

Get To Know The Kid!

He's Sure Some Boy!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
in the Frio Calaboose!

"LYNCH him!"
Like the murmur of the sea, innumerable voices buzzed and hummed round the lumber prison in the plaza at Frio.

The Rio Kid sat on the edge of the plank that served as a bed, and grinned. Sometimes a stone or a chunk of wood whizzed through the air, and crashed on the wall or the barred window.

"Frio is sure getting excited," the Kid remarked.

The Kid himself did not look excited. He seemed rather to derive amusement from the roar in the plaza.

"Have him out!"
"Lynch him!"

Frio was the roughest cow-town in the valley of the Pecos, and "necktie" parties were far from unknown there. More than one rustler or gun-man, lodged in the calaboose, had been taken out by an excited mob, before he could be removed to the safety of the county seat, and strung up on a branch.

And of all the hard characters in the section, the Rio Kid, boy as he was, was the best known and the most feared.

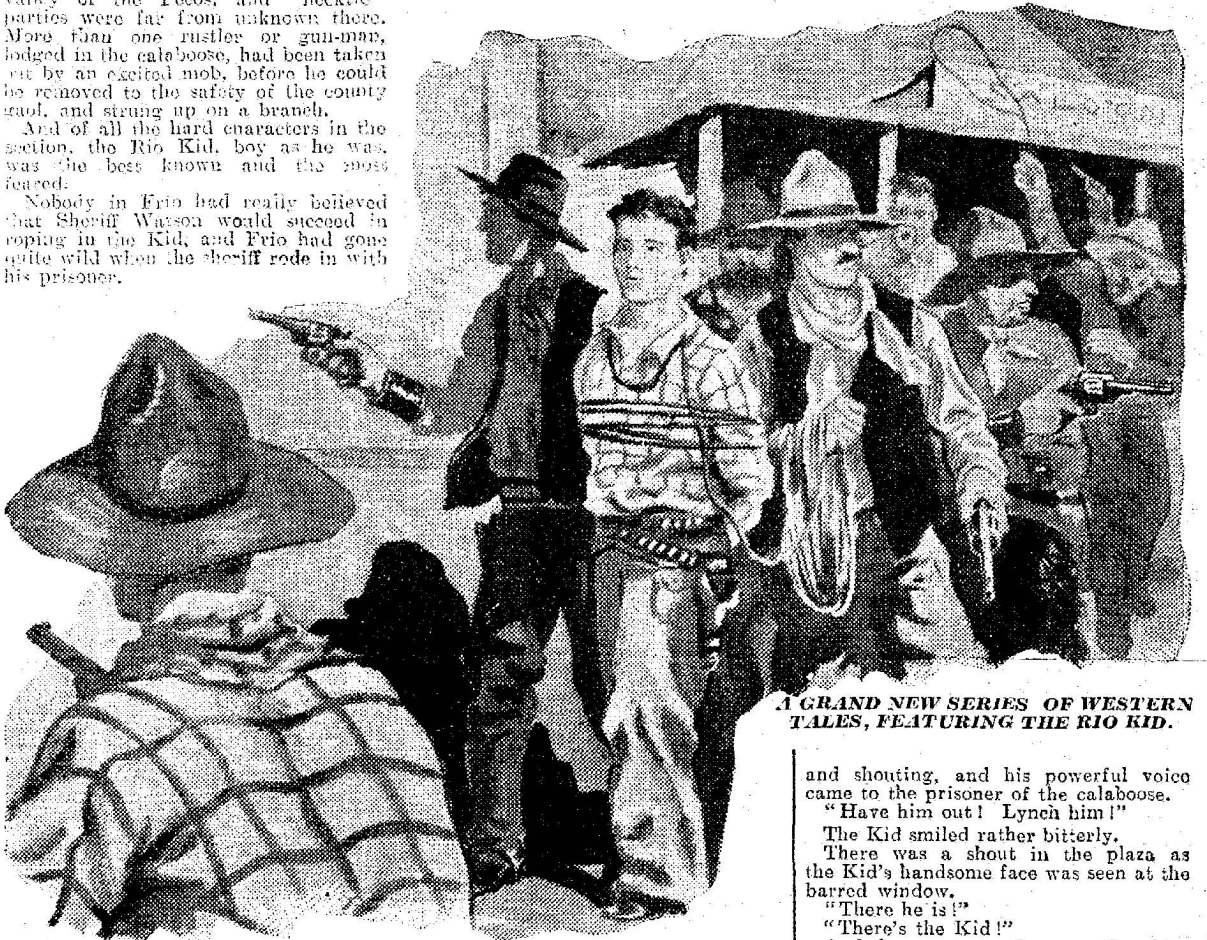
Nobody in Frio had really believed that Sheriff Watson would succeed in roping in the Kid, and Frio had gone quite wild when the sheriff rode in with his prisoner.

The RIO KID!



Ralph Redway

This week "LYNCH LAW"



A GRAND NEW SERIES OF WESTERN TALES, FEATURING THE RIO KID.

Day and night a crowd surged in the plaza. Every now and then some puncher from the ranches, having filled up on fire-water at the Red Dog, would roll down to the calaboose and loose off a succession of revolver-shots at the thick timber walls. More than once a hail had whistled in through the bars of the unglazed window.

"Lynch him!"

The Rio Kid stepped to the window of the little room and looked out, with clear, cool eyes.

He had a view of most of the plaza, with the Red Dog on the other side, and THE POPULAR—No. 473.

excited crowd bunched outside the saloon.

A dozen punchers from the Double Bar had ridden in, and put up their horses at the hitching-rail, and joined the buzzing mob.

The Kid's smiling face clouded a little as he watched them.

He recognised most of them—Bud Wash, the foreman of the ranch; Fatty Tick, the ranch cook; Tex, the horse-breaker. Old friends of his in happier days, before Old Man Dawney had driven him off the Double Bar.

The Double Bar outfit seemed as keen against the Kid as the rest of Frio.

Bud Wash was brandishing a big Colt,

and shouting, and his powerful voice came to the prisoner of the calaboose.

"Have him out! Lynch him!"

The Kid smiled rather bitterly.

There was a shout in the plaza as the Kid's handsome face was seen at the barred window.

"There he is!"

"There's the Kid!"

And there was a rush across the plaza towards the lumber building.

The Rio Kid eyed the excited mob coolly, a smile on his lips. But he was well aware that one determined rush of the Frio crowd would have burst open the calaboose and placed him at the mercy of the lynchers. It was only a timber building—one end of it the sheriff's office, the other, three rooms that served as cells. It was not the lumber wall that had saved the Kid, so far, from the mob. It was Sheriff Watson, and the well-known fact that he would shoot if an attempt was made to rush the calaboose.

But the Kid knew that it would come. For days he had been a prisoner in the

In Texas, a land of raw-boned he-men, where life is held cheap, Judge Lynch rules with a rod of iron. And the rustler or outlaw who falls into the hands of the law, meets a swift and grim justice!

calaboose, tied down to his plank bed by his wound. But the hardy Kid was almost himself again now. He was well enough to be moved to a safer place of keeping. He knew that on the morrow he was to go. And he did not believe that Frio would let him get away, even in the sheriff's hands. Yet he smiled



as he looked out at a sea of threatening faces.

"So you're thar, Kid!" said Bud Wash, staring at the handsome sun-burnt face framed in the little window. "Sure, old pard," said the Kid cheerfully. "Kinder friendly of you to pay me a call. How's things at the Double Bar?"

Bud grinned. "I allows you allers had a nerve, Kid," he said. "Lynch him!" "Have you fixed the party for to-night, you-uns?" asked the Kid carelessly. "You'll find me ready. I guess I shall be at home."

"Have him out!" "I'd be glad to see you if I had my Colts here."

Crack! A bullet struck the timber a few inches from the window.

The Kid laughed. "I guess you've forgotten how to shoot on the Double Bar since I left," he remarked.

"We ain't forgotten how to tic a rope, Kid!" said Tex.

"Has Old Man Dawney sent you in to town for me?" jeered the Kid. "That his thanks to me for gettin' him away from the rustlers up in the hills? I guess I was plumb loco to do it."

"Have him out!" roared a score of voices, and there was a surge towards the calaboose.

"Let up!" It was the sharp, harsh voice of Sheriff Watson.

The big, burly sheriff stepped out into view from the building, with his gun at a level. His grim face was dark.

"You ginks mosey on, pronto!" he rapped out.

"I guess we want the Kid, sheriff," said Bud Wash. "We've brought a rope for him from the Double Bar."

"Light out!" said the sheriff laconically, and his gun looked the Double Bar foreman full in the face.

Bud looked at him, shrugged his shoulders, and turned away. The mob, daunted by the sheriff, surged back across the plaza to the Red Dog.

The Kid smiled after them. Sheriff Watson stared after the retreating crowd with a grim, perplexed face. The westerling sun was dipping down to the sierra, shadows were lengthening in the streets of Frio. When darkness came, he knew that there would be an outbreak. It was to be a wild night in Frio, and the sheriff knew it. He glanced angrily at the window.

"Get back there, Kid!" he rapped. "Why?" smiled the Kid.

"Do you want to stop a bullet, you young gink?"

The Kid laughed. "I guess a bullet's as good as a rope," he answered.

Watson frowned.

"You're goin' to the county gaol to stand your trial, Kid," he said. "There

won't be any necktie party hyer while I can stop it."

"You sure can't, sheriff," drawled the Kid. "These hombres won't let me out of Frio now they've got me in. I guess you're as wise to that as I am. Best thing you can do is to be away from home when they call to-night. Hit the trail, sheriff, while it's open."

The sheriff grunted, and went back into his office. He felt that the Kid's words were true; but he had no intention of hitting the trail. He had his duty to do, and his duty was to defend his prisoner. But as he sat in his office, and listened to the roar of the mob surging round the Red Dog, it was borne in upon his mind that, in spite of him, that night would see the end of the Rio Kid's life-trail.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Lynchers!

FROM the locked and barred room that held the Rio Kid, as darkness deepened on the valley of the Pecos, came a tuneful whistle. Sheriff Watson, tramping, with a knitted brow, in the passage outside, frowned and wondered. The plaza was crowded with an ever-growing mob, and the roar of voices, the crackling of revolvers recklessly fired in the air, was incessant. Yet the Kid was whistling cheerfully a Spanish fandango tune, as if he had no care on his mind.

The sheriff unbarred the door at last and threw it open. From the shadows a mocking face looked at him.

"Say, sheriff, you're sure looking

troubled," said the Kid. "They'll be here soon. You want to hit the trail?"

"Oh, cut it out, Kid!" growled the sheriff.

"If you don't stand for a necktie party, old hoss, Frio will want a new sheriff to-morrow," grinned the Kid. "Those hombres mean business, and they'll shoot if you stop them."

"I guess I know that."

"It's you for the long trail, if you pull the trigger," said the Kid.

"What's the use, sheriff?"

"They won't touch you s'long as a bullet is left in my Colt," granted Watson. "They're sure wild to get you, Kid. Even the Double Bar men, what you worked with once—the whole outfit's in town, and yelling for you!"

The Kid's lip curled.

"What have I done to them?" he said. "I've always left the Double Bar alone. It's Old Man Dawney at the bottom of it; he wants to get clear of me."

The sheriff nodded.

"I allow it's that," he assented; "and it's queer, too. You saved Mr. Dawney from the rustlers when they had him by the short hairs. But for them you wouldn't be here. I don't figure we should have got you, when we trailed you in the hills, if you hadn't been wounded. But Old Man Dawney chipped in and asked me to let up on you, Kid. Now his whole outfit's yelling for your blood. They're the wildest of the lot."

The Kid's face hardened in the shadows.

He knew that. His old comrades of the Double Bar were the wildest in the lynch crowd.

Yet in all his wild deeds since he had left the Double Bar he had done them no harm. He had warned Bud Wash when the brand blotters were lifting the Double Bar steers; he had risked his life to rescue Old Man Dawney from the Black Sack crowd. Only the wound he had received in that desperate fight had brought him into the hands of the law. The Kid's face was hard and bitter as he thought of it.

"Old Man Dawney's a hard case, sheriff," he said. "He boosted me off the Double Bar, long ago, for no reason. He put 'thief' to my name in all the cow country, and never listened to a word I had to say. And the whole outfit followed his lead. And now they want to string me up. Sheriff, let me have my guns back."

Watson shook his head.

"I guess your guns are in safe keeping, Kid," he said. "They won't get you till they get me first."

"That sure won't take them long, when they get going," said the Kid. "Where's your posse, sheriff?"

Watson shrugged his shoulders.

"You're alone here?"

"Yep."

"Even the gaoler's lit out?"

"Yep."

The Kid laughed.

"He's got sense," he said. "Give me my guns, sheriff, and light out yourself. You're throwin' it away."

But Watson shook his head again.

"Hark!" said the Kid. "You can hear them! They're coming, sheriff!"

The sheriff was examining his revolvers. His face was hard and grim and determined.

The roar from the plaza was deafening now.

Darkness had fallen upon Frio. Across the plaza the naphtha lamps of the Red Dog flared and glared into the night. Cowpunchers rode up and down the rugged streets, with a wild rattle

of hoofs and harness, loosing off incessant shots. The Frio mob was working itself up into a fury—working up its courage to rush the calaboose, in spite of the grim and resolute man who stood on guard there. Not a man of the sheriff's posse had joined him to defend the calaboose. Some of them, indeed, were in the mob that roared round the lumber building. In all Frio there was only Sheriff Watson to stand between the captured Kid and the rope of Judge Lynch, but he stood like a rock of the sierra.

"Lynch him!"

It was a deafening roar.

The sheriff stepped to the little barred window and stared grimly out. The Kid sat on the edge of the plank bed and whistled again, a merry fandango tune.

"That's Buck Hawk," muttered the sheriff, as his eyes fell on a burly, powerful man who was mounted on a barrel outside the Red Dog, haranguing the crowd. "I guess he's the king-pin in this business. I guess he will get his first."

Buck Hawk's powerful voice came ringing across the plaza.

"Have him out! And if the sheriff chips in, string him up, too, along with the Kid!"

There was a roar of assent.

Hawk waved a revolver in the air.

"Foller me, boys!" he roared.

"Who's for Judge Lynch?"

Another roar.

"Lynch him!"

"That's the music!" shouted Bud Wash. "Have him out of the calaboose!"

"Have the Kid out!" yelled Tex.

The sheriff gritted his teeth.

From the flaring lights of the Red Dog the whole mob surged across the plaza towards the calaboose. And this time, as the sheriff knew, they would not be stopped. He had seen lynch crowds before.

He stepped back from the window.

"Kid!"

The Kid ceased to whistle.

"They're coming," said the sheriff.

"Keep where you are, Kid. No hombre in that caboodle will get into this room while I'm alive. I guess that's all I can do."

"Cut it out, sheriff," drawled the Kid. "What's the good?"

"That's my business."

Crash!

It was a thundering blow on the door of the calaboose. It was followed by a roar of voices.

"Sheriff!"

"Sheriff Watson!"

"Where's he hiding?" roared Buck Hawk. "Show yourself, sheriff. You let us in, or this door goes to blazes, pronto!"

Crash, crash!

The sheriff stood in the doorway of the Kid's cell. The passage ran past the cell to the door of the calaboose. The keen edge of an axe was already glittering through the wood.

Crash!

The door shook and groaned.

Under the heavy blows of the axe, and the pressure of the mob, it gave at last, and flew into pieces.

The mob of lynchers, with Buck Hawk at their head, swarmed into the calaboose.

The sheriff's gun came up. His steady eye glittered over the levelled barrel.

"Halt thar!"

The mob surged to a halt. In his cell behind the sheriff the Rio Kid was whistling a fandango again, with never a quaver.

"Back, you coyotes!" growled the

sheriff. "You, Hawk, put 'em up. You pesky gunman, it's you for the long trail if you take another step!"

"Let up, sheriff!" rapped out the gunman. "We don't want to hurt you; we want the Rio Kid."

"Lynch him!"

"I guess you'll hurt me first, and somebody else will get hurt, too," granted the sheriff. "Back, I tell you!"

"We want the Kid!"

"You want ten years in the pen, you Hawk!" jeered the sheriff. "I guess I remember the Kid belting you with a trail-rope for ill-using a horse. Is that why you want him?"

The gunman gritted his teeth.

"Stand aside, sheriff!"

"Not a step!"

"Foller on, boys!" yelled Hawk.

And he rushed on, firing as he came. But the sheriff pulled trigger first. There was a fearful yell, that rang above the roar of the mob, and Buck Hawk spun over and crashed on the floor.

With a gasping breath the mob surged back. For a tense moment they hung, glaring at the sheriff and his levelled gun, with the groaning gunman sprawling between. Then there was a deafening roar, and a score of guns were thrust forward.

A moment more and the calaboose of Frio would have rung and echoed to a desperate fight—one determined man against a savage mob. But in that moment the sheriff's gun-hand was suddenly forced up, as his arm was grasped from behind. And the Rio Kid's voice called coolly:

"All right for you-uns! Pronto!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Friends or Foes?

SHERIFF WATSON struggled savagely and desperately.

But the Rio Kid held him fast, and the Kid's muscles were of steel. His gun was forced above his shoulder; an impotent bullet went tearing through the wooden roof of the calaboose. A second more, and the Kid had knocked the gun from his hand.

"Kid!" panted the sheriff. "You mad gink! Let me go!"

The Rio Kid grinned in his face.

"What's the good, sheriff? Your life's worth savin'!"

"Let me go!" roared the sheriff.

But it was too late.

The lynchers came on with a desperate rush. Hands were laid on the sheriff on all sides. The Kid laughed and let him go, and stepped back into the cell. The sheriff, still struggling furiously, was dragged out into the passage; and at the same time three or four pairs of hands were laid on the Rio Kid.

"I guess this lets you out, Kid!"

Bud Wash, the foreman of the Double Bar, laid his sinewy hands on the Rio Kid.

"Correct!" assented the Kid. "No need to be rough, gents; I'm coming like a lamb!"

In the passage, the sheriff was still struggling and spitting out curses. Fatty Tick, grinning, drew a trail-rope round him.

"You're sure out of this deal, sheriff," grinned the cook of the Double Bar. "I guess I'm going to tic you up for your own sake, sheriff. You won't do yourself any harm with your hands tied."

Three or four cowpunchers were grasping the sheriff, and the Double Bar cook bound his hands together, and then his ankles. Then the sheriff, panting with rage, was cast aside, helpless.

Round the Rio Kid the lynchers

gathered, with triumphant faces. He made no resistance, and the cool smile never left his face. The Kid knew how to take his gruel with a stiff upper lip.

Bud Wash bound his hands behind him. Tex looped the end of a riata round his neck.

There was a roar from the mob outside.

"Bring him out!"

"Let's see the Kid!"

"Get going, Kid, pronto!" rapped out the foreman of the Double Bar.

The Kid eyed them. Bud Wash held his right arm. Tex gripped his left. Round him the Frio men thronged and surged. Within the calaboose Buck Hawk, the gunman, lay groaning unhedged—as unhedged as the sheriff, who was streaming lurid "cuss-words" at the lynch-crowd.

There was a swarming at the Kid, but Bud Wash shoved back the too eager.

"Easy, gents—easy!" said the burly foreman of the Double Bar. "I guess

indifference. The men he had known on the ranch where once his home had been seemed keenest to drag him to the rope that was to end his trail. They packed round him, and every man had a gun in his hand; and the mob had let them take the lead in the affair.

Past the Red Dog saloon they marched the Kid. The moon was coming up, and a silvery radiance mingled with the glare of the naphthalamps. Down Main Street, towards the open plain the lynchers marched the



"VISITORS" FOR THE KID! Under the heavy blows of the axe, and the pressure of the mob, the door gave at last and flew into pieces. The mob of lynchers swarmed into the calaboose. "Where's the kid!" The Sheriff's gun came up. "Halt thar!" he growled. (See Chapter 2.)

"I guess I'm at your service, gents!" drawled the Kid. "Pleased to meet you all—more pleased if I'd had my guns!"

He walked out of the cell in the midst of the lynchers. He gave the bound sheriff a smile in passing.

"So-long, sheriff! I guess I've saved your life! You'll be glad to-morrow, sheriff!"

"You fool, Kid!" panted Watson. "I guess you're plumb loco!"

The Kid grinned.

"You'd have been over the range by this time, sheriff, if I hadn't hooked your gun away!" he said. "What was the use?"

And the Kid, his head erect and his face smiling, walked out of the calaboose in the grasp of many hands.

The sheriff dragged wildly at his bonds. But the trail-rope held him fast, and the Kid disappeared from his eyes as he lay struggling on the floor.

Outside the calaboose a thunderous roar greeted the appearance of the Rio Kid.

"Hyer he is!"

"Lynch him!"

we're doing this thing in order! Who's got the rope?"

"Here you are, Bud!" grinned Mezal Pete, of the Double Bar.

"Rope all ready on the Kid's neck!"

"This way!" said Bud.

"Bring him over to the Red Dog!" roared five or six voices. "Lynch him over the doorway!"

"Quit that!" snapped Bud. "He's goin' up on a tree! Make way, you hombres!"

The Rio Kid was marched forward through the roaring crowd.

He walked steadily and coolly. He noted that the Double Bar men were closing round him, keeping the Frio crowd off from close quarters. They packed him like a guard as he crossed the plaza. Men from other ranches—the Circle Cross, the Bar-O, the Golden West, and many more, were shouting in the crowd, along with the Frio townsmen, the loungers and gunmen of the saloons. But the Double Bar crowd were more than twenty strong, and they kept together. It surprised the Kid, though he took it with his usual cool

Kid, to where tall trees nodded in the moon glimmer.

"You're wastin' time, hombres!" said the Kid. "But I'm enjoying this little paseo with my old pards."

"Lynch him!"

The mob poured out of the town, and stopped at the clump of trees by the side of the rugged trail.

There the Kid was halted under a high horizontal branch.

Tex threw the end of the lasso over the branch, and caught it as it came down. The riata tautened, and the noose gave the Rio Kid's chin a sharp jerk.

"Up with him!"

"Pronto, pards!" crawled the Kid.

"The gents are gettin' impatient for the show."

"You're a cool little cuss, Kid!" grinned Tex.

The Kid smiled, with a glint of fire in his eyes.

"If I had a hand loose and a gun in it," he sighed, "I guess some of these ginks would be hittin' it for home, instead of howling like a pack of coyotes!"

But the game's up, and I guess I'm not squealin'. Put her through!"

"Up with him!" roared the Frio mob.

"Bring the boss!" shouted Bud Wash. And a Double Bar puncher came pushing through the crowd, leading a grey mustang.

The Kid's face changed.

It was his own mustang that he had not seen since he had left it free in the Hueca hills, the day he had fallen into the grip of the Frio sheriff and his posse. The mustang whinnied softly as he recognised his master, and thrust a soft muzzle against him. The Kid's face, hitherto cool and recklessly indifferent, worked.

"You could have left that out, Bud," he muttered. "I guess you might have scared up any old cayuse in the burg. You ain't a white man, Bud, to play a trick like this."

Bud Wash made no answer. From the crowd surging round the doomed Kid and the Double Bar punchers came a yell. They recognised the Kid's well-known horse, and yelled again as he was hoisted into the saddle.

Bud Wash lifted the lithe figure of the Kid into the saddle. The Kid's face was a little whiter now; the sight of his horse, the one creature he loved in all Texas, had shaken him for the moment.

But as Bud was placing him in the saddle, he whispered, and his whisper electrified the Kid.

"Watch out, Kid! When you hear my gat, ride hell-for-leather for the Double Bar."

The Kid's cool brain swam for a moment.

The next, Bud Wash stepped back. He waved his hand, with his gat in it, driving back the eager crowd.

"Clear back, gents! Give the Kid room."

There was a laugh from some of the lynchers.

"Give him room to swing."

The Kid sat his mustang like a statue. The Double Bar foreman's whisper was still in his ears; hope, in the hour of shadow and death, ran through his veins like wine.

His hands were bound behind his back; but that mattered little to a rider like the Kid. Often had he guided his horse only with a pressure of the knees in a wild crowd of steers. His feet were in the stirrups; he could ride—he would ride, if there was a chance. But the bridle was held by Tex, to lead the mustang from under the Kid as soon as the rope was pulled taut and to leave him swinging.

The mob backed away, breathing hard as they watched.

"I'm givin' the word!" shouted Bud Wash. "When this gat goes, drive on that cayuse, Tex."

"You bet."

A puncher pulled at the rope to tauten it. The Kid caught his breath as he felt the noose slipping. The knot was not tied—it was a trick. He understood at last, but his face gave no sign. Had the Frio mob understood, a hundred guns were ready to riddle the Kid with bullets before he could escape.

But the Kid knew.

He knew why the Double Bar men had taken the lead in the lynching now. He knew that as soon as the mustang started, the noose would slip from his neck, leaving him free.

His heart beat.

"She goes!" roared Bud.

He lifted his gat high.

Bang!

The roar of the .45 was followed by the rush of the mustang, led onward by Tex's grip on the bridle.

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The next instant the Kid should have been swinging at the end of the rope over the branch.

But the loose loop slipped from his neck, and he went on with the mustang. Tex released the bridle, and struck the animal a quick blow with his quirt. The mustang leaped forward into the crowd.

There was a wild swaying away from bared teeth and lashing hoofs, as the mustang plunged into the mob. Wild yells and shouts rose on all sides.

"Shoot, you ginks, shoot!" roared Bud Wash, and his own revolver barked out bullets.

But the Kid, though the lead whistled close, knew that none would hit him. He drove on the mustang with his knees, and the horse fairly tore through the swaying, surging crowd, kicking and plunging and snapping. In a few seconds he was through, and the Rio Kid was riding for his life under the dim gleam of the moon.

He left a roaring mob behind him, yelling, raving, loosing off shots. The Frio crowd did not yet understand the trick that had been played, and how their victim had been snatched from them, under their eyes, by the Double Bar outfit. Bud Wash was roaring for his horse, and the Double Bar men were the first in the saddle to pursue the escaping Kid. Behind them came a crowd of Frio men who had got at their horses. But the Double Bar men had had their bronchos near at hand in readiness, and they had a good start of the Frio crowd, and were close behind the Kid.

The Rio Kid rode hard.

Behind him the roar of Frio died down; but he heard the thudding of rapid hoof-beats.

He laughed aloud as he rode.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Back to the Double Bar!

"PULL in, Kid!"

It was the hoarse voice of Bud Wash shouting behind.

A pressure of the Kid's knee's, and the grey mustang slackened speed.

With a shout and a clatter of hoofs, the Double Bar outfit rode up and surrounded the Kid.

Bud grinned at the Kid's bright face.

"Hyer you are, you young gink. I

guess it was a close thing—but we've pulled it off."

The Double Bar punchers cheered wildly, waving their Stetsons.

"You had me beat, Bud," said the Kid. "I'd never have figured it out that this was the game. I reckoned you was all keen on getting me strung up—keener than the hombres in Frio."

The Double Bar foreman chuckled.

"I guess there wasn't any other way, Kid. We couldn't have hooked you out of the calaboose without fighting all Frio. But I reckon as soon as they started talking of Judge Lynch it was easy going. Them ginks in Frio don't savvy yet, but they've got it coming."

He slid his knife across the rope that fastened the Kid's arms, and freed him. The Rio Kid reached for his reins.

It was like a dream to him; only minutes could be counted back to the moment when he had been a helpless victim in the grip of the lynchers, and now he was riding on the open plain under the stars, with his mustang between his knees, free and light of heart.

Bud Walsh gave an anxious glance back.

Horsemens were pushing on from Frio. A hundred men or more had followed the Double Bar punchers in pursuit of the Kid.

"This-a-way!" muttered Bud, and he turned off the trail, and the punchers rode across the open plain.

"Where are we going, Bud?" asked the Kid.

"To the Double Bar, I reckon."

"You'll get fired for this, Bud."

"Guess again," grinned the foreman.

"Old Man Dawney will fire you, as sure as shooting," said the Kid. "He won't stand for me getting away with it this-a-way, Bud."

"Forget it, Kid," said Bud Wash.

"Do you figure it out we'd have woke up Frio without orders from the boss?"

The Kid started violently.

"Old Man Dawney's orders?" he exclaimed.

"Old Man Dawney hasn't forgot that you hooked him away from the rustlers, Kid. Didn't he tell you, when you was brought into Frio, that he was standing by you?"

The Kid nodded, still amazed.

"I guess it was Old Man Dawney put this up," said Tex. "Not that we'd have let those ginks lynch a feller what had run with the Double Bar outfit. But the boss planned it all. We'd have had to fight the hull town to get you out of the calaboose. But Old Man Dawney knew. He put us up to takin' the lead in the lynching. Savve?"

"And I reckoned—" muttered the Kid.

"Course you did," said Bud Wash. "If we'd let out what we'd reely come for we'd be fighting all Frio at this blessed minute. But bein' as we was yelling for your blood, they gave us the lead. Pull in here for a spell, you-uns."

The punchers rode into a shadowy mottle and drew rein under the trees. Far in the distance, they listened to galloping hoofs. The pursuit from Frio swept away under the stars, and the galloping died into silence. Bud Wash chuckled grimly.

"I guess those ginks have gone," he said. "They've missed us in the dark. But it was sure a close thing."

The punchers resumed their ride, the Kid in the midst of the hilarious crowd of horsemen. Across the shadowy plains they were riding for the Double Bar Ranch.

THE END.

(Boys! There's a thrill in every line of next week's roaring tale of the Rio Kid, entitled: "The Whip Hand!")

THE MAGICAL CUP!



All about Saturday's Cup-ties in the Fifth Round and who should win. See this week's

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