

**BIG PACKET of FOREIGN STAMPS**

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**NEW CLYDE CLIPPER RIDES THE SKY!—See page 15**

# Watchers of the RANGE

From their hiding-place the cowboys saw a cloud of dust in the distance—bobbing stetsons of men on horseback. The Rio Kid was right . . . the rustlers were riding into a trap!

By

## RALPH REDWAY

### Sharp Shooting!

"A W, can it, Colorado?"  
"Forget it, feller!"  
"Pack that gun, you geck!"

A dozen voices showered advice on Colorado Jim, horse-wrangler of the Lazy S. But Colorado had no use for good advice. He stood by the gateway, his hand on a half-drawn Colt, his eyes fixed on a horseman coming down the trail to the ranch at a gallop.

It was Carfax, the new foreman of the Lazy S, who was riding for the ranch as fast as his grey Mustang could cover the ground. Nobody at the Lazy S knew that Carfax was known in other parts of Texas as the Rio Kid, the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande, or probably more than one gun would have been pulled as he came.

To the Lazy S bunch, he was their foreman—a boy in years, but a man-sized guy in all else; popular with all the bunch, excepting Handsome Harris, who was of no account, anyway. Up to that day, Colorado Jim had liked him as well as any horse in the bunch. But there had been trouble that morning on the Lazy S. On Colorado's jaw was a big black bruise, due to a punch that had been like the kick of a mule, and he moved his jaw with difficulty. But if his jaw was stiff, there was nothing wrong with his gun-hand; and Colorado figured that Morris Hall, the boss of the Lazy S, was going to want a new foreman soon.

"You canny horsehead, Colorado!" said Bill Saunders. "I'm telling you to forget it! There's less'n two foremen of this hyper ranch shot up by the rustlers, and what you figure the boss will say, if he comes back from Hatchet and finds his noo foreman shot up on the Lazy S?"

No answer from Colorado. Grimly he waited and watched the Rio Kid. Under the staring eyes of the group of punchers, he came whirling up in a cloud of dust, and drew in the Mustang, with a wild clatter of hoofs, in the gateway. He alighted to the punchers as he reined in Side-Kicker.

"Saddle up, you 'uns! You got to ride, and ride quick! Every guy here, saddle up and pack a gun!"  
"Git off'n that cayuse!"

Colorado Jim's gun was out now.

He glared over it at the Kid. The Kid stared at him.

"Say, you loco, Colorado?" he snapped. "You giving orders to your foreman, you big boob? Pack that gun, pronto!"

"I guess I ain't going to pack this gun none, at your order, you baby-faced geck!" said the horse-wrangler. "This gun is going to talk, and I'm giving you a chance to get off'n that cayuse and pull!"

The Kid sat in the saddle and looked at him under the shady rim of his stetson. His reins were bunched in his left hand; his right slid carelessly into the pocket of his gaiterkin chaps. But he made no move to dismount, or to touch one of the walnut-buffed six-guns in his holsters. A faint smile flickered over his sun-burnt face.

"Forget it, feller," he said good-humoredly. "You're too good a man for me to push you over the range, Colorado—and sure I want every man here to ride with me to round up the Bear Face gang. Pack that gun, old-timer, and go for your cayuse."

"You been on the trail of the rustlers?" exclaimed Bill Saunders, and there was a general exclamation from the group at the gate.

"You said it!" agreed the Kid. "And I'm telling you, I've tracked that gang down in the Hatcherets, and this bunch is going to ride hell-for-leather for their hide-out up in the hills. There sure ain't no time to waste on gun-play among friends. Forget it, Colorado."

"You gitting off'n that cayuse?" roared Colorado.

"Not so's you'd notice it!" drawled the Kid. "Maybe I ain't no great shakin' as a ranch foreman, though I do figure that Mister Hall knowed what he was about when he roped me into it—but I'll tell a man, I ain't jumping to the orders of a pecky, pif-fared, bone-headed horse-wrangler! No, sir," he laughed. "Say, what's boting you so hard, you big stiff?"

"You socked me to the jaw!" said the horse-wrangler. "And why? Because you sent Panhandle and Yuba with a hundred of my best horses to the Apache range, where

meat was scarce, you was square you was square by with that?"

"I should smile?" assented the Kid. "You got another guess coming?" Colorado's Colt tilted. "I'm giving you an even break—I ain't no god-darned skunk like Handsome, to pull on a guy without putting him wise. Git off'n that cayuse and pull your gun, and the bunch'll see who's the best man of us two."

"I guess they can sure see that without gun-play, old-timer," said the Kid. "Now don't shoot off that big mouth of yours any more, but pack that gun, and keep it for the rustlers in the Hatcherets. Jump to it, hombre. I'm telling you, that if I get off'n this cayuse, I'll sure boot you all round the corral, and back again, after I get in the saddle again."

"You got it coming!" roared Colorado, and he threw the Colt to a level, his finger on the trigger.

Bang!

But it was not Colorado's Colt that roared. The Kid had not touched either of the six-guns in the leathersling holsters. His hand was in his pocket. It was from that pocket, through the hairy gaiterkin of the chaps, that the bullet came, with a stream of smoke—and Colorado never crossed the trigger on which his finger was bent. He went backwards, the Colt crashing from his hand, a crimson streak running down his bronzed face from under his stetson hat. Two paces he staggered back, and then fell heavily on his face, and lay still.

There was a gasp from the crowd of punchers. They stared at the burly, motionless figure of the horse-wrangler—and at the Kid, sitting the saddle with a smile on his face. Colorado did not stir.

"By the great horned toad, Colorado's got his!" exclaimed Bill Saunders. "I'll say he sure asked for it a whole heap."

"He sure did!" drawled Curtes Joe. "I guess the boss won't want no noo foreman, like Colorado allowed—but he sure will be rubbering around for a new horse-wrangler."

The Rio Kid laughed, and dropped lightly from the saddle.

"Guess again, you 'uns!" he said, as he bent over the horse-wrangler.

"You figure that I'd wash out a good little man like Colorado! He sure has got a temper, and he is a bone-headed cuss, but I'll tell a man I like him too much to hurt him. Ain't you galoots ever crossed a steer that would not come to the rope? I've just crossed this guy, for his own good—and he will be sittin' up and smiling by the time you get your cayuses saddled! Here, caddy, bring me a bucket of water!"

"Crossed?" gasped Bill. "You got him from the pocket, and jest crossed him? I'll say that was some shootin'."

The ranch cook brought the bucket of water from the thick-house. The Kid, lifting Colorado to a sitting position, rested the horse-wrangler's head against his knee, and splashed cold water over his head and face. Under the thick hair was a streak where the bullet had grazed the skull—stunning the horse-wrangler. But



Scar Face was riding for his life, by a route that few would have cared to follow. The wild threw himself into the saddle and tore in pursuit.

leaving him with no damage but unconsciousness, with a headache to follow.

Colorado's eyes opened under the splashing of the cool water. He stared dazedly as his head rested on the Kid's knee.

The Kid glanced round. "How long you galoots going to be saddling up them cayuses?" he demanded.

The Lazy S punchers rushed to the corral.

**Rounding-up the Rustlers!**

SETH HAWK, town-marshal of Hatchet, lifted his head for the tenth or twentieth time, stared around, and sat back again with a grunt. Marris Hall, boss of the Lazy S, stood leaning on a trunk, his grim hard face almost expressionless, but his steady eyes keen and watchful on the rolling plains that surrounded the clump of timber. Ten men, marshal's deputies of Hatchet, lay sprawling in the grass, smoking, or dozing, or chattering in low tones—and a dozen horses were creaked back in the timber, saddled and bridled ready for riding. From the plain, the keenest eye could not have spotted the men in the timber—but from the timber, the marshal and his men could watch the plains for miles—and for long hours, under the westerling sun, they had been watching and waiting.

That clump of cottonwoods stood in the midst of the Apache range—the feeding-ground of the Lazy S that was furthest from the ranch, and cut off from the other ranges by a long rocky spur of the Hatchet Hills. There was good feed, and plenty of water, on the Apache range; but it was seldom used, since the Scar Face

gang had taken the cow-thief trail in the Hatchets.

It was no wonder that Colorado Jim had kicked when the foreman of the Lazy S had ordered him to send a herd of his best horses to graze the Apache. Colorado figured that his cayuses would be no safer there than in the old days when red Apaches had ridden on raids. But the horse-wrangler had had to stand for it—helped by a sock on the jaw from his foreman, which made him see stars if not reason. And the horses were there now—grazing the rich grass, watched over by a couple of punchers, Yuba Dux and Pan-handle Pete. Watched over, too, by the marshal of Hatchet and his men, and the rancher himself, from the dusky interior of the timber-clump—for that was the Sic Kid's game. From early morn they had been there, deep in cover, waiting and watching—wary of the night, but glad of the remotest chance of getting to grips with Scar Face and his gang.

Marris Hall was silent, grimly patient. He had great faith in his new foreman, and he was backing his play, and he hoped that it would prove a cinch.

And a gleam shot into his deepest eyes, as, from an opening of the hills, a patch of dust on the dry wind caught his eye, and in the midst of it several bobbing steekon hats. From the marshal of Hatchet, sitting back against the cottonwood, chewing an unlighted Mexican cheroot, came a grunt. A long day of illikness was getting Beth's goat.

"You figure that foreman of yours

knowned what he was talking about, Mr. Hall?" he granted.

Hall, with his eyes on the distant dust-path and the hats that bobbed in the dust, grinned sourly.

"Get on your hind legs, you gink, and look!" he said. "Look, you gink—and tell me what'll that be coming out of the hills?"

The marshal of Hatchet gave him one look—and bounded to his feet. His eyes blazed.

"Thunder!" he ejaculated. His eyes turned to his men. "Git your cayuses, boys, and stand ready! We've got 'em—got 'em in a tight cinch!"

There was immediate haste in the timber. Not a man showed himself outside the circling trees. But every man was ready with his hand on his bridle—ready to mount and ride on the instant. From their cover, they looked out over the sunny plain—and fixed their eyes on the horsemen that rode out of a gulch in the distant hills. Small in the distance, but plain now to the view, there were seven of them, stubby roughtacks in steekon hats, with rifles under their arms. One, who rode in the lead, drew all eyes—a man whose face was so fearfully scarred that once seen it could never be forgotten. —a face known on all the cattle ranges in the valley of the Larist river—the face of Scar Face, the rustler. And every eye glanced at that grisly scarred visage, grim and terrible to the view, in the bright Texas sunlight.

"Scar Face!" ran a mutter among the marshal's men.

They watched with keen and eager eyes. From the opening in the hills the Scar Face gang came at a trot, quickening to a gallop. The two punchers in charge of the herd had sighted them, and there was a

## Watchers of the Range

sudden ring of rifle-fire as they opened up with their Winchester. From the rustlers came return fire, seven rifles blasing away as they galloped. It was hasty long-range shooting, and the lead flew wild—but Panhandle Pete and Yuba Ben put spurs to their broncos and retreated before the advance—or they would have been riddled in a few minutes.

They came at a gallop towards the clump of timber, the rustlers throwing lead after them as they rode. The herd was abandoned to the greedy clutches of the horse thieves. Startled horses, starting round from the grass, were circled by the rustlers. Two of the gang continued to throw lead after the fleeing cowboys—the rest devoted their attention to rounding up the cayuses to drive away into the hills. But as Panhandle Pete and Yuba Ben got into the cover of the timber, the rustlers ceased to waste lead, and the whole gang gave their attention to the cayuses. Some of them were roped in and led—and the whole herd led or driven towards the opening of the hills from which the Scar Face gang had emerged.

Morris Hall smiled grimly. Scar Face had driven off the two punchers—and as long as they hunted cover in the timber, and left him to drive the herd, he had no chance to worry with them further. Evidently, he had not the slightest suspicion of the strong force hidden in the timber, which Panhandle and Yuba had now joined.

"Say, boss," gasped Panhandle, as he saw in his passing bronco, "I'll tell all Texas we got that bunch now by the short hairs."

"I'll say that young hoodler Carfax knowed what he was about when he sent the herd here, even if Colorado had to be rocked on the jaw to let them come!" grinned Yuba Ben.

"Ends!" said the rancher.

Forth from the timber, with whip and spur, burst the marshal's posse of Hatcher, Morris Hall and the punchers riding with them. They swept across the plain at a fierce gallop, with rifles up and already raring.

The scarred rustler stared at them as they came, his eyes burning with fury under his bushy brows. Shot after shot rang—the marshal's men firing as they came on, the rustlers firing back as they fled, or sought to fly, abandoning the herd that had seemed to offer so rich a prize to the horse-thief gang. But three of the rustlers, tangled among the snorting, stamping horses, had no chance to ride clear, and as the Hatcher bunch swept down on them, they put up their hands and surrendered. Four, one of them the scarred man, rode madly for the hills—and after them except Morris Hall and a dozen determined riders—firing on them as they fled.

A bronco ran riderless, as its rider pitched into the grass—then another. Then a third rustler, hard hit, reined in his foaming bronco, and threw up his hands. Of the whole desperate

gang, one man alone was still riding like a madman—the scarred chief of the rustlers. Bullet after bullet whizzed by him as he spurred and lashed—his steersman spurs on his head as it was torn by a whining bullet—but he was still riding, and the hills swallowed him, a jingle of hoofs on hard rock coming back to the punchers as he disappeared.

"Side on!" roared Morris Hall. And the pursuing bunch, close on the track of the fleeing outlaw, swept up the rocky gulch in the Hatcherets, in hot chase. Morris Hall gritted his teeth—the marshal of Hatcher swore furiously. High up in the gulch, they glimpsed a steersman hat for a moment, and a savage scarred face that stared back—then both vanished amid rocks and pines. Scar Face, the rustler, had made his getaway—and made it good!

### The Hide-out in the Hatcherets!

**S**IDE-KICKER was taking his ease in the corral of the Lazy S when the Rio Kid rode away from the ranch, a dozen punchers, armed to the teeth, riding with him. The black-maned mustang had covered many long miles that day, and unwilling as the Kid was to part with his faithful cayuse, he was not the guy to ride a horse too hard. Mounted on a pinto that belonged to Mr. Hall, the Kid rode at the head of the bunch. There was rest in the shady corral for Side-Kicker, but there was no rest for Side-Kicker's master till the rustling gang in the Hatcherets had been circled.

Colorado Jim, with a bandage under his steersman, and an ache in his thick head that could have been cut with a bow-knife, rode by the Kid's side. If Jim was still mad with his foreman, he was not flaring on further guffaw with the guy who had crushed him like a steer, and he did not aim to be left out of the rookus with the rustlers.

From what the foreman had said, the bunch knew that he had tracked Scar Face to his hide-out in the hills—though how he had made the grade they did not know and could not guess. More than one of the bunch suspected that there was a spy on the ranch—but they did not know that it was Handsome Harris—neither did they guess that it was Handsome whom the Kid had trailed to the rustlers' den that day; the Kid said no word of that. He said, indeed, few words at all—it was a time for action and for haste, and the Kid had no chance for chewing the rag.

Side after mile flew under the lashing hoofs, till at last the bunch rode into the rocky draw, where the Kid had trailed the traitor puncher. Twenty miles or more north of the Apache range, it was far enough from the scene where Morris Hall and the marshal's men were, in those very moments, throwing lead at the horse thieves. Gladly enough the Kid would have been on in that scene, but he had laid his plans carefully for that day, and he had other work to do.

"Halt!" he rapped, as the heads of the broncos rang at the foot of a steep, winding arroyo, down which came a ripping torrent. He slipped from the saddle, and took the pinto by the bridle.

The punchers stared at the narrow, rugged ravine, where there was hardly space for two men to ride abreast.

"Say, you figure that's the trail to Scar Face's hide-out, Mr. Carfax?" asked Bill Saunders, with a grin.

"That's just what I figure, old-timer, and if Scar Face was to come, I reckon one guy could hold this whole arroyo with a rifle against the whole bunch backed up by the Texas Rangers!" answered the Kid. "I'll mention that that's why we're calling while they're out on the trail."

"How'd you know?" granted Colorado.

"Because I seen them ride, you gink, with my own two-lookin' eyes!" said the Kid. "What you figure I sent them cayuses to the Apache range for?"

"I guess it was because you was plumb boss," granted Colorado, "and I'll shoot out that Mr. Hall will comb your hair for a few, when he comes back from Hatcheret, and finds you've lost a hundred of his best cayuses for him!"

The Kid grinned cheerily. "Colorado, old-timer," he said, "you're a good little man, and I like you a whole heap; but if I give a dollar to the gold-brained hoodlum I ever saw, I guess you would be a hundred cents richer. Now we got the rustlers where we want them, and there ain't no chance for a little bird to fly off and spread the news, I'll just whisper to you that them cayuses was sent down to the Apache range to draw Scar Face and his gang—no being wise to it that he would get the news, and get it quick."

"Aw, what you giving me?" granted the horse-strangler.

"The goods!" grinned the Kid. "I'm putting you wise, old boss, that Mr. Hall ain't sling to Hatcheret to-day—he's on the Apache range with Seth Hawk and his whole caboodle, watching for the rustlers. And I seen them start from their hide-out to ride down to that range—and I've brought you boys along to wait for them to ride home—if they get away from Mr. Hall and his side-kickers! Now you savvy, you gink?"

"Aw! Carry me home to die!" gaped Colorado blankly.

"Heed it, you 'uns!" snapped the Kid.

He led his horse by the bridle up the rugged arroyo, and the punchers, stringing out in single file, followed him up. There was a tramping and a splashing in the stream that flowed down the ravine—and more than one of the bunch cast anxious glances around and upward.

The Kid knew his game. He had watched the rustlers ride—seven of them—Scar Face and all his gang. True, he had been puzzled and perplexed to know what had become of Handsome Harris, the spy, whom he had trailed to the hide-out—who had not ridden away again with the

rustlers, but whom he had been unable to find in the outlaw's den.

But in whatsoever way Handsome had eluded him, he knew that the traitor puncher was not there, and there was no foe to look for till the rustlers came back from the saddle. How many of them would survive the fight with the marshal's men on the Apache range—whether, indeed, any would survive it—the Kid did not know, and could not guess; but he was taking no chances. All or any who escaped would scuffle for the hide-out like prairie-rabbits for their burrow; but it would not buy them anything, with the Kid and his punchers there ready to receive them!

"Great was a knee!" ejaculated Colorado, as the bunch at last tramped and led their horses out of the steep ravine into the valley above, into which it opened. "Say, I guess you got it right, Mr. Carfax."

"You said it!" agreed the Kid. The bunch rode across the valley to the group of wattle huts, beside the corral. There were horses in the corral, and more than a hundred head of cattle feeding in the grass. The punchers rode with watchful eyes and ready guns; but it was clear that the Bear Face gang were not at home; there was no sign of anything living in the valley, save the horses and the cattle. The Kid reckoned that he would have to wait before he saw a sign of the rustlers, if and when they came.

How the fight on the Apache range had gone he had no means of telling—it was possible that the whole gang had been wiped out by Seth Hawk and his men—but it was on the cards, on the other hand, that they might have got clear, and might come riding loose in full force. The Kid was prepared for either eventuality—he was there to see that the last straggler of the rustling gang did not escape.

The punchers dismounted at the huts and turned their horses into the corral, the high fence of which screamed them from any guy riding in from the ravine. Then they took cover in the wattle huts to wait. From that spot, across the level floor of the locked valley, they could watch the opening of the ravine by which alone any corner could enter the valley.

The Kid saw all his men safe in cover, with not so much as an eyelid showing, before he took cover himself—and it was two long hours later, and the sun was dipping deep towards New Mexico, when the ring of a horse's hoofs sounded across the valley from the ravine and warned the bunch that a rider was coming.

Every eye watched, and every trigger had a finger on it as a horseman pushed out of the arroyo into the upland valley. The westerling sun shone full on him as he came—on the horse smothered with dust and lathered with foam, on the rider with his grisly scarred face. And the Kid's eyes snapped as he saw him.

It was the chief of the rustling

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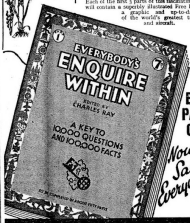
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## Watchers of the Range

gang who came—and he came alone—defeated in his raid, hunting cover in his hide-out, little dreaming that it was occupied by enemies awaiting him. Weary and dusty from hard riding, and from wild scrambling over rugged rocks, Scar Face the rustler rode into the locked valley of the Hatcher Hills—and headed for the wattle huts, where a dozen rife were trained on him, and as many pairs of gleaming eyes watched him as he came.

### Hunted Down!

BANG!

It was Colorado Jim's rife that roared—too soon! The bullet whizzed a yard from the scarred outlaw; and as the report thundered through the silent valley, Scar Face drew rein, staring about him with wildly started eyes—and from the Rio Kid came a shout of rage:

"What dog-gone headshot—"

But it was not Colorado's fault. With a swollen, aching jaw and a calumet that asked it to crack, Colorado's finger was not so steady on the trigger as it was wont to be. Five minutes more, and the scarred raider would have ridden right under the rife and would have had the choice of putting up his hands or going down riddled with lead. But that little unintentional pressure of Colorado's trigger-finger had done it—and the roar of the rife warned the rustler of what was waiting for him.

"God-dam it!" roared the horse-wrangler. He leaped up and rushed out with lifted rife—but he was not so fast as the Rio Kid. The Kid sprang into view, firing as he sprang. Cover was futile now, with the scarred rustler warned of what was coming to him, and already swinging round his horse for flight. The Kid ran forward, firing, and after him ran the Lazy S punchers, loosing off lead. But the range was as yet distant, and the alarmed rustler was riding back to the ravine at a mad gallop the way he had come.

"Hossen!" yelled the Kid. And the punchers rushed for their cayuses, while the Kid still loosed off lead at the madly fleeing rider. Twice he was almost sure that he had him. But the scarred man rode heading low in the saddle, and his horse was taking great leaps under quirt and spur, and the lead that sang close to him did not strike. And almost in a second he had plunged headlong into the arroyo and was riding down, with leap on leap of a frantic horse, where our false step meant rolling down to death—such a ride as only a man utterly desperate would have faced or thought of. Crash, crash, clatter ran back the wild hoofs on the rocks as he went.

The Kid, gritting his teeth, three aside his Winchester. He grasped at the pinto as Bill Saunders led him from the corral, and threw himself into the saddle. His quirt rang on the cayuse, and he tore across the valley to the ravine, careless whether he was followed or not. Scar Face,

who had shot up two foremen of the Lazy S, had ridden almost into his hands. Only that unlucky rife shot had saved him from capture or had saved him from capture or death. But now he was riding for his life by a route that few would have cared to follow. And the Rio Kid was the man to follow him if death lurked in every step of the way!

The Rio Kid had ridden by wild ways many a time, with his life in his hand, but never had he faced such a ride as this. Behind him, the punchers were riding, but they rode step by step, picking their way down. They were bold riders on the Lazy S, but they did not figure on riding hell-for-leather down a steep arroyo where a slipping hoof meant death to man and horse. But the scarred rustler, with death behind him, was taking the desperate chance—and the Rio Kid was not the guy to be beaten by any man that rode horseback. He cursed his luck that it was not Side-Kicker under him; but the pinto was a good cayuse, and the Kid rode him good and hard.

Clatter, clatter, clatter rang the hoof-beats ahead of him down the steep arroyo. Once started on that mad gallop, the scarred rustler could not have pulled in had he wanted to. Neither could the Kid. It was "rest, leg, or die" with both of them as they leaped and thundered down with the falling torrent. But the scarred man made the grade, and his horse thundered out of the ravine into the draw below; and in a matter of seconds after him the Rio Kid thundered down, the pinto leaping out into the draw, to meet a stream of smoke and lead from the scarred man's revolver. The Rio Kid leaped clear as his steed went over, torn through and through by whizzing bullets, and stretched dead on the rocks; but he was on his feet in a split second, gun in hand and blazing shots at the rustler, who ceased instantly to burn powder and galloped down the draw to the plains below.

"Dog-gone the luck!" the Kid gritted through his teeth. He stared at the dead pinto, glad in that moment it was not Side-Kicker! But he was dismounted, and the scarred man was riding for the prairie like the wind, rocks and pines saving him from the hot lead that screeched after him. On foot it was useless to follow, and the Kid shouted to his men, picking their way down the steep arroyo:

"Hump it, you 'uns! Dog-gone your heads, you figure that you're taking a sheet in the bunkhouse? Ain't you learned to ride on the Lazy S yet? You want time to rubber around till the cows come home!"

Cactus Joe was the first man out of the arroyo, and the Kid grasped his horse by the bridle as he came.

"Light down!" he almost shrieked.

A moment more and the Kid was mounted on the puncher's horse and galloping down the draw in pursuit of the rustler. Cactus was left staring. "One by one his comrades emerged from the ravine and rode after the Kid. But the foreman of

the Lazy S was far ahead—and far ahead of the Kid, the scarred man rode for his life. But he was yet in sight as the Kid rode out of the hills, and the Rio Kid swore savagely that he should not escape him.

It was between the Kid and Scar Face—and Scar Face was holding his own. Without pausing in his fierce gallop, he looked back at the Kid, and the foreman of the Lazy S saw his scarred face clearly, strangely expressionless, as the rustler glared back at him, only the black eyes under the bushy brows burning with rage and hate. On he galloped, the Kid hot on his trail, the Lazy S punchers strung out behind their foreman.

The Kid had a hope that some puncher from a ranch, or some guy from Hatcher, might appear on the prairie ahead and check the rustler's flight. There was a good chance of it, for the farther the fleeing man galloped from the hills the more likely he was to raise riders on the prairie.

"Dog-gone him!" bellowed the Kid.

Ahead of the fleeing rider, a belt of post-oaks and pecans barred the grassy plain. It was for the trees that the rustler was riding, and the Kid figured that his game was to hunt cover and turn at bay, for he knew by this time that he could not shake off the Kid's pursuit. Mile after mile had raced under the galloping hoofs since the hills had been left behind, but if the Kid had not gained a horse's length in the race, neither had he lost one.

But the Kid did not figure on facing powder burned from cover. If he could help it, and as the scarred man rode down to the timber-belt the Kid pulled in his bronco, raised a six-gun, and dwelt carefully on the rim. Sighting the notorious horse, the revolver steady as a rock in his hand, it was a long moment before he pulled trigger—and he reckoned that the lead was not going to be wasted. Neither was it, for as the report roared out the rustler's horse checked in its wild gallop, staggered, and rolled headlong in the grass. The scarred man, springing clear, dashed on to the trees, and vanished into the pecans as the Kid pulled trigger a second time.

The Kid turned in the saddle and waved his smoking six-gun to his bunch. He waited for them to come galloping up. His eyes were dancing.

"I'll say we got that dog-gone rustler now, you 'uns!" shouted the Kid. "I'll tell a man, he won't burn the wind on his own feet. You want to watch out for pot-shots from them pecans, but we got him now—we sure got Scar Face by the short hairs!"

"Search me!" grinned Colorado.

Stringing out to put plenty of space between each rider, watchful for pot-shooting from the trees, the Lazy S bunch rode on, gun in hand. Somewhere in that straggling line of brush, the scarred rustler lurked, dismounted, cut off from flight, right at the end of his rope, nothing left him but to turn on his pursuers and sell his life dearly. Every moment the Lazy S riders expected a stream of bullets from the brush. But not

h shot tang. Sear Face was not turning powder, and the bunch rode into the brush unopposed.

Shots from a dozen six-guns searched through the brush; but not a shot came in reply. If the scarred rustler was still there, he was hugging cover, and hugging it close.

"Carry me home to die!" exclaimed the panted Kid. "He sure ain't beating it about—he surely ain't! Why, great jumping pants!" he suddenly shouted, as he pushed through the belt of brushwood on the farther side and scanned the open plain beyond. "This-a-way, you 'uns! That guy sure is hooding it, and we got him dead to rights!"

Far out on the prairie, tramping with his back to the brushwood, was a man. The Kid dashed after him at a gallop, and after the Kid galloped the punchers. That it was the rustler, attempting to escape on foot, utterly hopeless as that attempt was, they had no doubt, and they thundered jubilantly in pursuit, waving their six-guns.

"Hall!" roared the Kid. "Hands up, you peaky scallawag, or you get yours! Hands up, Sear Face!"

The man swung round—and as he halted the bunch of riders circled round him. But as he looked at him the Rio Kid gave a gasp of stupefaction. He stared at the face as if he could not believe his eyes.

"Say, that's Handsome!" stammered Colorado. "What in thunder you doin' around here, Handsome?"

"I sure figured it was Sear Face, hooding it!" gasped the Kid. "You Harris, what you doing here? Where's your horse?"

Handsome Harris shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess a rustler got it off'n me, at the end of a gun!" he answered. "I been hooding it since I lost my cayuse. Say, what you guys after?"

"You ain't seen Sear Face!" exclaimed Colorado.

Harris stared at him. "Sear Face? Nope! You after that fire-bag?"

"I'll say so!" growled Colorado. "And I'll say we done lost him! That peaky rustler's hiding in the brush, I reckon—but we'll sure root him out and string him up!"

The punchers from the Lazy B swung down from their saddles and set out on foot to run down the rustler. He may have got away from them before, but this time they were going to make sure of the round up!

The Rio Kid and the bunch searched through the pines and post-oaks and straggling juniper, roding through every foot of the brush from side to side and end to end. No spot that could have hidden a prairie rabbit was left unsearched—but in vain: there was no sign of the scarred rustler in the brush. And in panted rage and disappointment, they gave it up at last.

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