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The PILOT 2^D

The GREAT NEW STORY PAPER for READERS OF ALL AGES

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"Here, quick, take it!" muttered the sailor, pushing the sealed document across the table. "I've been shadowed here."

From this week's long story:
"HE WAS A SPY!"

A CROOKED MARSHAL WAS USING THE LAW AGAINST THEM, SO THEY MADE A JUSTICE OF THEIR OWN—WITH ROARING SIX-GUNS!

The Outlawed THREE



INSIDE the gaolhouse cell were two innocent young cowpunchers . . .

OUTSIDE was a raging, lynch-mad mob . . .

AND riding hell-for-leather along the trail to their rescue thundered a lone rider . . .

WOULD HE BE IN TIME?

“**W**ON'T it ever be dark?” muttered Kid Byrne savagely.

He scowled at the western sky, where the red sun was dipping beyond the desert. He stood on the edge of a clump of timber, a mile out of the cow town of Bullwhacker, the reins of his bronco looped over his arm.

Shadows were lengthening in the timber, and, far off, in Bullwhacker, naphtha lamps were beginning to gleam. But it was not yet dark—and it seemed to the impatient Kid that the day was endless. He was waiting for darkness—for until it was dark he could make no attempt to rescue his comrades, Dan and Red, in the cow town calaboose.

The Kid had ridden out of Bullwhacker under a rain of bullets. To ride back while daylight lasted was to ask for sudden death. That would not have helped Hardfist Hall's prisoners in the cow town gaol. The Kid groaned with impatience as the leaden minutes crawled by.

His eyes on the distant cow town, he was unaware of slinking, shadowy figures in the cottonwoods; of stealthy footsteps in the grass. But he knew nothing—till suddenly the muzzle of a six-gun was pressed against his back from behind, and a hoarse voice rapped:

“Stick 'em up, big boy!”

The Kid slowly turned his head. He saw the bulldog jaw and scarred cheeks of Jad Jadsen, and knew into whose hands he had fallen. The rustler had him at his mercy.

Five other figures came out of the shadowy timber. They gathered round Kid Byrne, grinning. The Kid was not easy to catch napping; but in his anxiety for his comrades in the cow town gaol, he had been taken completely off his guard.

“I guess I said stick 'em up, Kid Byrne!” drawled the rustler. “You ain't getting away like you did last time.”

Kid did not lift his hands. He knew that it was his horse Jad was after.

“Forget it, Jad!” he said quietly. “Listen to me! Hardfist Hall has got my side-kickers in the calaboose at Bullwhacker, and I got to get them out. I guess there ain't no love lost between you and the marshal; he's been after you with a rope long enough. Give me a chance to help my friends.”

Jadsen eyed him curiously. “I guess I've heard there's a lynch mob out in Bullwhacker,” he said. “I'll say they'll have your pardners out of the jug and strung up afore midnight. You can't help them none.”

“I'm going to try,” said Kid Byrne, in the same quiet tone. “If Dan and Red go up, I'm going up along with them—I guess we've

stood together ever since we could walk, and I ain't letting them down now, even if I've got to fight it out with you!”

The gang of horse-thieves peered at him in the thickening dusk.

The Jadsens, outlaws and horse-thieves and hold-up men, were the toughest gang in Arizona. But the Kid's appeal was not lost, even on that savage gang. Standing in the very shadow of death, he was cool and calm, and thinking only of his friends.

One of the ruffians muttered:

“Say, Jad, give the kid a chance!”

Jadsen knitted his rugged brows in thought.

“We lost a man last night,” he said. “I guess he was at the wrong end of a gun! You like to sit in his saddle, Kid Byrne?”

Kid started

“Me—join up with hoss-thieves!” he exclaimed. “What do you think I am?”

“I guess if you got any friends in Tontine County, they're on the wrong side of the law!” grinned Jad. “Where are you now? You and your pardners are accused of shooting-up old Sam Oak at the Rojo Ranch—you're wanted on a charge of murder! This very day you rode into Bullwhacker and shot up the marshal. I guess every guy in the section has heard about it already. You got to ride and hide, you young geek—if you get through this night alive! You're an outlaw already!”

Kid Byrne caught his breath.

What the horse-thief said was true. Hardfist Hall, marshal of Bullwhacker, was a villain—but he stood for the law. Standing against him, the Rojo pals stood against the law. The Kid was as much an outlaw as any of the shaggy-bearded ruffians standing round him in the gloom.

“I guess I'll give you a chance!” said Jad coolly. “If you get through, you'll want a hide-out, I reckon—you won't dare be seen at the Rojo Ranch agin. Ride with this bunch, Kid—I guess you're as good a man as I could want—and I guess there's room for your side-kickers, if you get them out. And we'll sure help you through.”

The Kid drew a long, deep breath. He was outlawed already—and if he saved Dan and Red, what did anything else matter? Help from a gang of horse-thieves was better than no help, with all the chances against him.

“That goes,” he said. “Help me save Dan and Red, and I'm your man, and I'll ride with you as far as a sheriff's rope.”

Jad Jadsen holstered his gun.

“It's a cinch,” he said. “But I'm telling you that your best guess is to ride clear of Bullwhacker.”

“Forget it!” said the Kid briefly.

He glanced round over the darkening plain. The sun had dipped beyond the desert towards far-off California. It was dark, and growing darker. It was time for action.

“Lissen to me, then!” said Jad. “Get to it, Kid, and good luck to you! I'll say you've got heaps of sand! We'll ride round to the other side of the town—and when you hear guns, you'll know that we're shooting up the burg! That'll give you a chance!”

The Kid held out his hand.

“You're a tough guy, Jad!” he said. “But you help me through to-night, and I'm your man!”

In silence the horse-thieves watched him mount his bronco and ride away through the gloom towards Bullwhacker.

The Kid had thrown in his lot with the toughest gang of outlaws in the West. He did not regret it—if only he could save Dan and Red! And that wild night he was going to save them or die with them!

“**T**HEY'RE coming, Red!” muttered Dan Oak.

Night had fallen. The naphtha lamps outside the Yellow Dog saloon on Main Street in Bullwhacker were flaring against the stars. With the fall of darkness the lynch mob outside the gaol increased in numbers and its threatening roar deepened.

“Lynch 'em!”

“Have 'em out! String 'em up!”

The mob was working itself up to the right pitch. Yuba Bill, the gaoler, was in the yard, thoughtfully chewing tobacco. During the day he had been on guard with a shotgun. Dan noticed now that the shotgun had disappeared. Yuba had no intention of resisting the mob when they came.

Red joined Dan at the little window. His plump face was pale, but he was cool. Looking between the bars, the boys could see the crowd thickening at the gate. They were coming! Dan called to the gaoler.

“You leaving us here for that crowd to get?”

called Dan. "I guess if you unlocked that door, Yuba—"

Yuba grinned. "I reckon not! They'd string me up if I did! I guess I'm sorry—I'd hold you if I could. But you got it coming to you! I'm telling you, they're plumb mad because of the marshal being shot-up in his office. That pardner of yours, Kid Byrne, shot him up under the eyes of twenty galoots and got away with it! I reckon he wasn't shooting to kill, or Hardfist would be over the range now. But he sure shot him up, and the marshal's jest a bundle of bandages in his bunk, and you can bank on it that he won't be horning into this rookus none."

"It's Hardfist's doing!" snapped Dan savagely. "The doggoned thief's after the goldmine on the Rojo land, and I'm certain that it was Hall who shot up old Sam Oak at Rojo. He set this lynch mob going, and I guess the Kid shot him up to stop it!"

Yuba shrugged his shoulders and turned away from the barred window. He went across the yard to the gate where the boys could see him gesturing and expostulating with the threatening crowd outside.

Dan grasped the thick pinewood bars, as if to make a desperate effort to wrench them loose. As he did so, a shadow moved in the gloom outside.

Dan stood still, staring. He wondered if he was dreaming. Or was it Kid Byrne's face that was pressed to the space between the bars?

"Kid!" breathed Dan Oak.

"Kid!" muttered Red, in wonder. "You here, Kid!"

It was the Kid! His voice came in a low whisper.

"They're all in front! I guess I got into the yard at the back—there ain't nobody watching there. I been waiting for dark to try it on."

"Beat it, Kid, beat it!" muttered Red. "You can't help us none, and they're coming—they'll get you, too!"

"I guess I'm packing a gun and they won't get me easy!" said Kid, quietly. "I'm with you to the finish. Who's got the key of this shebang?"

"Yuba! He's chewing the rag with them at the gate!"

The Kid stared round him, straining his eyes in the gloom. Save at the gate, where there was a glimmer of light in the street, all was dark. So far, the Kid had found his enterprise, desperate as it was, easy going.

He had left his bronc tied up outside the town, crept in under cover of darkness, and reached the back fence behind the calaboose. To climb it and drop within was easy work for the active Kid. The shadows screened him from all eyes, and he had crept round to the front of the gaol unseen and reached the window. But what now?

The bars at the little window were thick and strong. The door, of massive pinewood, was locked. To get hold of the key somehow and get hold of the key had been the vague plan working in the Kid's mind. But he could not approach Yuba without betraying himself to a swarm of eyes—and when Yuba quitted the gate the surging mob would be at his heels.

Suddenly, there came a sudden outburst of gun-fire from the other end of the long street of Bullwhacker. Judson's gang had come.

The roaring of six-guns, the thunder of galloping hooves, rang through the cow town from end to end. Wild shouts and yells came from the street.

"The Jadson gang!" came a yell from the street.

"They're shooting up the town! "

There was a rushing and trampling of feet. All along Main Street, six-guns were ringing out in reply to the reckless fire of the outlaws. And the lynch mob, their attention turned to a new focus by the raid, went rushing up the street, guns in hands, yelling with rage, firing wildly. Yuba was left standing at the gate alone.

He knew that it would not last—the Jadson raid would be driven off in a matter of minutes. Then the mob would come pouring back. Yuba leaned on the gate, staring into a deserted street.

"Don't squeak!" A soft voice spoke in his



Elder Brother: "Hey, you can't go out in my overcoat, you young imp!"

Younger Brother: "All right. I only took it to make sure I didn't get your suit wet!"

ear, and he felt the muzzle of a revolver grinding into the back of his neck. "Jest one squeak, Yuba, and you get yours."

Yuba gave one gasp. But he did not utter a syllable. He knew Kid Byrne's voice, and he knew better than to argue with a six-gun pressed to his neck.

The Kid stuck the gun in his ribs and drove him across the yard. He stopped at the locked door of the calaboose.

"I've come for my pals!" Kid said. "Get that door open!"

Yuba hesitated one second. Then he grabbed the long iron key from his pocket, jammed it into the lock and turned it. The door flew open.

"Dan!" breathed Kid, "Red!"

BANG, bang, bang! The roar of six-guns came booming along Main Street.

But the firing was already dying out. The Jadson gang had ridden in, firing right and left—"shooting up the town." But Bullwhacker was a tough town, where every man packed a gun; and after the first few minutes of surprise, the raiders had had a hot reception.

Already they were riding for the prairie faster than they came. But Jad, as he had promised, had made a diversion, drawing off the mob to give the Kid a chance—and Kid Byrne had made the most of it. Already a crowd of the lynchers were swarming back towards the calaboose. There was no time to lose.

"Quick!" breathed the Kid.

With a twist of his arm he sent Yuba staggering headlong into the cell, as Dan and Red joined him in the open air. Yuba crashed on the floor, yelling. Before he could gain his feet, the Kid had slammed the door again and turned the key on the outside.

Kid grasped Red by the arm and led him away. Behind the gaol the yard was in darkness, and the Rojo pals disappeared into it—hearing, as they went, the gate going with a crash. Hurrying footsteps and shouting voices filled the yard with din.

Back of the gaol there was a ten-foot fence, and behind it waste land that ran to the open plain. Panting, the Rojo pals reached the back fence.

The Kid leaped, and grasped the top of the pine fence. Hanging there, he leaned down to give Red a hand. Big Dan grasped Red and heaved him up, and the Kid pulled. Red, panting, clambered over and dropped outside the fence.

"Pronto, Dan!" hissed the Kid. From the top of the fence he could see the lynch mob come swarming round on both sides of the pine-wood gaol. They were hunting through the yard for the escaped prisoners.

Dan clambered desperately. He joined the Kid and they dropped together outside the fence. But as they dropped, a yell,

and the barking of a gun, told that they had been seen.

Some of the lynchers rushed across to the fence to clamber in pursuit. Others streamed out at the gate.

"Beat it!" muttered Dan.

Hard and desperately they ran, and reached the cottonwood standing black against the stars on the plain.

"Get the bronc, Dan!" snapped Kid.

In the starlight on the open plain, they had been seen. Some of the lynchers had mounted horses, and now they came thundering down on the fugitives in a bunch. The Kid lifted his revolver. There was no help for it. With a cool eye and a steady hand, he fired into the thick of the bunch of riders, and fearful yells answered the shots.

A horse rolled over—a man went down—and another; wounded or killed the Kid did not know, and little cared at that wild moment. With a crash of hoofs and a jingle and bridles and spurs, the rest dragged in their broncos. But more and more of the lynch mob were streaming out of the cow town, some on foot, some on horseback, and the firing guided them to the spot.

Dan dragged the bronc loose under the shadowy cottonwood.

"Get on, Red!"

"But—," panted Red.

Big Dan did not wait for "buts." He grasped Red in his powerful arms and flung him into the saddle. Taking the bridle, he led the horse and ran. The Kid, gun in hand, panted after them.

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Bullets screamed through the air; but the firing was wide and wild. Galloping hoofs thudded and echoed—hoarse voices yelled and shouted through the gloom. The lynch mob, savagely disappointed at the escape of their prey, hunted them fiercely in the shadows of the prairie. But the shadows were thick; the rugged folds of the plain and straggling patches of post-oaks gave the fugitives cover.

A mile from the cow town, Dan dragged the bronco to a halt in the darkness of the timber island where Kid had met up with the Jadson gang at sunset. Dan and Kid panted with bursting lungs after that desperate run. With thumping hearts they listened.

Far away in the night, horses were galloping, and random shots echoing. But the hunters had lost them, and for the moment, at least, they were safe!

DAWN was glimmering on the prairie. The Rojo Rancho was dark and deserted, on the bank of the river. The three cowboys had reached it, after their escape, to find it deserted. The marshal's men had long gone, and Doc Baker had taken old Sam Oak back with him to Parksville. It was the one comfort the boys had, that old Sam was safe in good hands, out of reach of the bitter enmity of the marshal of Bullwhacker.

The Kid had told his comrades about his contract with the Jadson gang. As he explained the position, there were strong objections from his pals. Kid tried to point out that there was no other way out, if they were to try to solve the mystery of the shooting of old Sam, and, still arguing, he crossed to the open door and looked out. He stood there for a few minutes, then suddenly wheeled round.

"You had better make up your minds," he said. "The marshal's bunch is coming up the trail, and if they find us here, I'll say we ain't going to live long enough to find out who shot up old Sam!"

Dan and Red joined him at the veranda door. Far away across the Rio Rojo there was a cloud of dust on the trail in the direction of Bullwhacker. The marshal's men were already riding out to Rojo.

Big Dan stood staring. He was not so swift on the uptake as the quick-witted Kid, and the true position dawned more slowly on him. Dan drew a hard breath.

"Let's go!" he said.

It was like the taciturn Dan, having made up his mind, to say no more on the subject. The three pals lost no more time. They had had a rest and snatched a hasty meal. Now they hastily packed a few possessions to take with them—camping outfit, packed in their

slicker packs; old Sam's rifle, food, and clothes.

They picked the three best of the bunch of broncos and saddled. There were half a dozen others, and Dan put them in a string for leading.

By the time they rode out at the gate, the cloud of dust on the Bullwhacker trail was very near. A dozen armed men were riding hard for the ford of the Rojo. The three pals headed up the bank of the river for the Mesa Mountains. Once in the hills, they could defy all the marshal's men to hunt them down.

But it was evident at once that they had been spotted. Leaving the marked trail, the marshal's men cut across the plain, with the obvious intention of intercepting them. The crack of a rifle came from the midst of the dust cloud, and the whizz of a bullet fanning his cheek told Dan that they were within easy range.

"Burn the wind!" snapped Dan.

The punchers quirted their broncos to a gallop. The barren plain, dotted with sage brush, flew under the lashing hoofs. Still at a distance the Bullwhacker posse came splashing through the muddy waters of the Rojo, and took up the pursuit on the other side.

Before the three fugitives was the opening of the great canyon that split the steep side of the mesa. But the canyon was still half a mile distant, when a scream came from one of the led horses. A bullet had struck the animal, and it rolled over, kicking wildly, and throwing the whole string into confusion.

"Doggone it!" panted Dan, through his clenched teeth. He checked his bronco, but the Kid shouted to him:

"Ride, you geck! Ride!"

There was no time to cut loose the injured horse. Dan threw the end of the rope from his saddle, casting loose the whole string.

Hard and fast behind them came the marshal's posse. Bullets were falling closer. The ground was rising to the hills, and the going was heavy and hard. The pursuers, not yet on the rise, were drawing closer—the range was narrowing. Shot after shot rang, and the Kid compressed his lips as a bullet bit his ear in passing, taking a strip of skin. He spurred on fiercely.

Out of the blaze of sunshine they dashed into the deep canyon at last, hoofs ringing loud and sharp on rocky earth. There was a sudden squeal from Red's bronco as it was hit by a bullet. The animal pitched forward on its forelegs, sending Red with a crash over its head.

Red, half-stunned by the fall, sprawled on the rocks. The Kid and Dan drew rein

instantly. They leaped from the saddle, grasped Red, and lifted him to his feet.

"Look after him, Kid! I guess I'm going to stop those rubes!" gritted Dan, between his teeth.

He grasped old Sam's rifle, and dropped on his knee behind a boulder, his eye gleaming along the barrel. Kid half-led, half-carried Red into the cover of a rock, and left him there. The two horses went scampering up the canyon. The loss of Red's horse cut short the flight, and the fugitives had to stand at bay. Kid, revolver in grip, joined Dan behind the boulder, looking down the trail.

Up from the plain, clattering into the wide opening of the great canyon, came the Bullwhacker posse, riding hard. They knew that a horse had gone down under their fire, and they were looking to ride down the fugitives.

In a galloping, shouting bunch they came on, eyes gleaming under stetson hats. And as they came, Dan's rifle barked from behind the boulder, and the leading rider went backwards over the tail of his horse, crashing to the earth.

Crack, crack, crack, crack! The Kid's six-gun sprayed bullets while Dan reloaded. With wild yells and howls the Bullwhacker crowd scattered from the fire, leaping from their horses, and hunting cover.

"I guess we stopped them!" breathed Dan.

The Kid nodded.

But he knew they were not stopped for long. The marshal's men were tough guys, used to hard riding and hard fighting. They were not going to ride to death—but Kid knew that already they would be creeping up the canyon, taking cover behind every rock and clump of scrub pines, coming every minute nearer to close quarters. And when they were close enough, there would be a rush and a hand-to-hand grapple against overwhelming odds. It was the finish, and Kid Byrne knew it, if Dan did not.

There was a grinding of heavy boots on the rocks as the rush came. Leaping from cover, blazing six-guns as they came, the Bullwhacker posse rushed. Dan and Kid fired together—and a roughneck reeled to the right and another to the left. The next minute they would have been mixed.

But at that moment there came a sudden outburst of rifle-fire from higher up the rocky canyon.

Who was burning powder, neither the Rojo pals nor the Bullwhacker crowd knew. But they knew that a tearing volley of lead smashed into the marshal's posse as they rushed on—sending three or four men dead to the ground, and the rest running back like rabbits. Shot after shot came from the unseen rifles, and what were left of the Bullwhacker crowd ran for their lives.

Dan and Kid stared round blankly.

That sudden fire had saved them—it would all have been over in a minute more. Suddenly snatched from death, they stared round. A burly ruffian with a bulldog jaw and a scarred face came striding down the canyon towards them, a smoking rifle in his hand. Following him came the rest of the Jadson gang.

Jad grinned at the Rojo punchers.

"I guess we heard your shooting and humped along, big boys," he said. "I'll say we was on time. I'll tell a man I'm glad to meet up with you."

"I'll say the same, Jad," said the Kid quietly. "You sure horned in when you was wanted bad."

Dan did not speak. Red, rubbing his aching head, joined his comrades, and he, too, stood silent. The Kid looked at them very quietly.

"Chew on it," he said. "We ain't in no position to choose our friends now. It's riding with Jad, or the rope at Bullwhacker! And Jad's stood for us like a white man."

Dan nodded slowly. The die was cast. It was with the Jadson gang, members now of the toughest and wildest gang of outlaws and rustlers in Arizona, that the Rojo riders went into the mesa.

The die has been cast—Kid, Dan, and Red, now ride with the outlaw gang. Don't miss next week's great story of how the Rojo riders take part in their first cattle raid, and also strike another great blow at Harafist Hall, the marshal, whose scoundrelly schemes have made them into outlaws.



"I've come for my pals!" Kid told the jailer. "Get that door open!" With the outlaw's gun jabbed against his back, the jailer had no choice but to obey.