and Bill Saunders exchanged a look as they noted it.

"I guess there's been shooting!" muttered the horse-wrangler. And Bill nodded.

Hall rode on in grim silence, puzzled. His knitted brow cleared a little when, a mile from the hills, the stampede-trail swept round to the south.

"They sure never went into the hills, boss!" said Colorado.

Hall nodded. They rode on, mile on mile, the stampede-trail leading them ever south, and farther and farther away from the rustler-haunted hills. Suddenly Colorado rose in his stirrups and pointed.

"There's the cows!" he cried.

"But where's the puncher?" asked Bill.

"You can search me! But there's the cows."

They drew rein on the fringe of the herd. Hall ran his eyes over them, counting swiftly with a cowboy's eye. A hundred and sixty or seventy head were there, out of a herd of two hundred. It was not a bad tally after a wild stampede, with only one man to handle the herd. But where was the puncher? The herd had been got in hand, driven to a new pasture, and few were missing; but where was the man who had handled them?

Sitting in their saddles, the three scanned the prairie. Colorado pointed to a cloud of dust in the far distance. They watched it in silence, as it approached. As it came nearer, they picked out nine or ten cows, rolling wearily along, driven by a rider in gaiter-knaps, cracking his quirt. Colorado put his hands to his mouth and gave the cowboy yell:

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