

GREAT STORY BY S. P. B. MAIS

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Free Inside!

**BIG
PACKET OF
STAMPS**

-also-

**GRAND PRIX
THRILLS**

by

S. C. H. DAVIS
*(Sports Editor of
"The Autocar")*

-and-

**Five
Splendid
Stories**



out. Its whereabouts was a mystery . . . until the Rio

Kid, boy foreman of the Lazy S, hit the—

TRAITOR'S TRAIL

****By RALPH REDWAY****

Moonlight Raider!

THE Rio Kid's sunburnt face, in the flicker of the camp-fire, was bright and cheery. Sitting on a log, with a tin plate of flapjacks on his knees, eating his supper, the Kid was thinking that he was a lucky hombre, and life seemed good to him. Foreman of the Lazy S Ranch, with as white a ranch under his orders as ranch foreman ever had, it tickled the Kid to a frazzle to think of it.

Every now and then, he wondered whether it was real, and whether he might not wake up to find himself hunted, as of old, by sheriffs and Texas Rangers. But it was real enough. The Rio Kid, the outlaw of the Rio Grande, had disappeared, and in his place, Mr. Carfax, foreman of the Lazy S, rode the range, housed the outfit, branded cows and hunted broncos, and found life good.

The Starlight Skicker on the bronzed faces of three punchers of the Lazy S, camping with their foreman on the solitary prairie, almost in the shadow of the Hatchet Hills. Foreman as he now was, the Kid worked as hard as any guy in the bunch—or perhaps a little harder.

That afternoon he had ridden out on the hunt for a stray bunch of cows, without finding them. At nightfall, he and his men camped, to take up the trail again in the morning. The trail had led them to the edge of the hills, and the Kid reckoned that it was more than likely that those cows had been snipped up by the rustlers who haunted the Hatchets. But the Scar Face gang were not—if the Kid could help it—going to get away with the cows, even if he had to trail them through the hills as far as New Mexico.

The Kid, lifting his ear, named with the coffee half-way to his lips. From the dusky prairie, stretching round the lonely camp-fire, a sound had come to his keen ears—the distant beat of hoofs. The Kid heard it first—but the other punchers caught it a few moments later, and all of them looked round into the night.

"That'll be Handsome!" said Bill Saunders.

The Kid nodded, his cheery face darkening a little. In all the Lazy S bunch, there was only one man he disliked—Handsome Harris. The Kid had more than a suspicion that the handsome puncher had dealings with the Scar Face gang, and he had a hunch that through Handsome he might get a cinch on Scar Face, the leader of the rustlers. Handsome had ridden with him that day, though he had missed the others in the hunt for signs of the lost cows.

From the darkness came the concrete beat of hoofs approaching the camp, the rider guided by the leap of flame against the dark sky. Dimly, the horseman loomed up in the gloom.

Bill Saunders threw fresh flapjacks into the pan hissing on the fire. Supper was ready for Handsome when he joined up. The other two punchers, lying in the grass, were smoking.

The Kid drank his coffee—and the can was at his lips when it was struck away with a clang and a crack by a whizzing bullet.

There was a yell of amazement from the punchers. The horseman, dim—seen as he rode towards the fire, had a gun in his hand. In the blaze of the camp-fire the Kid and his men were easy targets—but in his experience, the bullet intended for the Kid's head had knocked the coffee-can from his mouth.

The next came swiftly, but not swiftly enough, for the Kid had rolled backwards over the log on which he sat. The lead whizzed over him as he rolled.

"Gee-whin! That ain't Handsome—it's Scar Face!" Bill Saunders yelled. "Watch out, you 'uns!"

Bang! roared the horseman's gun. In the flare of the fire, his face could be seen now—a face so terribly scarred as to be unlike a human visage. Well was that scarred face known on the ranges by the Larist river. Given by hideous scars, it looked like the face of some goblin of the night in the flare of the camp-fire.

To the staring punchers, the scarred rider gave no heed. It was the foreman of the Lazy S at whom he was firing, and he had some very

seeing, for the camp by surprise.

But the Kid was up swiftly, a gun in his hand, throwing lead. The punchers, after the first shock of surprise, grasped their Colts and blazed away.

The scarred horseman was riding on without a pause. He had passed within twenty feet of the camp, losing off lead at the foreman of the Lazy S, but he did not draw rein.

He careered onward, the darkness swallowing him before a bullet could reach him.

"Scar Face!" yelled Bill, and he pumped bullets after the vanished rider.

"That dog-goned rustler!" gasped Yuba Dan.

Spattering lead from the camp whistled in the night. But the Kid, after the first shot, did not burn powder. It was useless to throw lead after a vanished shadow in the dark.

"I guess you can pack your guns, you 'uns," he drawled. "That hombre sure ain't hanging on to stay lead. I'll say he's half-way to the Hatchets while you're wasting cartridges."

The punchers ceased fire. In the silence that followed, there was a faint sound of galloping, dying away in the distance towards the hills. Scar Face, the rustler, had come—and gone! The Kid glanced towards his Mustang—but he shook his head. There was no chance of riding the rustler down on the dark prairie. Instead, he stamped out the camp-fire. Darkness fell on the camp.

"I guess Handsome won't hit this bunch afore sun-up, Mr. Carfax," said Yuba Dan, as the Kid tramped out the sparks.

"I reckon Handsome can take his chance of that," said the Kid. "We sure ain't setting up here in the light, like a row of bottles at a rodeo, for that dog-goned gun-slinger to ring the bell. I'll say that his lead went closer than I wanted it."

"That damned rustler sure has a big punch again, you!" said Bill Saunders. "It was you that he wanted."

"Didn't I stop him cutting out a herd of two hundred head, only a week ago? And didn't Master Hall make me foreman for that very thing!" said the Kid. "But I'd sure like to know how he was wise to it that I was here, setting up for him to take potshots at. Maybe a little bird whispered it to him."

The Kid's face was grim as he rolled himself in his blanket. He was thinking of Handsome Harris. He figured that he knew the name of the little bird who had whispered to Scar Face where the Lazy S foreman was to be found. And he figured, too, that he had something to say to that puncher when he turned up on the morrow; and that it was going to be something with a kick in it.

The Kid Handles His Quilt!

"Y OU, Harris—you hang around a piece!"

Handsome Harris looked at his foreman, under lowering brows. In the sunny morning the camp was



With a cluster of heels on steeps, the cowboys rode out of their secret retreat, watched by the Kid.

breaking up, to resume the trail of the lost cows, Harris had ridden in at dawn and joined the bunch at breakfast, the Kid listening, without comment, to his explanation that he had failed to pick up the camp in the dark. That went with the punchers, but it did not go with the foreman. When Bill Saunders, Yuba Dan, and Panhandle Pete saddled up, the Kid did not ascend the grey Mustang, and Harris, about to get on his black bronco, was called back.

"Say, ain't we riding, sir?" asked Bill, looking round.

"You 'uns hit the trail," said the Kid. "I guess I'll feller on after I've cleared the rag a piece with this hombre."

The three punchers mounted and rode away through the waving grass to the west. Handsome Harris stood with one hand on his saddle, eyeing the Kid. The Kid stood facing him, quiet and calm, smiling faintly as he saw the puncher's hand move, as if by instinct, closer to the butt of a Colt. The Kid was not touching a gun, but his hands were very near the butts of the six-guns in the low-slung holsters.

"Guess again, hombre," said the Kid softly. "You pull that gun, you all-fired cowboy, and you get your powder soaked."

"What you want," chiding the rag?" guessed Harris. "Ain't we hitting the trail after them cows?"

"I get to talk turkey to you, feller?" said the Kid. "I came as near as I want to getting shot up by Bear Face, in this camp last night. It sure does seem to be mighty unlovely for a guy to be foreman of this ranch. Jake, the old foreman, was shot up by Bear Face and his crowd, and when Barron, the new foreman, came they laid for him on the Lariat trail and shot him up, too.

"It sure does look to me as if that

hombre Bear Face would like to see a friend of his foreman of the ranch—and maybe Mister Hall might give you the ticket if his new foreman followed the last two on the long trail. What you figure?"

The puncher's black eyes glittered at the Kid from under his knitted brows, but he did not speak.

"I guess," went on the Kid, "that I've made a big cinch, hearing in us foreman of this bunch. I'll say that I want to keep foreman, and not to be found looking up at the sky, with holes through me. A week ago you put the ruddlers on my trail when I was punching cows with you, and I reckon I've let it drop. Maybe I'm a soft guy, but I ain't no Rubo from Rubesville, Harris, and I surely do know enough to go in when there's a clew-out. You missed the camp last night."

"How'd I find it in the dark?" muttered the puncher.

"I ain't worrying about that none," said the Kid. "What gets my goat is that Bear Face found it in the light. I ain't asking you if you put him was, Harris, because I durstn well know you did! I'll say that that ugly guy sure know where to look for Mister Hall's foreman. I ain't come on this ranch a-shooting, and I ain't going to spill the juice of any galoot in Mister Hall's outfit—but I'll just mention to you that you ain't getting by with this, and I've got a quirt here what says the same."

The Kid's quirt was under his arm. It slipped down into his hand as he spoke, and he made a stride towards the puncher.

Instantly Harris' grip closed on a gun. The Colt came out like a flash,

and was thrown up to fire. But at the same moment the quirt caught it and twirled it from Handsome's hand. The Kid laughed as the gun dropped in the grass.

"You want to be quicker'n that, Harris, when you pull your hardware on this body," he said banteringly. "Now you got what's coming to you, you dog-goned double-crossing skunk!"

The quirt rose and fell with all the strength of the Kid's six-woy arm. Handsome Harris yelled under the lash, and he leaped at the foreman of the Lazy E, his fists thrashing. So swiftly that the eye could not follow the movement, the Kid reserved the quirt in his hand, and it was the heavy metal butt that descended on the puncher, smashing in his stomach and almost cracking the head under it.

Handsome Harris rolled over in the grass, and the next moment the Kid's grasp was on the back of his neck, twisting him over and pinning him down. And as the cowman struggled and howled, the quirt rose and fell like lightning, every lash ringing across the psalms like a pistol shot.

At a distance the three punchers reined in their broncos and stared back at the scene. The Kid did not heed them. He laid on the quirt hard and fast till at length he pitched the yelling cowman away.

The Kid tracked his quirt under his arm again, and looked at the sprawling, panting puncher, a gleam like cold steel in his eyes.

"I guess that lets you out, feller," he said quietly. "Now you'll get out your bronco and hit for the ranch—I guess I don't want your company as this trail no more. If you ain't satisfied you can ask for your time and ride off the Lazy E as soon's you want. But chew on this, hombre—this time I've whittled you; if there's a

Traitor's Trail

next time you get hot lead! Chew on that, Harris, and maybe you'll live long enough to be strung up for cow stealing!"

The Kid swung himself to the saddle of his waiting mustang, and rode after the punchers without another word or look to the watching men in the grass.

Trouble at the Gate!

"THE Apache range?" exclaimed Colorado Jim, horse-wrangler of the Lazy S, staring at his foreman as if he could hardly believe his ears.

The Kid smiled. He knew that he had given an unexpected order, and he reckoned that it would surprise the horse-wrangler. But that cut no ice. Unless given on the Lazy S by the new foreman, every order to be carried out to the very letter.

"You don't mean the Apache range, sir?" said Colorado.

"Feller," said the Kid. "I never was a guy for shooting off my mouth promises. When I say the Apache range I mean the Apache range, and no other range on this here ranch, from Lariat to the Hatchets."

Colorado and a dozen Lazy S punchers, among them Handsome Harris, looked at the Kid with curious eyes. Several of the punchers spoke at once, but Harris did not speak. Since the 'ay he had been quieted Handsome had never spoken to his foreman if he could help it—he had led the line and jumped to unless and buried deep in his own breast his bitter feud with the foreman of the Lazy S. But the other punchers all had something to say. For, to men who knew the Lazy S ranges, the order he had given was not merely surprising—it was amazing. It was not, if Colorado could help it, an order that was going to be obeyed.

"Mr. Carlos, sir," said the horse-wrangler, "when it comes to shooting up rustlers, and trailing hot cows, I'll tell a man you're the goods, and there ain't no guy betwixt New Mexico and the Gulf that can lay over you. But when you spill an order to leave a herd of horses on the Apache range, I'll mention that you've got another guess coming."

"Now ain't you an all-fired horse-head, arguing with the horse that Mister Hall's put over you as foreman?" said the Kid goodtemperedly.

"I'll say that Mister Hall would think twice about his foreman if he knewed what you've just spilled," said Colorado. "You figure that Mr. Hall wants to make the rustlers a present of a hundred head of horse-heads? You go back to your bunk and dream again."

"You're now here, Mr. Carlos," broke in Bill Saunders. "Maybe you ain't wise to it that the Apache range is cut off by the hills, and twenty-five miles out and—"

"I sure rode over it that day we was trailing a hot bunch of cows," said the Kid. "and I sure did keep my eyes open. There's a good feed

on that range, and good water, and I reckon that no foreman is going to waste good feed because of god-darned rustlers."

"I'm telling you," roared Colorado, "that horses let out on the Apache range will be roped in by rustlers, every cayuse of the herd, above you can say no sugar in mine unless you set a guy up on every critter, with a six-gun in his hand, to watch out!"

"And I'm telling you," smiled the Kid, "that I'm foreman of this ranch, and them cayuses is going to graze on that range, if the rustlers get every critter in the bunch, and a horse-headed horse-wrangler along with them!"

Colorado Jim breathed hard and deep. He liked the new foreman, as all the bunch did except Handsome. He respected him a whole heap. Kid, as he looked in years, had proved himself a man-sized guy. But Colorado was horse-wrangler, and the horses bred on the Lazy S were the pride of his heart. The bare thought of a hundred of his best cayuses being thrown, as it were, into the clutches of the rustlers got his goat, and got it bad.

All the bunch knew the Apache range—the farthest from the ranch, cut off by a rocky spur of the Hatchet Hills—right at the front door of the Scar Face gang, as it were. Cover, of rocks and tangled chaparral, all round it, for half the rustlers in Texas, and no help, within long hours of riding, for punchers left in charge of a herd.

Since the Scar Face gang had got busy in the Hatchets, that remote range had not been used, even for the scrappiest and strongest cows on the Lazy S. And now the new foreman was proposing to graze Colorado's horses there—every one a prize fit to make a horse-thief's mouth water. Colorado was surprised, but he was as much enraged as surprised. It was almost enough to make a guy pull his gun.

But the foreman, whether right or

wrong, evidently meant it. He had given his order, and was waiting for it to be carried out. Under the stare of a dozen pairs of eyes, the Kid glanced at the blue sky of Texas. The sun was coming up golden over the far-flung ranges of the Lazy S.

"You want to get busy, hombre," said the Kid amiably. "I guess you get time before noon to hit the Apache range, if you don't sit around letting the alfalfa grow under your chaps."

"Foreman or no foreman," howled Colorado, "my cayuses ain't going to be run off by the Scar Face gang! You got another guess coming, Mister Foreman! And I'm telling you, and telling you loud, you better go back to your school marm, and leave horses to a guy what knows a horse from a ring-tailed creaker."

"You sure have spilled a mouthful, old-timer," said the Kid, "and if I was wanting to listen to a guy shooting off his mouth, I guess I couldn't do better than sit on the corral fence and let you go on spilling your eloquence. But that ain't what I want just now. What I want is them cayuses on the Apache range, and you to get them on the hoof."

Colorado Jim glared at the smiling Kid, then deliberately he slumped the corral gate.

"Meaning?" asked the Kid, still calm, though his eyes were glinting.

"Meaning that you can go and chop chips!" howled Colorado. "Not a cayuse in that bunch goes on the Apache range, not till Mister Hall's dead us off a his ranch."

"I guess the foreman can fire you, old-timer, just as soon as he wants," said the Kid. "But I should sure love to fire a hombre I like as much as I do you, Colorado. Get that gate open."

"Forget it!" said Colorado.

"You ain't giving your foreman the trouble of opening that gate, and driving the cayuses?" asked the Kid.

"If my foreman puts a hand on

(Continued on page 22)

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Traitor's Trail

(Continued from page 26)

that gate," said Colorado, "I'm giving him such a sock that I reckon he'll want piecing together afterwards."

The brawny horse-wrangler stood in front of the corral gate, his big fists clenched, eyes gleaming. There was a hint of excitement from the punchers, Hitherto, the Lazy S bunch had jumped to the orders of the new foreman, boy as he was. But then, hitherto, all orders had been dictated by horse-sense, and showed that the Kid knew what he was about. But the order to drive five thousand dollars' worth of horseflesh to a range where the rustlers had only to pick them up as soon as they got word, was a different proposition.

"If Mister Hall was home, I'd call him to talk to you," said Colorado. "I guess the boss'd tell you to guess again, if he heered this. These cayuses ain't going to no Apache range. Ain't these good feed nearer home, you greek? What about the Larlat range?"

"Six on the Larlat range," said the Kid. "Get away from that gate, Colorado, old boss. You sure are talking foolish and I don't want to handle you."

Colorado, lowering a foot or more over the Kid, laughed.

"As, you sure make me snicker," he said. "You get on with it, Mister Corlar, if you get a bunch for being broke up into small pieces. I ain't pulling no gun on my foreman, but I sure will break you up if you touch that gate. If I don't knock your face through the back of your calsons, you can sure order me to drive the cayuses into Mexico, if you want, and I'll jump to it."

"You're an sneaky guy, Colorado, and you got my goat!" said the foreman of the Lazy S. "You got to lump it away from that gate. Yuba,

you get ready to string them cayuses, and hit the Apache range with them."

"That gate ain't open yet!" grinned Yuba.

"I guess it will be open, pronto." The Kid put his hand on the corral gate. Colorado, as good as his word, let out a flat that was like a Kansas ham. If that sock had reached the Kid, the Lazy S would have had to carry on without a foreman for a week or more. But a flat that was half the size, but like a lump of solid iron, came up on the brawny wrist with a crack that nearly snapped the bone. Colorado's drive missed by a foot, and he offered a yell of pain. Before that yell was fairly uttered, the Kid's knuckles were hitting his jaw, and Colorado went back against the corral gate with a crash.

He sagged there, blinking, a numbed arm hanging by his side, his left hand groping at his jaw, to feel if it was still there. The Kid grabbed his neckcloth, swung him away, and sent him spinning, to collapse in a heap a couple of yards away. Then, breathing a little quickly, but otherwise quite unmoved, the Rio Kid threw open the gate of the corral.

"You stringing them cayuses, Yuba?" he asked quietly.

Yuba ran gave one glance at the sprawling horse-wrangler — the biggest and heaviest guy on the ranch — and answered promptly:

"Mr. Corlar, sir, I'm stringing them cayuses, and I'm doing it now!"

Half an hour later the Rio Kid rode away from the ranch in the cloud of dust kicked up by a hundred horses, led by half a dozen punchers.

Over the gate the men left behind watched him go, and exchanged guesses and grins. Colorado Jim, sitting against the corral wall, nursing his chin, was interested in nothing else — not even in his cayuses, for the moment. Handsome Harris was grinning — a sneering and mocking grin. Not a man there opined that the cayuses would ever be seen on the ranch again; and they reckoned that Mister Hall, when he heard of his new foreman's proceedings with that valuable bunch of critters, would figure on string his new foreman, and firing him quick.

But the Kid did not seem to mind what the bunch thought. He rode away on the grey mustang, but he did not ride after the herd. The bunch headed southwest, to strike the Apache range at the foot of the Hatcher; the Kid rode east, which meant that he was riding to the distant town of Larlat, if anywhere. And Handsome grinned after him as he rode.

"Want, I swear!" said Bill Saunders, when the herd of broncs and the foreman of the Lazy S had disappeared in different directions across the small prairie. "You heered what that young cuss spiled, you 'uns! The cayuses is to be left on the Apache range, with Yuba and Panhandle keeping tabs on them — the other guys is to ride back when they've got them there. And Mr. Corlar riding off to Larlat, and leaving it at that! If I didn't know that he was a square guy, I should surely reckon that he was

making Scar Face a present of Mister Hall's horses."

"I guess if Old Man Hall was to home —" said another puncher.

"Want, he ain't!" said Bill. "Old Man Hall's rode over to Hatcher, and I heered that he don't aim to get back before sundown. I'll bet any guy here ten Texas dollars to a Mexican cent that Scar Face will have lifted them cayuses afore Mister Hall steps on his pants again."

"You said it!"

Handsome Harris lounged away to the corral, and added his black cents. As he led the horse out, Bill called to him:

"Say, you, Handsome! You ain't wanting your bronc — it's you for cutting affairs to-day, like Mr. Corlar has told you!"

"I guess Mr. Corlar won't be foreman of this outfit after to-day," answered Harris. "Old Man Hall sure thinks a lot of that young guy, but I guess he won't stand for this. Six on Mr. Corlar, you heeb!"

And Handsome rode away, heedless of his foreman's orders. He rode north, on the trail to the cow-town of Hatcher, where Mr. Hall had ridden at dawn. But when he was out of sight of the ranch, Handsome wheeled his horse, and rode at a gallop to the west, where in the far distance the Hatcher Hills barred the sky.

The Lone Horseman

THE Kid lay on the summit of the mesa, his steetons hat on the back of his head, to keep off the burning rays of the hot sun of Texas, and watched. High on the edge of the low range of hills, the mesa rose, a vast mass of rock, giving a wide view of mile on mile of rolling prairie in one direction, of rocky draws and gulches and gullies in the other. For a view of the wide lands of Morris Hall's ranch, no spot could have been better chosen, and that was why the Kid had picked it.

The mesa lay almost due west of the ranch, and it was to the east that the punchers had seen the Kid ride that morning. But the Kid had no hunch to ride to Larlat. Out of sight of the ranch he had circled round and barred the wind for the west — stretching the black-mounted grey mustang to his fastest gallop.

Often had the Kid ridden Side-Kicker hard, so if the whole troop of the Texas Rangers were barring the wind on his trail. For the Kid reckoned that he had no time to lose if he was not to be spotted by a guy riding the same way before long.

Twenty miles at racing speed did not worry the Kid or worry his cayuse, but Side-Kicker was breathing deep and steaming when at last the Kid dismounted and creaked him in a thicket at the foot of the mesa.

Since then the Kid had been on the summit, hidden from the sight of any rider on the plains, but watching with eyes as keen as those of one of the black vultures sailing in the blue overhead.

Less than half an hour after he had taken up his watch, a horseman pulled into view, riding for the hills.

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"BELISHA"

Page 26, 27. Every good stationer and news agent — "Belisha" Published by "Belisha" Co., Ltd., London and Glasgow.

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OVER THE POLE

By DOUGLAS ARMISTEAD, who will answer FREE any Stamp Queries which any reader may care to send to the Editor. If you can, enclose a stamped, addressed envelope for reply by Post

SOON you will be able to add to your collection specimens of an historic issue of stamps commemorating the most successful flight by Russian airmen to and over the North Pole. Soviet Russia has never been backward in producing special issues of postage stamps and it was not to be expected that she would let the opportunity slip to broadcast through the medium of the post this outstanding achievement in the history of aviation.

Actually there will be two separate series of stamps, one in connection with the flight from Moscow to the Pole, and the other celebrating the spectacular flight over the North Pole from Russia to the United States, so prominently featured in the newspapers of the world a short time ago.

Each set will consist of four values. The first, which will probably be available by the time this article appears, comprises the denominations 20, 30, 40, and 50 kopeks and embraces two designs. A map of the route, with a flight of four aeroplanes flying towards

the North Pole, is used for the two lowest values. The other, depicting the flag of the U.S.S.R. floating over the North Pole, is reserved for those of 40 and 50 kopeks respectively.

IN November will follow another series of four stamps commemorating the famous Trans-Polar flight, with portraits of the Soviet aviators Tchkalov, Haldin, and Beljaiev surrounding a map of the North Polar regions, with the route of their flight traced by a bold curved line and the flag over the Pole. The face values of these stamps will be 10, 20, 30 and 50 kopeks.

Other stamps associated with flights to the North Pole include those commemorating that made by the giant airship "Graf Zeppelin" in 1931, and by Soviet aviators to Franz Joseph's Land in the following year. There is also a set of air post stamps recording the rescue of explorers stranded on the icefields from the steamer Tchekotin in 1935. Thus the unfolding story of the conquest of the North Pole by air is well told in stamps.



These two specimens of the new Russian stamps show their flight from Moscow to the North Pole, and flight the famous Over The Pole flight and the men who made it.



Too far off, as yet, for recognition, the Kid could not have said that the rider was Handsome Harris; but he saw that the horse was black, and he knew.

"You dog-goned polecat!" he said, addressing the distant rider. "You ornery, double-crossing gook, I guess you got the news for Scar Face's crowd, and I guess you ain't losing time passing it on. And if you ain't leading me like a coyote on a string to Scar Face's hide-out, I'll say it's because I've sure forgot how to follow a skunk's trail."

And the Kid chuckled softly as he watched the rider draw nearer and nearer till he was able to recognize Handsome as well as his horse. But the Kid made no movement. He was not there for gunplay; he was there to trail the rustler's spy.

Colorado Jim had been far from guessing why his foreman had sent a valuable herd of horses to a range where the rustlers had only to pick them up, and why he had ridden away on the Lariat trail immediately afterwards. The Kid had laid his plans carefully. Unless he missed his guess, the rustler's spy on the ranch would ride for Scar Face's hide-out as soon as his foreman was out of sight, and he had specially ordered Harris to cut affairs that morning to give him no excuse for leaving the ranch.

The Kid smiled, but his smile was grim, as he watched the man on the black horse. Two foremen at the Lazy S had been shot up by the rustlers, and he had no chance for a third foreman to be added to the tally. The Kid was going to rub out the rustling gang in the Hatcher Hills, and he banked on Handsome leading him to where he wanted to go.

That was the reason of his unexpected proceedings that morning, which Colorado never guessed, or any other man in the bunch. The Kid was not the man to open his mouth too wide. He had laid the trap for the spy to fall into, and here he was springing for the hills under the Kid's keen eye.

Somewhere in the trackless hills the rustling gang had their hide-out. The Kid was counting on Handsome blazing the trail to it for him, and he grinned at the idea.

Harris was passing the man now, and the Kid watched him ride into an opening of the hills, and disappear. In a split second the Kid had slipped down from the high mesa and was moving swiftly.

He did not call to his mustang. Once in the Hatcher, rugged and steep and broken, a horseman could ride at little more than an easy trot, where he did not have to slow down to a walk. Neither did the Kid aim to let the puncher guess that he was trailed, and in the saddle he could not have escaped a backward glance.

Like all cowpunchers, the Kid hated going afoot, but he had to do so now. He entered the rocky draw into which the rider had disappeared, and his keen ear caught the distinct ring of a hoof on stones.

The draw ran deep into the Hatcher—rugged, broken, a way that no rider would have chosen without need. The hot Texas sun

burned down into it. For a quarter-mile the Kid saw nothing of the rider ahead except a glimpse every now and then of a hobbling steed—but almost continuously there came the clinking of heels on stones. Twice, thrice, he saw by the motion of a glimpsed steed that Handsome looked back—not, certainly, because he dreamed that he was trailed, but from the habit of caution. But the Kid moved in cover, and, little as he saw of the man he was trailing, the man could see nothing of him.

Suddenly Handsome pulled his bronco into a rocky ravine, down which came a trickling rivulet from the uplands. The Kid, stopping at the foot of the steep ascent, stared upward, the water flowing round his boots, and whistled softly. If this was the way to the rustler's hide-out—and the Kid figured that it was—Scar Face and his gang were well hidden. If they ran stalin come that way, the Kid reckoned that they had had to run them in single file, leaving the gurgling rivulet to wash away signs.

"I'll say I ain't a whole heap surprised that the marshal of Hatcher ain't got salt on the tails of them cow-stealers," murmured the Kid. "And I sure am powerful obliged to Handsome for blazing the trail this way."

He tramped up the ravine through flowing water. He had to go slow now not to overtake his quarry. Handsome had dismounted, and was leading his bronco by the bridle. Every now and then the Kid glimpsed him at winding turns of the steep arroyo. But he disappeared suddenly, and hoofbeats showed that he was mounted again. And the Kid, reaching the head of the ravine, stopped and stared.

An Amazing Disappearance!

BEFORE him lay a small but green and fertile valley—one of the hidden fertile spots dotted here and there in the midst of the barren hills. High, rugged cliffs closed it in on all sides. If there was any way out except by the opening of the ravine where the Kid stood, he could not see it.

But what he could see interested the foreman of the Lazy S deeply. Across the valley stood five or six wattle huts and a fenced corral in which he saw a good many horses. Down from the cliffs a torrent flowed, spreading into a stream as it crossed the valley, and finally reaching the ravine where the Kid stood. Along its banks, in rich grass, cattle fed—

(Continued on page 37)

(Continued from page 23)

some of them near enough to the Kid for him to discern the brand of the Lazy S on their hides. Handsome Harris was riding towards the huts. As he approached them six or seven rustlers gathered to meet him.

The Kid, scanning face after face, did not pick out the scar-faced rustler among them, and he reckoned that Scar Face was not at home. But with or without their chief, it was plain that the rustlers were going to ride, and ride at once. Within five minutes of Handsome's arrival they were leading horses from the corral to saddle up.

The Kid counted seven of the men, but he noted that they saddled eight cayuses, which made him wonder whether Scar Face was, after all, somewhere in the camp. That Handsome was aiming to ride with them he did not reckon—the spy was not likely to run that risk. Moreover, Handsome had disappeared from sight among the huts, and the Kid did not see him again.

Suddenly a man with a scarred face came striding from the huts to mount a horse held for him by one of the gang. The Kid's eyes fastened on the scarred desperado who had fired on him at the camp-fire on the prairie.

But he hugged cover as Scar Face and his gang came riding for the ravine. Deep in a crevice in the rugged rocks by the side of the arroyo,

across the valley in a bunch, but at the arroyo they strung out in single file to ride down. With a clattering of hoofs on stones, a splashing of water, the Scar Face gang passed the hidden Kid, and the clattering died away down the arroyo.

At last the Kid left cover and advanced cautiously towards the group of huts. All the rustlers had just ridden out under his own eyes, but Handsome Harris had not been with them. As the little valley was empty that could mean only one thing—Handsome was in one of the huts! His gun was in his hand, his eyes watchful as a cougar's. If Handsome Harris put up his hands the Kid was ready to ride him back to the ranch a prisoner, but if he chose gunplay the Kid was ready for that, too.

He hunted cover as he advanced, but he knew that if an eye was on the alert he must be seen, and every moment he expected bullets to whiz from the huts. But there was no shot fired.

It was a puzzled Kid that reached the huts and searched them with lifted

more puzzled Kid that stood at last staring about him with unbelieving eyes. For hut after hut had been drawn blank—Handsome was not there, and the Kid was the only living man in the valley. Yet the whole valley was open to the Kid's eyes, and if Harris had left the huts the Kid would surely have seen him. He was not in sight, yet he had not ridden away with the rustlers, and he was not in the huts.

It was a mystified Kid that trod at last down the arroyo from the locked valley and tramped back to the mesa where he had left his mustang. His brow was clouded with puzzled thought. He mounted Side-Kicker and rode at a gallop for the Lazy S.

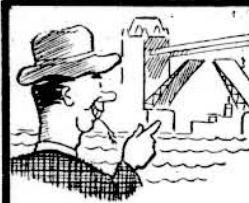
It looks as if the Kid is asking for trouble when he leaves his herd on the Apache range, and that's what Handsome thinks, too. But unknown to the rustlers as they ride down they are surrounded by THE WATCHERS OF THE RANGE!

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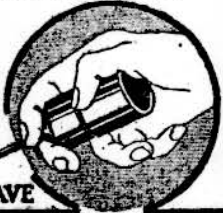
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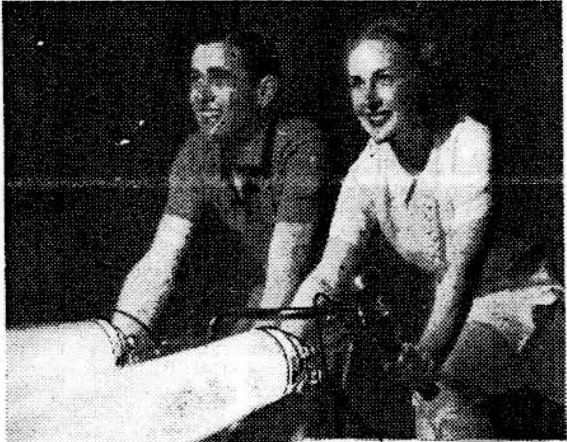
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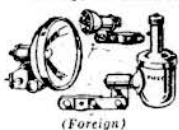
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