

THE RIO KID AT BAY! One desperate boy against a hundred fierce men—that's the situation in which the Rio Kid finds himself as a result of refusing to sell his gold mine to a ruthless company. But the Kid is not daunted by the odds, hopeless as they seem!

The RIO KID *By* Ralph Redway



ANOTHER ROARING WESTERN TALE, STARRING THE RIO KID, THE BOY OUTLAW!

This Week:

"FACING THE MUSIC!"

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
The Strike at Gold Brick!

THE full round moon sailed high over the Gila Mountains and the Red Desert of Arizona.

It was long past midnight, but no one slumbered in the camp of Gold Brick.

The naphtha lamps of the Gilt-Edge Saloon threw up a lurid light against the silver glimmer of the moon.

The saloon was swarming with excited men—growing more and more excited as the potent fire-water circulated.

Outside the building was another swarm, gathered round an upturned barrel, upon which stood an impassioned orator, in a red shirt, with a Stetson hat on the back of his head.

Across the wide, unpaved, rugged street stood the office and buildings of the Gambusino Mine, enclosed by fence and gate.

Within the gate was the Rio Kid, looking across at the flare of the saloon and the surging crowd, listening to the roar of voices, that grew every moment louder and more threatening.

There was a grim expression on the Kid's face.

He stood in silence, watching.

No man in Gold Brick was thinking of sleep that night—and least of all the Rio Kid, owner of the Gambusino Mine.

There was a step behind the Kid, and Jud Clay, the foreman of the mine.

THE POPULAR.—No. 462.

joined him, with a Winchester under his arm.

He looked over the gate and knitted his brows.

"I guess they won't be long now," he said.

The Kid nodded.

"Any minute, I reckon," he drawled.

"You're standing them off, Mr. Carfax?"

"You bet!"

"You don't reckon you'll get away with it?"

The Kid shrugged his shoulders.

"Quien sabe?" he said carelessly. "I guess no man puts a hoof on my ground without walking over my gun first! But look here, Jud, this isn't your rookus. If you're a wise man you'll hop over the fence while there's time, and go for your cayuse and vamoose the ranch."

Jud shook his head without replying.

A roar from the crowd in the distance came loud and threatening.

"Burn 'em out!"

There was a movement of the swarm towards the mine, and the Rio Kid's hands dropped on his guns.

But the attack did not come yet.

"I guess they know there'll be shoot-in'," drawled the Kid. "They'll shift some more tanglefoot before they wade in, to get their courage up. I sure hope that galoot Carter will be in the lead!"

"He sure won't!" said Jud. "He's paid by Jas Drew, in Los Pinos, to stir up trouble; but I guess he ain't looking for hot lead. You won't see him when the rookus begins."

"I guess not!" sighed the Kid.

He continued to watch. Big Hank Carter was still addressing the mob from the top of the barrel. The Kid could have "got" him easily enough then, in the flare of light from the Gilt-Edge, and he was tempted to put an end to the paid agitator's eloquence with a bullet. But he would not be the first to pull trigger in the trouble that was coming.

And it was coming fast now.

Fifty men in Gold Brick had been on the Kid's pay-roll at the Gambusino Mine, and they were on strike—and a strike in a Western mining-camp does not run on peaceable lines. But in the

crowd in front of the Gilt-Edge there were not only the strikers, but a hundred more men. All the loafers and riff-raff that had drifted into the new mining-camp had gathered there in the hope of loot if the mine was attacked, and to share in the bootleg whisky that was freely circulating. And there was a crowd of strangers in the camp—men from Los Pinos—sympathisers with the strikers, as they gave it out. But the Rio Kid knew well enough that they had been sent into the camp by Jas Drew, the agent of the Arizona Consolidated Gold-Mining Co. of Tombstone. He recognised some of them—Bad Starbuck, the gunman, with his arm in a sling; Two-gun Peters, with a bandaged hand—both of whom had scores to settle with the boy puncher who owned the Gambusino Mine.

"I guess you won't think I'm taking water, Mr. Carfax," said Jud Clay slowly. "But when they come, the game's up. If there's shooting, they won't be satisfied with burning the mine office. It will mean lynching." He paused. "Jas Drew has worked the whole riffle, and I reckon it's not too late for you to get him to call it off. The Arizona Con sure mean to get hold of this mine, and they've planted this on you because you won't sell. I guess if you got word to Drew even now he would call off those bulldozers and make it a trade."

"Forget it, feller!" said the Kid lightly. "I'm not selling the mine to the Arizona Consolidated, or any other gang of gold-squeezers. And I guess Drew wouldn't come to terms, either—since I quitted him before all Los Pinos in the Red-Eye over there. He's sure got it in for me now, personal, as well as for his company. Forget it!"

The foreman was silent.

"Look at that crew," went on the Kid. "Fifty men are on strike here, and there's a hundred and fifty in that caboodle. Loafers and gunmen, most of them—and they're paid for their trouble. Somebody's paying for the bootleg stuff that's flowing like water yonder. I guess this rookus is costing the Arizona Con a heap of dollars. They figure on getting it back out of my bonanza."

The Kid's eyes gleamed. "Why, feller, if they beat us to it, and there's no other way of stalling them off, I guess I'll blow up the mine, and half the camp with it!"

He looked at Jud.

"I mean that, feller," he said quietly. "If we go up, the mine goes up, with every stick of dynamite we've got on hand. I guess I've cached the dynamite in the tunnel ready-enough to blow Gold Brick half-way across the desert to Mexico. That's the programme, Jud; and if you want to pull out before the band plays, I reckon you'll show boss-sense."

Jud's eyes gleamed.

"I guess I'm with you all the way," he answered.

"Here they come!"

There was a stirring in the crowd again. The men inside the saloon poured out, joining the crowd who surrounded the red-shirted orator on the barrel. Fists were shaken at the gate where the Rio Kid stood with Jud, and five or six revolvers barked into the air. There was a general forward movement, and Jud lifted his Winchester. But even yet it was not the attack. The mob started across the wide street towards the mine; but Big Hank Carter led the way, with a handkerchief tied to a barrel-stave by way of a flag of truce. And the mob halted and swayed within a dozen feet of the gate, while their leader waved the flag.

"Kid Carfax!" he roared.

"Here!" answered the Rio Kid coolly.

"Show yourself, if you ain't afraid!" shouted Dick Roper.

The Kid stood on a bench inside the gate and looked over the top, with a cool, contemptuous face.

"I guess I'm to home, fellers!" he drawled. "I'll tell a man you're keeping me awake late with your darned jamboree! Anythin' wanted?"

And the roar died away to a murmur as the mob stared at the cool, handsome face that looked scornfully and fearlessly over the gate.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Attack on the Mine!

THE Rio Kid waited.

More than a hundred excited men faced him, all of them armed. At any moment some excited man might have loosed off a bullet, but the Kid seemed as unconscious of danger as of fear.

Big Hank, catching the gleaming eye of the Kid fixed on him, made a gesture with his white flag.

"This flyer is a flag of truce, Mr. Carfax," he hastened to say.

"If you want to chew the rag, Carter, you can sure get on with it," said the Kid. "What's the news?"

"The men who are on strike at this mine have elected me leader—"

"And that gang of gunmen from Los Pinos?" jeered the Kid. "What's their trouble?"

"I've come to talk turkey to you, Mr. Carfax. The boys here will give you a chance to come to terms."

"Let 'em wait till I ask for it," suggested the Kid. "My terms are the same as before—the men can sign on to-morrow, if they like. But not you, big Hank, or that other darned fire-bug, Roper. You can go back to Jas Drew in Los Pinos, and tell him you're fired from here!"

"Then you ain't coming to terms?" roared Carter.

"Burn him out!" yelled a dozen voices.

The Kid laughed.

"There'll be some shooting before you

burn me out, you pesky coyotes!" he said. "But you're sure welcome to try."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Big Hank, as several of his followers grasped guns. The agitator did not want the shooting to begin while he was in the front rank. "Flag of truce, boys! We've come here to give the man a chance. Now, you listen to me, Kid Carfax. First of all, you've got to fire Jud Clay—"

"Cut it out!" snapped the Kid. "I sure know that this game is being worked by Jas Drew from Los Pinos, and I might fire Jud a dozen times, and it would begin again. How much is Jas paying you for fooling those suckers, Carter?"

Big Hank did not answer that question.

"Next," he went on, "every man goes back to his job. This here crowd don't stand for victimisation."

The Kid's lip curled.

"Forget it," he answered.

"If you refuse—"

"Take it as read," suggested the Kid.

"Then I'll tell you what this crowd is going to do," roared Carter. "We're going to take possession of the mine, and ride that Jud outer camp on a rail!"

"Pack a gun when you start, old boss. You'll want one."

"And if there's shooting," said Carter, "we'll string up on a tree any galoot that burns powder."

"You want to rope in that galoot first," said the Kid. "I'm sure waiting for you to quit chewing the rag and come down to cases."

"It's lynching if you shoot!" shouted Roper.

"Oh, sucks!" jeered the Kid.

There was a roar.

"Have him out!"

"I guess I've entered to your chin-wag," said the Kid. "Now, you listen to me. I give you one minute to get back across the street. After that I begin to burn powder. Now, pronto!"

And the Kid lifted his guns.

There was a swaying in the crowd as the two Colts looked over the gate, the Kid's gleaming eyes behind them. Guns were grasped on all sides.

"Drop your flag of truce, and come on, Big Hank!" invited the Kid.

"You're drawing the Arizona Cent's pay for stirring up this rookus. Come on and earn it, you darned yellow coyote!" Bang!

Two-gun Peters lifted a gun to fire at the handsome face over the gate. But nothing escaped the Kid's keen eye. He fired before the gunman could get a bead, and Two-gun Peters went down with a crash, his revolver exploding as he fell, and wounding a man beside him. The Kid stepped down.

He was only in time, for a roar of firing broke out, and bullets crashed on the gate and whizzed over it.

"Peters has got his!" exclaimed Big Hank, staring down at the gunman from Los Pinos. "Boys, that darned fire-bug from Texas has shot up Peters! Lynch him!"

"Lynch him!" rose a roar.

There was a wild and furious rush at the gate. The whole mob rushed to the attack.

"Have him out!"

"Lynch him!"

"Break in the gate!"

Crash, crash, crash!

Miners' picks and axes rang on the pinewood gate.

"I guess the trouble's coming, old pard," drawled the Rio Kid, as he walked across to the mine office. "We can't hold the gate. Get in here."

The gate was already giving, and the long fence that surrounded the mine enclosure was too extensive to be held against an attack in numbers. At various points, armed men were clambering over it, without waiting for the gate to fall.

The Kid and his foreman withdrew into the mine office—a log building close to the mouth of the deep adit of the mine. There was no shaft, sunk at the Gambusino. A deep tunnel ran horizontally into the canyon-side. That tunnel was a last refuge for the Kid and his comrade if the mob rished the mine buildings. Already, deep in the tunnel, the Kid had stacked food and water, and the supply of dynamite that was used for blasting the rocks. He was prepared for a fight to the death, if it came to that; but he was not prepared for surrender, whatever might happen.

The gate fell crashing, and the mob rushed into the enclosure. Men were dropping inside the fence on all sides. Big Hank Carter was not to the fore now; he had done his work, and he was prudently keeping back from the storm he had raised. From the shattered windows of the mine office, the Kid watched the crowd, gun in hand. But he hesitated to shoot.

The yard swarmed with strikers; but, madly excited and vengeful as they were, he knew they were merely tools in the hands of his enemies, worked up to this pitch of fury for purposes of which they knew nothing. Reckless, misguided men were not the targets the Kid desired for the wanton-butted guns he gripped in his hands. But as Dick Roper came unwillingly into the line of fire, swept on by a rush of the miners, the Kid pulled trigger, and Roper went spinning over with a bullet through his chest.

"Have them out!" came a wild roar.

The mine office was surrounded—ferce blows shook doors and windows. The time of hesitation was past. The Gambusino miners were mixed and mingled with the hired gunmen from Los Pinos, and life and death were in the balance. Once that wild mob laid hands on the Rio Kid, lynch law would do the rest. And the Kid, reluctantly, but coolly, and with deadly aim, pumped bullets from his six-guns into the mob that roared and surged round the log buildings, and wild yells and shrieks and heavy falls followed.

From one window Jud Clay was pumping bullets from his Winchester; from another, the Kid's six-guns roared, and the hot lead poured through the mob. Bullets smashed and crashed on the walls; but the thick logs stopped them.

The beating on the door of the mine office ceased; there was a backward surge of the mob. The fire was too hot for them, and they swayed and backed, and at last broke and dashed for cover, leaving a dozen men sprawling on the ground.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

In the Tunnel!

"TURN him out!"

"Fire the office!"

"Lynch him!"

The attack had stopped for the moment; but blood was at boiling-point now. The enraged mob, more enraged than ever, had no thought of retreat. They crouched in cover behind fences and wagons and everything that could screen them from bullets, at the same time keeping up a heavy fire on the mine office. Over the wild scene the moon sailed bright as silver, in a dark blue sky fleecy with light clouds.

From a little distance a flare of dancing flame rose wildly in the air. The Kid's frame house had been set on fire and was burning like a torch. And the mob were yelling to one another to fire the mine-office. The scene was now a carnival of hatred and fury.

"I guess they'll beat us to it, Jud," drawled the Kid. "They've got gasoline yonder."

"It's us for the tunnel!" muttered the foreman.

"Sure!"

"Your shebang has sure gone up, Mr. Carfax," said Jud, staring through a chink in a shutter at the blaze of the burning frame house.

"Let it go up," said the Kid indifferently. "I guess I'll get another shebang run up in short order, if we pull out of this. They sure won't be long in firing these logs, Jud."

There was a swishing in the air. From the cover of a stack of overturned mine-wagons, a bunch of strikers were pumping petrol, and the inflammable fluid dropped in a shower over the log building at the mouth of the tunnel.

It sounded almost like rain on the roof to the Kid and Jud as they listened.

"When they get a match to that, there will sure be some blaze," grinned the Kid.

A torch, soaked in petrol and lighted, soared through the air, describing an arc of flame.

It landed fairly on the roof of the mine office.

There was a wild rush of flame, soaring to the sky like a pillar of fire.

Fierce crackling came from the logs and planks; flame and sparks and smoke filled the air.

"I guess this is where we git!" remarked the Rio Kid coolly.

Bullets were crashing into the burning building; but the smoke and the flames and the fierce blaze of heat prevented a rush. The Kid quietly unbarred the door that gave on to the mine tunnel, and passed through, followed by Jud. He stopped to light a mine lamp—the tunnel was black as pitch. Behind them the fire roared and crackled, the roof of the mine office falling in amid streams of sparks. The Kid and Jud stumbled along the rails on which the ore trucks ran in the tunnel. Idle trucks were still standing on the rails, some of them loaded with ore ready for shipment in the wagons that went down the canyon to the stamp mills at Los Pinos.

At a good distance from the mouth of the tunnel the Rio Kid and Jud stacked ore trucks across the way, forming a barricade that would easily have stopped any rush of the crowd into the tunnel.

"I guess we can hold the mine till the cows come home, if we want," the Kid remarked. "I reckon those jaspers will cool down in the morning, Jud. I'm for bedding down."

The Kid rolled himself in his blankets and lay down to rest.

Jud stared at him in the glimmer of the miner's lamp.

The Kid's eyes closed, and in a few minutes he was sleeping peacefully. At the mouth of the tunnel the mine building, fence, and gates were going up in smoke and flame; and through the roar of the fire came the intermittent crackling of revolvers. The din was deafening; but it did not disturb the Rio Kid. But there was no sleep for Jud; his nerves were not of tempered steel like the Kid's.

He waited and watched in the

glimmer of the lamp, the rifle across his knees.

No attack came on the tunnel.

The blaze of the fire at the mouth of the tunnel kept the enemy off. Until it died down they could not follow on; and it was not likely to die down until every stick of timber was consumed to ashes.

The last hours of the wild night wore away.

Dawn was creeping over the Golden Canyon, when the fire died at last, and all the woodwork at the mouth of the tunnel had been reduced to smouldering, smoking ashes.

By that time many of the crowd had withdrawn, some tired out with the wild excitement of the night, others overcome by the "hooch" liquor that had been liberally served out at the Gilt-Edge.

As the sun rose higher, and a glimmer of daylight penetrated into the mine, the Kid opened his eyes and yawned.

He grinned cheerily at Jud.

"You ain't slept?"

"Nope."

"I guess you'd better snooze a spell while I keep an eye open for those rubes. You'll want it."

Jud nodded, and lay down on his blankets.

The Kid extinguished the lamp. Now that the timber was burned away, the great cavity in the hillside which was the mouth of the mine, was open and unsheltered, open to the sun and wind, and to attack.

Only a faint glimmer of light penetrated as far as the spot where the tunnel was barred with overturned ore trucks.

The Kid watched coolly.

If the enemy came on they would be in the full light, under his fire, and he would have undertaken to hold such a position against an army, so long as his cartridges held out. He had not the faintest misgiving that the barricade in the tunnel could be rushed. Neither could the defenders of the mine be starved out; the Kid had taken precautions against that. An attack in force was likely to cost the assailants so dear, that he had little expectation of it.

He wondered what the next move would be. The strikers had done their worst; they had wreaked their fury on the Kid's property. And the Kid was out of their reach; and they were very unlikely to sit down before the tunnel

to besiege him for days—or for weeks. The strikers, the Kid sagely opined, would throw the game up; but it was quite otherwise with the gang of gunmen who were backing them up. The men who were in the pay of the Arizona Consolidated were there to "get" the Kid, and they were sure not to let up. But the Kid, as he ate a cheery breakfast of cold flapjacks, washed down by cool water, wondered when and how they would come down to business.

It was close on noon before he knew. Then a shouting voice reverberated along the tunnel from the entrance.

"Say, Mr. Carfax!"

"Hallo!" chirruped the Kid.

"You don't want to burn powder—it's McCoy speaking—town marshal of Los Pinos."

A burly figure appeared in the opening of the tunnel.

"I guess I want a word with you, Mr. Carfax."

The Kid eyed him across the barricade.

"You can come on, Mr. McCoy—but come alone."

"Sure!"

And Rube McCoy, town marshal of Los Pinos, strode into the tunnel, and came along the rails to the spot where the barricade stopped him.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Goods on the Kid!

RUBE MCCOY halted, blinking in the dim twilight of the tunnel.

The Rio Kid sat on one of the ore trucks, and gave him a nod and a smile. Jud Clay rose from his blankets and picked up his Winchester. The Kid was not touching a weapon; but his eye was alertly on McCoy, and his hand was within easy reach of a gun.

"Morning, marshal!" he said cheerily. "I guess you heard in Los Pinos that there was a rookus going on here at Gold Brick?"

"I sure did," assented the marshal, eyeing the Kid keenly and curiously. "A good many galoots came loping into town for the doc."

The Kid laughed.

"Yep; I guess some of them must have wanted the doc," he agreed. "And you came over at once to restore order, marshal, and to put down that gang of gunmen who are running my camp."

The Kid smiled as he spoke. He was well aware—as all Los Pinos was aware—that the town marshal was in the pay of the Arizona Consolidated, and performed his duties—or left them unperformed—at the behest of Jas Drew.

"I've sure come to restore order," admitted the marshal. "You're safe under my protection, Mr. Carfax."

"I guess I'm safe under my own," drawled the Kid. "But thanks all the same, feller."

"There's sure been some rookus here," went on McCoy. "A hull crowd of galoots have stopped lead."

"Sure," said the Kid. "I guess you know there was a strike here, and the whole caboodle attacked the mine."

"That isn't how I've heard the story," said McCoy. "The men out there tell me that your side started the shooting."

"But you know better?" suggested the Kid, still smiling.

"Not a heap," answered McCoy. "According to what I hear, a man named Peters got his first pop, and it was you dropped him."

"He was pulling on me, marshal."

"The other galoots didn't see him

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pull," said the marshal. "But if you're giving me the straight goods, you've sure got plenty of witnesses. There was a hundred galoots on the spot, or more."

The Kid's eyes danced with amusement.

"I guess they won't feel like witnessing in my favour, marshal, as they and Peters were all in the gang attacking the mine."

"That's your say-so," said McCoy. "It ain't for me to judge; I guess I'm here to restore order. I want you to come to Los Pinos with me, Mr. Carfax."

"You do?"

"Yep."

"And you want me to hand over my guns?" suggested the Kid.

"Sure."

"And you'll sure see that when I've handed them over, and stepped out of the mine, those galoots don't make a rush and string me up to the branch of a cottonwood?"

"Rely on me, Mr. Carfax, to see that you come to no harm."

"I guess I'd rather rely on my guns," smiled the Kid. "You mightn't be able to keep off a lynch crowd, McCoy, you sure mightn't. Even if you wanted to, feller."

The marshal compressed his lips.

"I guess you savvy, Mr. Carfax, that I represent the law here?" he snapped.

"I sure opined that you represented the Arizona Con," jeered the Kid. "I sure reckoned you was sent here by Jas Drew to get me where he wants me!"

Rube McCoy flushed crimson.

"That sort of talk won't help you, Kid Carfax," he rapped, "I guess I order you, as town marshal of Los Pinos, to hand over your guns and come along. If you fired in self-defence, as you allow, you can sure prove it—the whole camp witnessed the rookus. I've got an affidavit from Hank Carter that you shot down Two-Gun Peters when he was looking on peaceable, you having had some old trouble with him at the Red-Eye in Los Pinos. You've got to answer that charge, Kid Carfax."

The Kid chuckled.

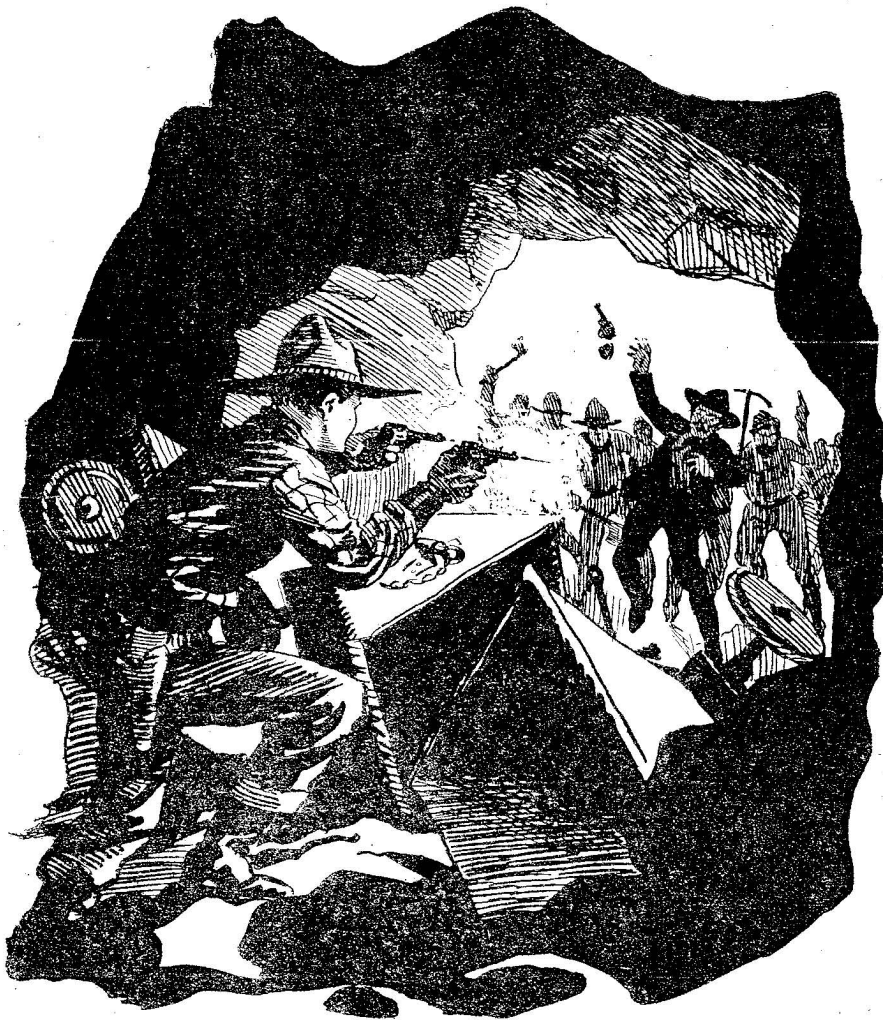
"I sure do admire Jas Drew," he said. "He's some hombre when it comes to laying out a gun-game. If I hadn't burned powder last night I'd have been lynched by that crowd, and the Arizona Con would have snooped up this mine while I was ornamenting the branch of a tree. And if I burned powder I was to be charged with shooting down a galoot and hanged, according to law. I guess all the law there is in Los Pinos is in Jas Drew's pocket, marshal. I allow he's laid it out well. Why, you durned pesky coyote, do you figure that I don't know you're hand-in-glove with Jas Drew, and that you've come over to hook me out of the mine because your rough-necks slipped up on it last night?"

McCoy's eyes glittered.

"That's enough, Kid Carfax! You're my prisoner."

"I guess not!"

"Watch out!" said the marshal of Los



HOLDING THE MINE! There came a sudden rush, and the mouth of the tunnel was black against the sunlight with the crowd of gunmen and strikers. They fired as they came. Bang! Bang! Bang! The Kid's guns rang out from behind the barricade, and bullets tore through the rushing crowd. (See Chapter 5.)

Pinos. "I'm bound to take you, and I promise you protection."

The Kid snapped his fingers in the marshal's face.

"That for you and your protection!" he answered.

"If you don't surrender," said McCoy, in a grinding voice, "I'll swear in every man in the camp as a member of my posse, and if you pull trigger when they come for you, you'll be pulling trigger against the law, Kid Carfax. You want to think first."

"I guess I've answered you," said the Kid contemptuously. "What sort of a sucker do you take me for? If I walk out of this mine with you, and without my guns I guess I shall have about ten seconds before I go up a branch. And you'll tell Los Pinos that you were rushed by a mob and couldn't save me. Forget it, feller!"

The marshal gritted his teeth.

"I give you one hour to come out and surrender," he said. "After that the mine will be entered by my men; and if you pull trigger you'll be an outlaw."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Kid.

That Kid Carfax had been an outlaw on the Rio Grande, in far-off Texas, was unknown to any man in Arizona. The marshal stared at him, puzzled and angered by his amusement.

"You Jud Clay!" McCoy peered over the barricade at the foreman of the mine. "You've backed up your employer, and no galoot is going to blame you for that. But if you back him up any further you'll be breaking the law, and you'll be outlawed along with him. Step out, while the stepping's good."

Jud shook his head.

"That's good advice, Jud," said the Kid soberly. "They've got the goods on me, old-timer—they sure have!"

"It ain't yet too late to sell out to the Con, Mr. Carfax," breathed Jud. "They've got the goods on you, like I warned you they would have."

"I guess I ain't selling."

"You can hold the mine," whispered Jud, "against a mob of strikers and gunmen, yes; but when the marshal's sworn them in they ain't gunmen any more—they're special constables, and if you drop a galoot of them it will be called murder."

"I'm wise to that, Jud."

"It ain't good enough, sir," said the foreman earnestly. "An outlaw can't own a mine and work it—you know that. The mine goes derelict, and the Con will get a grip on it. That's been the

game all along. Take what you can get and step out, Mr. Carfax."

"I guess I'm not selling the mine, Jud. But they're going to make me an outlaw, sure, for sticking to my own property; and I don't want you to be in the soup with me. You walk out pronto. They've nothing against you if you don't back me up, and you can't help me further."

Jud did not answer.

"That's sure good talk, Jud Clay," said the marshal. "I'll see you safe to your horse if you step out."

"You're fired, Jud!" grinned the Kid. "The way things are shaping, I sure don't want a foreman any longer. You're fired, feller! Now step out!"

Jud Clay laid down the Winchester. "I'll stand by you to the last, marshal or no marshal, if you say the word, Mr. Carfax," he said.

The Kid shook his head.

"What's the use, feller? I tell you you're fired!"

"That goes, then!"

Jud climbed over the barricade of ore trucks. He shook hands with the Kid and walked away with the marshal of Los Pinos to the mouth of the tunnel and disappeared with him.

The Rio Kid was left alone.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Kid Faces the Music!

THE Kid stood very still, his eyes on the patch of daylight at the mouth of the tunnel.

He was glad that Jud had gone.

In the abyss that had opened before him the Kid did not want to drag another man down.

There was a sardonic smile on his handsome face.

Jud and many others had warned him that the Arizona Consolidated would be too strong for him, that if he defied that powerful company they would get the goods on him.

They had got the goods on him now, with a vengeance.

In other days the Rio Kid had been driven into outlawry in his own country by unjust suspicion, injustice piled on injustice. He had ridden a long trail from Texas, throwing the past behind him, determined that in a new country he would lead a new life. But fortune had given him another fall. By no fault of his own he was to be made an outlaw in Arizona. His mind was quite clear on that point. They had got the goods on him. If he abided by the law, as represented by Rube McCoy, he would be lynched as soon as he set his foot outside the Gambusino Mine. If he defied the law, as represented by Rube McCoy, he was an outlaw, his hand against every man's and every man's hand against him. The Arizona Con had been too strong for him. He had been warned, and he had scoffed at the warnings—though had he heeded them the outcome would have been the same. He had set out to fight a powerful and unscrupulous company, and they had beaten him to a frazzle. The quirt had lashed Jas Drew, the agent of the company, as a warning to step clear; and the result was that the agent aimed at his life, as well as his mine—and was getting away with it. The town marshal was his paid tool. In his office at Los Pinos the agent of the Arizona Con pulled the strings and all danced to the tune—including the Rio Kid himself.

What McCoy had threatened, he could and would make good. The gang of gunmen and the crowd of disgruntled miners would be sworn in as special constables to assist the marshal in securing a law-breaker. In any law-court the Kid would have had no fear of the result; and for that very reason he would be lynched out of hand. Los Pinos would talk and whisper of one more gold-finder who had bucked against the Arizona Con, and had been broken by them. Outside the Los Pinos country nothing would be known, unless it was a tale told by his enemies, figuring him as a reckless gunman, who had been lynched for his wild deeds. They had got the goods on him, and the Kid knew it. He had set out to fight a power that was too strong for him, and he had been beaten to it.

Harder and grimmer grew his face. He was beaten to it—but they had not got the mine yet. They never should get the mine! He had sent his last friend away, to save him. He wanted to be alone at the finish, to face his wild fate singly. They had beaten him to it; but the Rio Kid was a bad man to crowd.

Sixty minutes passed, and promptly, when the hour of grace was up, a figure appeared in the mouth of the mine, holding a white flag. It was the marshal of Los Pinos.

Rube McCoy did not advance into the tunnel. He shouted to the Kid from where he stood, and his voice reverberated like thunder through the hollows of the mine.

"Carfax!"

"Hallo!"

"Your last chance!" shouted the marshal. "A safe escort to Los Pinos if you step out—without your guns."

"Forget it!" jeered the Kid.

"Then you'll be taken by force."

"I guess I'll be to home when it's done," replied the Kid. "I give you one second to hop out, marshal!"

One second was enough for the marshal of Los Pinos. He vanished from sight with a bound.

"Now for the rookus!" murmured the Kid.

He stood behind the barrier, a six-gun in either hand, a gleam in his eyes. Minute followed minute; the Kid watched and waited. Then there came a sudden rush, and the mouth of the tunnel was black against the sunlight with a crowd of gunmen and rough-necks. There was a roar of firing as they rushed into the tunnel.

Bang, bang, bang!

The Kid's guns rang, and the bullets tore through the rushing crowd. Men reeled to right and left. The Kid was in cover, and the assailants, with the daylight behind them, were an easy prey to the guns that never missed. For two or three wild minutes the tunnel was pandemonium, booming with wild cries and the cracking of firearms, thick with smoke from the guns. But the wild rush did not reach the barricade behind which the Rio Kid stood pumping out bullets. It failed and broke, and the assailants fled frantically for the open, yelling and panting. Behind them sounded the roar of the Rio Kid's six-guns till the tunnel was clear. And at the mouth of the tunnel, still and silent, lay Rube McCoy, town marshal of Los Pinos, shot through the heart.

THE END.

(Will the Rio Kid save his mine, or will he lose it to the enemy? See next week's roaring tale of this amazing Boy Outlaw.)

THE MERRY CHUMS OF ST. FRANK'S!

This is Archie
Glenthorne—
doesn't he look
a nut?



STARTING
in
next Tuesday's
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Do you know Nipper & Co., of St. Frank's? And Nelson Lee the famous detective who has become a master at this well-known school? Do you know Edward Oswald Handforth, the prize chump of the Remove? And Sir Montie Tregellis, West—and his noble chums? They are NEW CHUMS to the "Popular," and they will be making their bow in next week's issue. Many of you may have read of their adventures in our Companion Paper, the "Nelson Lee," and will know what ripping chaps they are. Those of you who do not know them will be introduced in a **SPLENDID SERIES OF STORIES DEALING WITH THE EARLY ADVENTURES OF THE BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S** starting in next week's issue. The First story is entitled:

"How Reggie Pitt Came to St. Frank's!"

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