

GREATEST SPEED CRASH EVER! By "SAMMY" DAVIS

The MODERN BOY

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THRILLING STORY OF THE RIO KID!—See page 18

HUNTED DOWN

"Let me see your face," said the ranger captain. "Push back that stetson. Reckon I've seen you before somewhere!" The Rio Kid knew that the game was up!

"Beat it!"

THE Rio Kid grasped the butt of a six-gun—and released it again. A grim, hard look came over his handsome sun-burned face. He had grasped the gun instinctively—for, outlaw as he was, with a price on his head, it got him great to see a rifle aimed from ambush to shoot down an unwary man. But he checked himself, for if Mule-Kick Hall, captain of the Texas Rangers, went down under that treacherous shot, it spelled safety for the kid—safety for Mr. Carfax, foreman of the Lazy S Ranch.

Sobody in the Larist valley of Texas knew that they were one and the same. Sobody, the kid reckoned, ever would know if Mule-Kick Hall was left on the prairie for the buzzards to pick. He had no call to save the life of the man who was hunting him.

The kid stood still and watched. The sun was high on the prairie. Slow down, he and his mustang had been trying dogs in that clump of trees.

The kid had no chance to spend an idle day, but as long as Hall's troop of rangers were camped at the Lazy S, the foreman had to ride clear of the ranch. He figured that Morris Hall, his boss, would wonder, but there was no help for it. So long as the rancher's brother, Captain Hall of the Texas Rangers, was there, the foreman had to be somewhere else. Not till the rangers had hit the trail could "Mr. Carfax" be seen again at the Lazy S.

The Rio Kid had been lying in cover waiting for the long hours to pass. It was a rattle in the thickets that caused him to rise, silently, to his feet and peer through the trees. His eyes fixed on a Mexican number, on the head of a swarthy, black-haired granger, hardly a fist's length from him.

Pedro Diaz Pedro de Carhill—was not looking towards the kid. He was kneeling by a log, on which his rifle rested, watching the open plain. But on the sunny plain was a horseman, riding towards the clump of timber. The Mexican's rifle was aimed at the rider. The kid knew the rider at a glance—the lean, brown face under the stetson hat was as familiar to him as his own; it was Mule-Kick Hall who was riding to his death.

The ranger captain was alone. His men were scattered over the wide ranges of the Lazy S—hunting the kid! Many of the Lazy S bunch were riding with them, little dreaming that it was their foreman they were hunting. Hall looked tired—he had ridden most of the night and all through the sunny morning—but

By RALPH REDWAY

he was not quitting the saddle so long as there was a dog's chance of picking up a sign of the man he wanted.

There was a gush on his lean brown cheek from the bullet that had gone close the evening before at the ranch—fired, the ranger did not doubt, by the Rio Kid, though the kid had been many a long mile from the Lazy S when the powder was burned. The kid could guess who had loosed off that lead—the Mexican who was now watching over his rifle. But Mule-Kick's thoughts were concentrated on the lay outflow of the Rio Grande, and he had taken it as a proof that the kid was at hand.

That day the rangers had been scheduled to hit the trail for the east. Instead of which they were riding the ranges of the Lazy S, hunting the Rio Kid. And while they remained, the foreman of the Lazy S had to hunt cover—unless the Mexican's rifle was going to solve that puzzle for him!

The lean brown face came nearer and clearer. Hall's eyes were watched as he came. He was going to give that clump of trees the steecover, to see for himself whether the kid had taken cover there. He had searched a dozen such clumps during the morning, and every time he had to take the chance of a shot from cover. Such chances were all in the day's work to a Texas Ranger. But he was watchful. The slightest movement in the trees would have caught his keen eyes and put him on his guard.

But the Mexican was so still and silent as a lion watching for a passing deer. He was not likely to put the ranger wise—even the kid, wary as a prairie wolf, had not known that he was in the timber until the last few minutes.

Harder and grimmer the kid's face grew as the moments traveled. The death-shot might ring at any moment now. And when Mule-Kick Hall rolled from his saddle with a bullet through his heart, his long hunt for the Rio Kid would be at an end. Whether Hall's men stayed or went out or no—he feared no eye among them but Jim Hall's. He had changed his looks significantly to deceive the others—but never Mule-Kick!

There was a slight movement of the crouching Mexican—like the quiver of a cougar before he springs. The dusky finger was cracked on the trigger to pull. And at that moment

the kid knew that he could not stand for it.

Bitter enemy as he was, Jim Hall was a brave man—a man the kid had to respect, regardless enemy as he was. He could not see the ranger shot down like a pawling coyote. Those bones told him to stand put—but instinct was stronger than horse sense. Even as the dusky finger cracked on the trigger, the kid whipped a six-gun from his holster and fired.

There was a shrill, startled yell from the Mexican as his rifle went whirling from his grasp, exploding as it went. Leaping up, Pedro Diaz glared round, his black eyes blazing with rage and fear.

"The kid!" he gasped.

"You said it, granger!" scolded the kid. "I guess I don't know why I didn't put that lead through your calico, but you sure got the worst one where you do your thinking if you don't beat it pronto!"

"Are you mad?" gasped Diaz.

"Your enemy and mine—"

"Beat it!" scolded the kid.

"Your enemy, Hall of the rangers, who—"

"I guess you want to beat it, granger, and beat it quick!" drawled the kid. "I ain't losing to spill your jakes—but I guess Jim Hall will make it the last sickness for you—"

The Mexican, passing with rage, leaped away among the trees, disappearing from the kid's eyes. Those eyes turned on the ranger.

The report of the kid's six-gun, followed by that of the Mexican's rifle, warned the horseman of danger. Mule-Kick, probably, figured that a killer he had fired at him from cover, and missed. He drew spurs into his horse's flanks and came on at a gallop, heading low in the saddle. Even as the Mexican disappeared in the thickets, the ranger thrustened into the trees, re-cover in hand.

The Rio Kid had the choice of shooting the captain of the rangers dead, or taking the chance of losing him, and trusting to pass unrecognized.

But only to save his life would Mr. Carfax become the Rio Kid again!

The kid's gun was thrust back into its holster, and, with his stetson low over his brow, the foreman of the Lazy S Ranch faced the ranger as he came.

Outlaw and Ranger!

"HANDS UP!" Covered by the ranger's revolver, the kid lifted his hands above his stetson, smiling. He was taking a chance—a desperate

rookery.

"Say, Mr. Hall, you sure want to pack that gun," he drawled. "I guess a Texas Ranger don't want to pull his hardware as a cow-puncher—specially a puncher that has just saved him from being drilled full of holes."

"Keep 'em up!" said Hall tersely. "You're the doctor!" smiled the Kid. "I'm reaching for the sky just as long as you stay so."

Hall's steady eyes gleamed at him over the gun. His gaze was searching—suspicious—but not, for the moment, hostile. He was ready to pull the trigger on the instant on the Rio Kid but for the moment, at least, he did not know that this was his man. He saw a young cow-puncher before him, in chaps and steers hat. The hat was pulled low, shading the upper half of the face, and the lower half revealed a little mustache. The ranger captain knew the Rio Kid as well as he knew his own face in the glass, and all Texas knew that the Rio Kid's face was as smooth as an infant's; he had never been seen with a mustache. But though he did not reckon that this was the Kid, Hall kept him covered. He wanted to know how matters stood, before he gave him a chance to pull a gun.

"I guess there was shooting here!" he rapped. "I'm looking for that drover, the Rio Kid, and I reckon as the us not he'd be in cover in this timber. You seen any guy here?"

"Sure!" said the Kid easily. His face revealed more freely. So far, at least, Jim Hall had not recognized him, and he reckoned that there was a healthy chance now of getting by. "I sure seen a guy here—a deggoned Mexican, with his rifle, and if I hadn't heard so, I guess you wouldn't be handling that gun this very minute!"

"How come?" snapped the ranger. "I guess he left his rifle when he lit out," said the Kid. "You look at it, Mr. Hall, and you'll sure see where my head hit it, just when that deggoned greaser had a head on you."

Hall's keen eyes flashed at the rifle, lying on the log, where the Kid's bullet had smashed it from the Mexican's hands. At the same time, he picked up the signs of the man who had knelt there, and who had fed into the brush. One swift glance was enough for the ranger, experienced in the reading of signs. He knew that a man had knelt behind that log, with the rifle trained over it; knew that the single shot had cracked out a second before the rifle-shot. He saw that the riflestock was smashed by a bullet, and knew exactly what had passed. He lowered his revolver, and slipped from the saddle.

"You sure it was a greaser?" he rapped.

"Sure!" said the Kid.

Hall made a gesture, and the Kid dropped his lifted hands. The ranger was satisfied—for the moment—that this boyish-looking puncher was no wrong.

"Looks as if you've saved my life, puncher," he said slowly.

"I sure wouldn't see a deggoned greaser shoot up a captain of the



The ranger had no chance to see his gun. The Kid hit him on the jaw, and the weapon fell from his hand as he pitched backwards.

Texas Rangers!" said the Kid. "I reckon if you want him, Mr. Hall, he ain't far off. Maybe you'll rope him in afore he gets away on his cayuse."

Hall nodded, and made a stride to follow the signs of the man who had fed into the brush.

The Kid's heart lightened. Had he passed the test? The obvious fact that he had saved the ranger's life disarmed suspicion—and Jim Hall was keen to get on the track of the gunman who had so nearly given him his ticket. But the boy outlaw's heart sank again as the ranger turned back.

The steady eyes in the lean, brown face fastened on him again. Something familiar in that boyish figure, perhaps, had struck the ranger.

"You allow it was a greaser you saw drawing a head on me?" he rapped.

"Sure!"

"I guess I can get him when I want him. It's the Rio Kid that's my game. You ain't seen nothing of that firkng?"

"I sure ain't seen any guy except that greaser," said the Kid. "You figure that that firkng from the Rio Grande is around?"

"I know he is—he fired on me last night, on the piazza of my brother's ranch." Hall looked the cut on his cheek. "I'll say his head went clear, too."

"I sure heard of that, Mr. Hall," said the Kid quietly. "You figure it was the Kid bred on you from the dark? That ain't the Kid's way, from what they say of the guy. I'd sure figure it was more like that Mexican, that was a-going to wipe you out just now."

Hall started. He had taken it for granted that that shot from the dark had come from the Rio Kid. He was not so sure now.

"Maybe that's so!" he said slowly. "But—" He paused and came closer to the Kid. "If there's a greaser punning after me, like you allow, maybe it was that guy, and not the Kid. But—"

There was a sudden thudding of heels on the farther side of the timber clump. Pedro of Carlinville was on his cayuse, and being. Hall paused for a moment, but that was

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all. His own narrow escape, and the escape of the Mexican bandit, out little too with him—the Rio Kid was his game! And more and more it seemed to the keen, suspicious ranger that there was something he knew in this boy puncher. He made another step towards him, his eyes sharp and suspicious, his hand on a gun.

And the Kid's face hardened. He was not going to make the grade, after all.

"Say!" Hall's voice came quietly. "I guess I've seen you before somewhere, puncher. Who are you, and where's your ranch?"

The Kid paused a second before he answered. Had he passed the test, had he been sure that the ranger would not know, he would have answered that he was Carfax, foreman of the Lazy 8. He could not make that answer now. For the ranger was going to know, if he did not know already, that it was the boy outlaw, whom he had so long hunted, who stood before him. But he was not going to know that the Rio Kid was his brother's foreman.

"Smith?" drawled the Kid, after that brief pause. "I guess Smith will find me, Mr. Hall, at the Joshua A."

"Mebbe!" let me see your face, Smith of the Joshua A!" said Hall. "Dash back that stein. I guess I want to give you the cow-water, full and clear! I reckon I've seen you some time when you wasn't Smith of the Joshua A."

Hall was pulling his gun as he was speaking. But he did not finish the sentence, for the Kid sprang like a panther. His fist caught the ranger on the point of the jaw, and Hall went down, his gun falling from his hand. And as the straggled ranger struggled to rise, a long barrel looked him in the face, with the Kid's eyes gleaming over it.

"Go slow!" the Kid's voice grated. "Decease you, Jim Hall—you've hunted me down, you poke blood-head, but what is it going to buy you, with my gun on you?"

Male-Kid's Defiance!

MALE-KID darted on his elbow, his deep-set eyes glittering at the Kid. But there was no fear in the ranger's grim visage as he stared at the handsome, sunburnt face which he knew now that he saw it clearly, despite the darkened eyebrows and mustache. Rio Kid—the man he had sworn to get dead or alive.

It was as an outlaw at first that the captain of the Texas Rangers had hunted the Kid, but defeat on defeat had conditioned him and made him the Kid's relentless enemy. Now defeat came more had been his portion—and this time death with it—but the ranger's bold face told only of resolute defiance.

"Shoot!" he grated. "You slipped up on it last night, but you got me now—shoot, you damned frog!" I got twenty men trailing you, and twenty more of my brother's outfit—they'll get you! Shoot!"

But the Kid did not shoot.

"You gold-darned bombard!" he said bitterly. "You figured it was the Rio Kid that burned powder on you at the ranch! I guess the lead would have gone through your cabern instead of cutting your cheek if it had been. You pesky stiff, I ain't been gunning after you at the ranch. I guess it was that greaser, Pedro of Cochilla—but you sure jumped to it that it was this baby, like the dog-goned boy still you are, Jim Hall!"

"Mebbe!" said Hall. He knew that the Kid was speaking the truth—it was by a mistake that he had jumped to it that the Kid was in the Lariat country. But that mistake had led him to the right trail, for here was the Kid—though the ranger, now that he had found him, was at the wrong end of the gun.

"I guess," said the Kid quietly, "that you can get on your feet, Jim Hall! But don't reach for that gun—you'll never touch it alive. Stand again that tree!"

Hall, waddering, rose to his feet. Quietly he stood against the tree, and made no movement. If there was a chance of getting through this alive, he was not the man to throw it away—and for some reason he did not understand, the outlaw did not seem bent on shooting him out of hand.

"Now," said the Kid, in the same quiet tone, "I guess I'll talk turkey, Jim Hall. You've roused me out, here in the Lariat country—what you figure I'm doing here?"

"Hiding in a ranch outfit, from your looks," said Hall. "You've played that game before, Kid, in places where you wasn't known!"

"You said it!" The Kid nodded. "Punching cows, Jim Hall, honest and respectable, same as I used to on the Double-Bar at Frio, afore Old Man Brewery made a fool mistake and made an outlaw of me. Punching cows, haints, and asking to do nothing else, so long as sharifs and rangers leave a guy alone. You get me?"

Hall shrugged his shoulders. "I'm asking you, Jim Hall, to ride out of the Lariat country, and forget that you saw the Rio Kid here," he said. "I guess I shouldn't have to ask you if I'd stood put and let that greaser get you."

"Mebbe!" said Hall.

"That cuts no ice with you?" asked the Kid.

"None!" Mebbe you saved my life," said Hall steadily. "Mebbe not, I guess that greaser wouldn't have got more than one shot; and mebbe he might have missed. But if I had a hundred lives, and you saved them all, it wouldn't cut no ice with me, Kid! I got to get you!"

The Kid laughed scoffingly. "You got to get me!" he jeered. "And you under my gun! What's to stop me from killing you as full of holes as a colubator, Jim Hall!"

"Nothing!" said the ranger, unmoved. "If I live, I live to get you, Kid! Shoot—and when my men find me shot up, they'll come you out! Shoot, and get it over!"

The six-gun was half-raised, and

the ranger set his lips. But the gun was lowered again.

"You ain't believing that I've thrown down outlaw trails for keeps!" asked the Kid slowly.

"Not a whole lot."

"I guess I'll prove it to you, Jim Hall! You've hunted down the Rio Kid—and the Rio Kid has got you under his gun. But I ain't shooting you up, Jim—and mebbe, when you figure it out, you'll get it into your dog-goned cabern that I ain't on outlaw trails no more. And I reckon you want to be thankful that the Rio Kid ain't the frogger you make him out to be!"

Hall breathed hard and deep. Death had been very close to him—its shadow was still upon him. But he was to live! If he lived, it was to hunt down the outlaw who spared his life—and the Kid knew it. Yet the Kid spared him. From the saddle of the ranger's horse the Kid jerked a coiled trail-rape. He made a gesture with his revolver—it was enough. Hall's life was spared—but a hint of resistance would be enough to draw the death-shot. Silently, the ranger held out his hands for the rope; the Kid heaped it over his wrists and drew it taut.

Then he holstered his gun, and with both hands knotted the rope round the ranger's wrists. Hall, a helpless prisoner, gritted his teeth, but did not speak.

"Get on your knees!" snapped the Kid.

With the Kid's help, the bound man mounted. As he sat in the saddle, the Kid tied his feet under the brones with the end of the rope. The ranger's lean cheeks burned red.

"I guess some of your guys will pick you up," said the Kid. "You can see hell then that you found the Rio Kid, and that he sent you on the homestead this-away."

The ranger's eyes burned at him. Life was sweet, but Jim Hall would almost have preferred death to this. To be bound by his men—tied on his horse, carried by his sayone like a sack of alfalfa! The rage that swelled up in his breast almost choked him.

Headed of his rage—only anxious to see the last of him—the Kid gave the horse a cut from a quirt, and the animal dashed out of the timber clump. With a ready horse, the Kid watched the bound rider career away on the prairie under the blazing sun. And as he watched, he saw five or six straggled hats bob over the grass in the far distance.

Swiftly, he hurried to his mustang. It was time for the Rio Kid to ride—and ride hard!

On the Apache Range!

HIGHLY! shouted Fanchulle Pete.

The Lazy 8 puncher stood at the doorway of the cookman's hut, on the Apache range, looking out into the red sunset. Twenty miles southward from the ranch-house, cut off from the other ranges by a spur of the Hatcher Hills, the Apache range was the highest on the Lazy 8, and for

that reason the best loked by the goodness in Morris Hall's outfit. Only a small herd—fifty head of cattle—were feeding on the range, and Pankard was there to ride herd over them.

Some guy had to ride that range, solitary as it was, and Pankard admitted it. But he had a grutch. Only the day before, a Mexican horse thief had lifted his favourite pair, and Pankard liked to get on the trail of that groover. In which circumstances Pankard figured that Mr. Carfax might as well have sent some other guy to ride range at the Apache; and all through the sunny day Pankard had been telling empty space what he thought of his foreman—and his language had been hard.

At sundown he rode to the hut, turned his horse into the corral, and cooked and ate his bacon and beans. Now, standing in the doorway to take a last squint at the herd before he rolled in his blankets, Pankard eyed a horseman riding down to him through the tall grass. And his tanned face lightened, for whoever he was, any company was better than none at the lonely hut.

A few weeks since, Pankard might have figured that the newcomer was a rustler.

Who the guy could be, Pankard could not guess—till, as the horseman drew nearer in the red glare that came from the smoking sun over the Hatcher Hills, he recognized his foreman, Mr. Carfax. Then Pankard waved his stein and shouted the cowboy call:

"Hi-ya!"

Mr. Carfax waved a hand to him as he came on at a light gallop. Pankard had been cursing that very guy all day, but he was glad to see him now. Maybe he had news of the stolen pair. Anyhow, he was company, and as he came at sunset, that looked as if he came for the night—though why his foreman chose to put in a night of that remote hot land Pankard guessing.

With a chatter of hoofs, the foreman of the Lazy S rode up and dismounted, and Pankard gave his black-stockinged steading a rather curious look. It was a good twenty miles from the ranch, but Mr. Carfax's steading looked as if he had done much more than that. Strong-limbed and wiry as Side-Kicker was, he was almost spent.

"Say, you been riding a few, Mr. Carfax," said the puncher. "That's a good outfit, but I'll say he's had enough!"

Mr. Carfax slipped from the saddle. The beam dust of the prairie was thick on his nose, and he looked as weary as his horse. Pankard did not know that Mr. Carfax had had to ride for his life from Texas Hangers—and Mr. Carfax was not likely to tell him. From the timber clump far to the north where the Rio Kid had met up with Side-Kick Hall, the boy outlaw had ridden fast and far—circling wide before he struck southward—and horse and rider had covered sixty miles that hot day. Which was hard going, even



The Editor Talks

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SKEY-HIGH RESCUE.—There's a terrific Captain Justice story in store for you next week. Things happen in swift succession. Out from Justice Island strikes JKT, the most deadly armed bandit plane the world has ever seen. Meanwhile, Duffett is planning a terrible revenge . . . his amazing secret is revealed . . . and Midge is floating in space!

THE GREEN MIST.—It floated out of the brass urn the moment young William released the lid . . . the first time that lid had been off for centuries. The mist took shape and became the figure of Hagging the Magician. Next week's *Yankee Boy* is a real Tall Story . . . you'll enjoy it!

BRAITN'S FATEFUL DAY.—Jim and Jennifer learn at last the day on which someone set to attack Britain, only to become prisoners in a mystery castle, unable to take action!

BACKS TO THE WALL, Biggles and Algy face the firing squad. Hope has departed, but suddenly it rises as the sound of an approaching plane is heard. But in a second the order to fire will be given. A full-action installment of this splendid story comes to you next week.

FALSE TRAIL.—It seems sheer folly for the Rio Kid to remain at the Lazy S Ranch. Common sense tells him

to ride—and ride hard! Grit and determination make him stay behind, for almost certain capture.

A BRITISH GRAND PRIX is the subject of "Gaming" Harrison's exciting chapter. And there are more thrills for you in **NORTH OF THE RIO GRANDE**.

YOUR OWN MOVIE SHOW.—Home movies are attracting many of my readers, who write and ask me for advice regarding apparatus. There are several fine models of home projectors available, and one makes in particular has a range that suits all pockets—the Kingcopter. There is a 50, one which works from a 3-cell flashlight battery, models at 10s. 6d. and 17s. 6d., which can be operated from a 4-cell battery or accumulator, and a main model at 75s. which suits all budgets and gives a really splendid picture. Non-inflammable 3.5 millimetre film are used, so there is perfect safety.

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for the Rio Kid and Side-Kicker. But if he had ridden away from the rangers as the Rio Kid, he had arrived on the Apache range as Mr. Carfax—and nothing in his manner hinted otherwise.

"I guess," said Mr. Carfax, "that I sure been riding a few, Pankard— and then some! I've trailed that Mexican grober that lifted your pair, old-timer, though he sure slipped through my fingers!"

"Doggone his kids!" growled Pete.

"And seeing that that groover is around on Lazy S ranges," went on Mr. Carfax amiably, "I shouldn't be a whole heap surprised if he learned in this-a-way, looking for cows—and it would get my goat, Pankard, if Mr. Hall's steers was driven down to Mexico, so I guess you'd going to have company on this range for a piece!"

"I'll tell a man," said Pankard, "that if that groover showed up on this range, Mr. Carfax, I'd be jasper glad to see him—and he wouldn't drive Mr. Hall's cows none!"

"Mebbe!" said the foreman. "I allow you're a good man with a gun, Pankard, but I sarn that groover, and he sure is bad medicine. I'll say them cows will be safer with two guys on the range!"

"You said it!" agreed the puncher.

Pankard's grutch left him. Mr. Carfax, he reckoned, was a real white man to take his turn on that lonely range, foreman as he was. He could have sent any man in the bunch but he had seen himself, after a hard day's riding. Pete went into the hut to stack fresh pine chips into the iron stove, and get Dap-jacks and beans ready for Mr. Carfax; while the Kid, who always thought of his horse before himself,

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rubbed down Side-Kicker in the corral and gave him his fodder. Then, with a cheery, smiling face, he joined the puncher in the hut and sat down to eat.

The sun dipped behind the Hatcher's and darkness rolled over the prairie. The kerosene lamp burned in the cowboy's hut, and the above glistened cheerfully. The Kid ate his supper with a keen appetite, while Panhandle smoked his pipe, and they talked cowboy's shop—cattle-feed, and the prospect of rain, and the drying-up of the water-hole at Coyote Hollow.

But while he talked, the Kid was thinking of other things. It was true that he had trailed the Mexican horse thief—sure that he deserved it possible that Pedro of Chihuahua might figure on stealing cows on that lonely range. But his chief if not only reason for coming was the need of riding clear of the ranch while the rangers were there.

Male-Kick Hall knew now that he was in the Lariat valley, and he would not hit the trail. The rangers were at the Lazy S now for an indefinite period. While they stayed, the foreman of the ranch could not show up there. And what were the boss and the bunch going to think of his prolonged absence? What was he going to tell them when, at long last, he rode in?

The Kid had worked out that problem, and found an answer. He was going to ride range on the Apache with Panhandle Pete—for enough from the Lazy S to be clear of the rangers—but surely a natural proceeding on the part of a keen and dignified foreman like Mr. Carfax, when there were horse thieves and cow thieves around on the range?

He had met up with a Lazy S man—keeping a wary eye open for rangers while he showed the rag with him!—and sent that guy with a

message to Mr. Hall, asking the puncher to carry on for a few days, while his foreman was watching out for Mexican cattle thieves on the Apache range. The Kid reckoned that that would see him through. Anyhow, he had to chance it. Thinking it over, while he talked cows and fodder with Panhandle Pete, the Kid reckoned that he had done the best he could in difficult circumstances.

Panhandle rose from his bench, knocked out his pipe, and yawned. The Kid was ready for his bunk—even the iron-timbered Kid was tired with that day's hard riding. But there was no peaceful sleep in a cowboy's bunk for the Kid that night, surely as he had reckoned on it. He bent his head suddenly, listening.

"The cows!" said Panhandle. He had caught a sound a few moments after the Kid. "That doggone grazer—"

The Kid shook his head. It was not the stirring of cows that he heard, though his first suspicion had been that possibly Pedro of Chihuahua was on the range, and that the herd was in danger. But it was not that. "Horses, I reckon," growled the Kid.

He rose from his bunk, his face tense. Panhandle Pete crossed to the door, and threw it open. He stared out at a bunch of bobbing shadows on the trail from the northward.

"Rangers, I reckon!" said Panhandle. "Male-Kick and his guys after that doggone fooling, the Rio Kid. They're aiming to hit this shakedown, I reckon, Mr. Carfax!"

"You said it," agreed Mr. Carfax. "Mebbe they've had a hard ride, and aim to feed here and bed down—it sure looks like it. I guess you want to bunk up the store a few."

"Sure!" said Pete. "The fire in the store were dying down. Panhandle led it with a jolt of pine chips. Mr. Carfax, behind

him, picked up his saddle and stepped from the hut into the deepening darkness. There was still a red glimmer of sunset over the Hatcher's—but it was black as a hat in the shadow of the corral fence. In a short minute the Kid was in the corral, and his whisper called Side-Kicker to him. There was a bitter smile on his face. He had counted the Apache range and the lonely hut there safe from the rangers at the ranch—but it was rangers that rode in the last glimmer of the sunset. The boy outlaw who was so strongly playing a double part did not need telling that.

The corral was at the back of the hut. The Kid led saddled Side-Kicker, and he was holding his horse by the bridle, just within the corral gate, as a bunch of brownies rode up to the front of the little building.

"Clear chance had brought Male-Kick Hall close to his enemy again. But for the Kid's alertness, that chance would have served the ranger captain a good turn. The Kid, as he led his mustang softly from the corral, heard his name again grating with bitterness and anger:

"You seen nobody on this range, puncher? I got a bunch that the Rio Kid hit south!"

"You can search me!" said Panhandle. "I ain't seen a guy since I left the Lazy S yesterday, except my foreman, Mr. Carfax."

"He's here!"

"Sure! He's riding this range with me, watching out for a Mexican cow thief that's on the range!"

"I sure want to meet up with that foreman of yours. I ain't given him at the Lazy S!" said Hall. "He sure is no slouch from what I've heard of him—they tell me he trailed the Sean-Fare gang to their hide-out in the Hatcher's."

"He sure did!" said Panhandle. "I'll tell all Texas he ain't no slouch!"

"I guess he might be useful on the trail of the Rio Kid," said Hall. "I'm no slouch on a trail myself, but I'll own up the Kid's got me beat! I shall be glad to meet up with Mr. Carfax, after all I've heard of him. Where is he?"

"I guess he stepped out to meet you," said Panhandle. "He sure is around. Say, Mr. Carfax!" He shouted: "Say, here's Male-Kick Hall wants to show the rag with you a piece! Where you get, sir?"

"There was no answer from Mr. Carfax. The Rio Kid was leading his mustang softly away along the corral wall—out of sight of the rangers who were turning their weary horses in at the corral gate. Softly and silently the Kid led Side-Kicker till he was at a safe distance to mount, then he leaped into the saddle and rode.

What Panhandle and the rangers would figure had become of Mr. Carfax, the Kid could not guess—but he guessed that he had no bunch to show the rag with Male-Kick Hall!



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