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June 16th, 1928  
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**WHEN IS YOUR BIRTHDAY?**



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**AN OUTLAW AGAIN!**

The Rio Kid has lost his gold mine, and has been forced to fly for his life. But that's not the end of the Kid by any means!



ANOTHER ROARING YARN OF WESTERN ADVENTURE—FEATURING THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW!

**THE FIRST CHAPTER.****The Hold-Up!**

THE Rio Kid bent his head to listen.

From afar, through the clear mountain air, came faintly the throb of an engine.

"I guess she's coming."

The car was distant as yet, far out of sight on the winding mountain road. But the Kid's keen ear picked up the throb of the engine. He glanced round him, to make sure that all was in readiness.

It was a lonely road, from Flynn up to Los Pinos, on the edge of the Red Desert—as lonely a road as any in Arizona. It was but seldom that the hum of a motor-car was heard on that road. The traffic was mostly on horseback or burro. But horse or burro would not have suited Eli Robinson, the president of the Arizona Consolidated Gold-Mining Co., of Tombstone. It was but seldom that Eli Robinson visited Los Pinos, but when he came he came in state. And urgent business called Eli to Los Pinos now, though he was not likely to reach that town in the Gila Mountains if the Rio Kid could prevent it. And he guessed that he could.

Across the road lay the trunk of a great cottonwood, felled by the machetes of Rainy Face and his Apaches, barring the road from side to side. Among the boulders by the roadside lurked half a dozen Apaches, in war-paint and feathers. Rainy Face, the chief, stood by the side of the Rio Kid, a wild and savage figure in his blanket and fringed leggings, and head-dress of eagle plumes.

"She's coming, old timer," said the Kid.

Rainy Face nodded.

"Injun hear," he said.

"You'd better hunt cover," drawled the Kid. "Keep your men out of sight, Rainy Face. We've got to let the driver go, and I guess I don't want him to talk about a Redskin raid in Flynn."

"No talk if kill," said the Apache, touching the knife in his girdle.

The Kid shook his head.

"This is my say-so, Injun! No killing!"

Rainy Face nodded, and disappeared among the rugged boulders. The Rio

Kid stood alone in the road, awaiting the car.

The throb of the engine sounded nearer and clearer.

The Kid's face was dark and clouded as he stood waiting. Fortune had played him a cruel trick in making him an outlaw in Arizona, as he had been in the old days in Texas, and the associate of the thief-Apaches of the desert. And the man who was responsible was the fat, prosperous mine president from Tombstone, now approaching in his car. The Kid's handsome, sunburnt face grew grimmer as the throb of the engine sounded closer, and the car came into sight at last round a bend in the mountain road.

The gradient was steep, but the big car came on swiftly. There was a grinding of brakes, as the chauffeur sighted the great tree levelled across the road. The car halted within a few yards of the felled cottonwood.

Within the car sat a fat, hard-faced man, in store clothes and a plug hat, and gold-rimmed glasses. He got up from his seat and stared angrily at the fallen tree.

The Kid lounged forward to the car. He raised his hat in mocking politeness to the president of the Arizona Con.

"I guess you're Robinson?" he remarked.

The fat man eyed him sharply.

"Is this a hold-up?" he rapped out.

"Jest that," assented the Kid.

"Don't figure on pulling a gun. It will be sudden death if you do!"

The Kid had not drawn a gun, but his hands were fouching the walnut butts in the holsters low-slung from his belt. The chauffeur gave him one keen look, and then sat motionless. Eli Robinson drew a hard, deep breath, and his eyes glittered at the Kid through his gold-rimmed glasses.

"I'm not pulling a gun," he said icily.

"I guess you could beat me to it, whoever you are. But I warn you that if you hold up my car, I'll have you hunted down and sent to the pen, if it takes ten years and ten thousand dollars."

"Sho!" said the Kid. "You sure make me tremble, feller. I reckon you're a big shout when you're to home."

"I am Eli Robinson, president of the Arizona Consolidated," said the man in

the car, in the same icy tones. "If you've heard of me—"

"I sure have."

"Then you ought to know that you're playing a dangerous game," said the mine president. "You'd better clear the road and let my car get on, if you know what is good for your health."

"Maybe I don't, then," smiled the Kid. "This car has reached the end of its journey, feller. Get out!"

The mine president set his lips.

"If you're aiming to rob me—"

"Not at all. I've told you to get out of the car."

Eli did not stir.

"You'd sure better mind your eye, Mr. Hold-Up Man," said the driver, his eyes turned curiously on the Kid. "Mr. Robinson ain't the man to let you off light. You're asking for a lot of trouble."

"I guess I thrive on trouble, feller," drawled the Kid, with a smile.

"Thanks all the same. You hop it lively off the car, and hoof it back to Flynn. You ain't wanted here any more."

The man stared.

"It's twenty miles back to Flynn," he said.

"Then I sure hope you're a good walker," said the Kid. "The car stays here with Mr. Robinson."

The man hesitated, and the Kid's guns flashed out. One of them was levelled at the chauffeur, the other at the fat man in the car.

"I guess we're wasting time. Light down, both of you, before I drill you full of holes."

The chauffeur leaped down with almost ludicrous suddenness. More slowly Eli Robinson opened the door of the car and stepped out. His hard face was white with rage. Eli Robinson was a great man in the city of Tombstone. He was accustomed to giving orders, not to obeying them. It went sorely against the grain with him to obey the orders of the boy puncher who had held up his car on the mountain road, but he knew that he had no choice. There was death in the levelled gun, death in the gleaming eye that looked over the barrel. Almost the president of the Arizona Consolidated made up his mind to take the chance of drawing a gun. But he did not. He stepped into the road, and, at

a sign from the Kid, put his hands above his head.

"Keep 'em up!" drawled the Kid. "Now, you beat it back to Flynn," he added to the chauffeur. "You're leaving the car here. Beat it lively. I guess if you're in sight in two minutes from now, I shall clip off your ear to hurry you up. You get me?"

The chauffeur looked doubtfully at his employer; but an impatient motion of the Kid's gun decided him, and he started down the road on foot.

"Pronto!" rapped out the Kid.

Bang!

He fired in the air, the bullet whistling a foot from the man's head. That was more than enough. The chauffeur broke into a run, and banished down the road at top speed.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Blow for Blow!

ELI ROBINSON stood with his hands up, his eyes glittering with rage. It was the first time the president of the Arizona Consolidated had ever been held up, and even now he could scarcely believe that any outlaw had the temerity to do so. As he stood, with set teeth, he was scanning the handsome face of the Kid, memorising his features savagely, and bitterly determined that the hold-up man should not escape his vengeance. The Rio Kid slid his guns back into the holsters. The chauffeur's footsteps had died away now; the man was far out of sight.

"Show up, Rainy Face!" called out the Kid.

Eli Robinson started convulsively, as the gang of Apaches suddenly appeared from the rocks. It was the first intimation he had that the hold-up man was not alone.

"Indians!" he muttered.

"Sure!" smiled the Kid.

"If you want to rob me, you are wasting time," said Eli, between his teeth.

"Who's wanting to rob you, feller?" jeered the Kid. "I guess it's the other way round. Go through his rags, Rainy Face, and see if he's heeled."

Rainy Face searched the mine president, and took possession of a silver-mounted revolver. To Eli's surprise, nothing but his weapon was taken from him.

"I guess you can sit down till you're wanted, feller," said the Kid, indicating a rock by the roadside.

"What does this mean?" snarled Eli. "I've got to get on to Los Pinos on important business."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Kid. "I guess your business can wait, Eli. I've sure got some important business with you, and you won't see Los Pinos in a hurry, nor Tombstone, either. Sit down!"

With an angry glare, the mine president sat on the boulder to await the pleasure of the hold-up man.

He gave one sharp glance round him, as if calculating the chances of making a run for it. But the Apaches were round him, and there was no chance.

The mine president was completely puzzled. He understood now that he was not to be robbed. And what else the hold-up man could want with him was a mystery. He had plenty of enemies. His methods of business had made him many. But he had never seen the Rio Kid before. There were many mining men in Arizona who had been ruined by the "Con," but the Kid looked like a cow-puncher, and Eli's unscrupulous dealings had not been

extended to the cow country; he was a mining man. He could only wait and wonder who his enemy was, and what he wanted.

The Kid proceeded coolly to drench the president's car with petrol, and then a match was tossed into it.

Eli gritted his teeth with helpless rage.

The car was quickly a glaring, flaming mass, soon to be reduced to cinders.

Having set fire to the car, the Kid came across to the mine president. He took a seat on the low rock beside him.

"I guess you want to know," he remarked. "I'm going to put you wise, feller. You don't savvy whom you're dealing with yet."

"No!" muttered Eli.

"Ever heard of Kid Carfax?"

Eli started.

"You—"

"Sure," nodded the Kid. "Kid Carfax, the owner of the Gambusino Mine at Gold Brick. I'm sure that very galoot—"

Something like fear came into the hard face of the mine president.

"You're wise to it now," smiled the Kid. "You was going to Los Pinos on that very business, feller. You found that your man Jas Drew, in Los Pinos, slipped up on it. He had your instructions to get hold of the Gambusino Mine by fair means or foul, and he obeyed his orders. The Gambusino Mine has gone up now; they had me cornered, and I blew up the mine. I guess the gold vein is scattered, and will never be located again, even if you could shift the thousands of tons of rocks piled over the adit. I guess I blew up the mine to keep it out of your grip."

Eli breathed hard.

"Jas Drew worked a strike at the mine," went on the Kid quietly. "He played his cards well. He had the town marshal of Los Pinos in his pocket, and I shot up the marshal in defence of the mine. And after that it was just pie to Jas Drew. I guess I'm an outlaw now, and they've offered a thousand dollars for me alive or dead in Los Pinos. But they ain't roped me in yet!" added the Kid, with a grin.

The mine president panted.

"Kid Carfax was blown up in the mine?" he muttered. "You cannot lie. He was killed in the explosion."

"I guess not," grinned the Kid. "I guess I was safe out before the dynamite exploded, feller. And here I am—to talk business with you."

"Of course, I know nothing of all this!" muttered the mine president. "If my agent at Los Pinos did anything outside the law, it was done without my knowledge."

"Sho!" ejaculated the Kid.

"My instructions to him were to buy the mine," explained Eli. "Beyond that, he had no orders. You cannot suppose that—"

"That a galoot like you had anything to do with handing out the rough stuff?" grinned the Kid.

"Exactly."

"I guess that's jest what I suppose, Mr. Robinson."

"A mistake, I assure you," said Eli. "In fact, Jasper Drew has already been sacked. As soon as I heard that there was bloodshed at Gold Brick, I turned him off, guessing that he had exceeded his orders."

"Sho! And you didn't fire him because he had failed to get hold of the mine?" said the Kid, with grim banter. "You didn't boot him because he'd let me blow up the mine instead of roping it in for the Arizona Con?"

"No!" muttered Eli.

"You're sure some liar," said the kid. "Jas Drew was your agent at Los Pinos, and you sure pulled the strings from Tombstone. You knew that the Gambusino was the biggest bonanza ever struck in the Gila sierra, and you wanted it for your company. I guess I heard a good many stories in Los Pinos about the Con roping in prospector's claims, and all sorts of accidents happening to galoots who wouldn't sell. I guess you sat in your office at Tombstone like a pesky spider in a web, with Jas Drew on the spot hyer to do your dirty work. I reckon it was bad news for you when you heard that the Gambusino had gone up the flume, and you beat it lively for Los Pinos to see whether anything could be done. Say!"

Eli compressed his lips.

"I tell you I knew nothing."

"And I tell you you're a liar!" said the Kid coolly. "And I tell you there's nothing to be done with the mine. It was a big bonanza, but now it's nothing but a pile of rocks. I blew it up to keep it out of your hands, Mr. Eli Robinson—and you owe me for the damage."

"What?"

"I'm asking you a hundred thousand dollars for the mine," said the Kid. "I guess I can't afford to throw away my bonanza. You are going to hand over that little sum, feller."

The mine president stared at him.

"Are you mad?" he exclaimed.

"I sure hope not."

"I will not give you a cent," said Eli, between his teeth—"not a red cent. The mine is a wreck now, and if, as you say, nothing can be saved from the ruin, it is worth nothing to me."

"Nothing at all," agreed the Kid. "But you've got to pay for the loss to me, Mr. Robinson."

"Not a cent."

"I guess we'll talk about it again, feller," said the Kid, rising to his feet. "Here, you Rainy Face."

The Apache came up.

"Put him on the bronco."

"My little white brother speaks well," said the Apache. He signed to his braves, and they surrounded the man from Tombstone.

"What do you mean?" panted Eli.

"You dare—"

"Oh, can it!" interrupted the Kid.

"I guess you're coming for a little pasear with me."

"Where?" hissed Eli.

The Kid waved his hand towards the desert.

"That's where you and your gang have driven me," he said. "That's where you're coming, feller. I guess your friends won't find it easy to pick up your trail in the Red Desert—even if they want to look for you, of which I ain't sure. It's you for the desert, hombre."

"I—I—"

"Put him on the bronco!" said the Kid.

And the president of the Arizona Consolidated, grasped by the Redskins, was lifted to the back of a shaggy, bony bronco and bound there with a lasso. Then the Kid called to his mustang, and mounted, and the Apaches followed his example. Leaving the car still burping on the road, the party struck into a trail to the southward, an Indian leading the mine president's horse by a trail-rope. Eli's face was as white as death. His eyes stared round him with a hunted expression in them. Many and many an unscrupulous deal had the president of the Arizona Con brought off success-

fully; many a mining man in the Arizona sierra owed his ruin to Eli Robinson. But never had the hard-faced mining man from Tombstone dreamed of retribution like this. The Rio Kid was a bad man to crowd, and the Arizona Con president was learning that—too late for the knowledge to be of service to him.

Even as the hoofs of the mustangs knocked up the dust of the desert, he could scarcely believe that this disaster had fallen upon him—that it was not some fearful dream.

mile after mile, league after league vanished under the galloping hoofs.

Behind, as the man from Tombstone looked back, the line of the Gila sierra was low and dim against the sky.

Before him lay the desert—illimitable to the eye—sand and dust, cactus and yucca; arid, waterless, trackless.

The Red Desert—of which even hardened plainsmen spoke with bated breath—the desert, dry and deadly, given over to the thief-Apache, the coyote, the rattlesnake, the vulture. He was penetrating into the heart of the desert.

His face was haggard now.

He glanced many times at the Rio Kid; but the Kid, riding with the Apaches, did not look at him.

mile after mile, league after league! The dust blinded him, as it was kicked up by the dashing hoofs. He ached with fatigue, with heat, with misery. The despairing thought was in his mind that even if he escaped from his captors he could never find his way through the trackless desert unaided. Escape meant certain death from hunger and thirst in those fearful solitudes.

With his chin sunk on his breast, haggard despair in his face, the mine president of Tombstone rode on, and on, and on into the heart of the Arizona desert.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER. The Kid Sells!

**S**TARS were gleaming in a sky of darkest blue, arched over the boundless expanse of the desert, when the cavalcade halted. How many hours had passed Eli Robinson did not know; it seemed to him that for days and days he had been in the saddle—aching, blinded by sun and dust, saddle-sore.

He was too dazed even to look about him when he was untied from the broncho, and bronze hands lifted him to the ground; but he heard a muttering of guttural voices, and saw the gleam of black eyes, the glimmer of bronze skins in the starlight, and knew that he had reached the Indian encampment. Against the starry sky close at hand rose a dark mass, but he was too dazed with fatigue even to wonder what it was. He felt himself dragged away and thrust into an evil-smelling shelter of some sort, and then he slept, on the bare ground, the sleep of exhaustion.

The sun was high in the sky when the president of the Arizona Consolidated opened his eyes again. He was aching, and stared about him with dizzy eyes, wondering. He was not in his handsome house at Tombstone, he was not in the hotel at Flynn. Where was he? Recollection came with a rush, and the man from Tombstone sat up with a cry.

He rubbed his eyes and stared about him. He lay in a skin jacal, of which one side was open, giving him a view of the desert. Other jacals and tepees were in sight, lounging Indians, squaws and papooses, horses, and dogs. It was the encampment of the Apaches.

The mine president had heard of the gangs of thief-Apaches of the desert, THE POPULAR.—No. 490.

who preferred the wild, hard life of the waterless wastes to Indian reservations, but he had never dreamed of seeing them in their camps. And he was a prisoner here—a prisoner of the wild Apaches of the desert.

Only the previous morning he had left Tombstone in a luxurious Pullman; at Flynn, where the railway ended, he had stepped into a handsome motor-car; and now—now he was in the desert, where life was red and raw, where the savages were still as savage as in the days before Columbus sailed to the west. A day had made that change, and the change was overwhelming.

He dragged himself to his feet at last, stepped wearily to the opening of the jacal. The great mass against the sky, which he had dimly noted the previous night, was now before his eyes, clear in the sunlight.

It was a vast circular mound, rising in steps, or, rather, terraces—gigantic steps suitable to the feet of a giant. He gazed at it in wonder, dimly into his mind came remembrance of tales he had heard of the remnants of ancient Aztec civilization in the desert. It was a "teocalli," an open-air temple of the Aztecs, that race long-vanished from the earth, but whose blood still flows in the veins of the Mexicans. Close by the teocalli, the Apache camp was pitched, and the shadow of the vast mound fell across the camp.

On the summit of the teocalli he made out a figure—a boyish, active figure, in cowboy chaps and Stetson hat, a strange figure on that spot, among the wild Apaches of the Red Desert.

He knew that it was Kid Carfax, once the owner of the Gambusino Mine at Gold Brick; now driven to the desert, a fugitive, his mine blown up to save it from the greedy grasp of the Arizona Consolidated.

His eyes gleamed with hatred at the sight of the young puncher. The Kid, standing on the summit of the teocalli, was staring to the northward, scanning the level plains and the distant horizon, and Eli guessed that he was watching for a sign of pursuit.

He moved at last, and descended the teocalli to the camp. Eli could see in his face that he had discerned no sign of an enemy on the arid wastes that stretched northward to the Gila sierra. The sierra, in whose shadow lay the town of Los Pinos, was a mere blur on the horizon—many a long mile distant from the Apache camp.

Pursuit there was not likely to be; Eli knew that. No doubt his chauffeur would tell the story at Flynn; there would be search along the mountain road, the wreck of the burnt car would be found. But no track remained to tell what had become of the president of the Arizona Con. The chauffeur's description of the Kid would be enough to tell into whose hands he had fallen; but none could tell whither the Kid had taken him; the sands of the desert told no story.

There were many who would rejoice to hear of his disappearance—many who would hope that he would never be found. But even those who would have sought him had no clue, they would not even guess that he was a prisoner; they would conclude that he was dead, and that his body had been thrown into some arroyo or barranca.

Eli Robinson realised it, and realised that there was no hope of rescue, no hope of escape. He was at the mercy of the man he had robbed and driven into outlawry.

The Rio Kid, as he came down from the teocalli, sighted the man from

Tombstone standing in the opening of the jacal, and came towards him.

"Morning, president!" he said.

Eli looked at him with gleaming eyes.

"A thousand curses—"

"Cut it out!" said the Kid derisively.

"I guess you can be glad that you're not tied to the stake, feller. Do you reckon those injuns would have let you have your sleep out if I hadn't been here?"

Eli shuddered.

Many of the Redskins were glancing at him, and he understood only too well what their glances meant. Only the Kid stood before him and the savage cruelty of the Apaches.

"You, a white man, in league with Apaches!" he muttered.

The Kid coloured a little.

"I guess I've always said that injuns is pizen," he admitted. "But I sure reckon that beggars can't be choosers! I did the chief a good turn, and he saved me from your gang; and I guess I'm safer here in the desert with the reds than I should be in Los Pinos with the whites now that you've loaded the dice against me, Eli! But I reckon I ain't hanging on here—only till I've sold you my mine!"

Eli gritted his teeth.

"You sure allowed you'd buy the Gambusino mine, whether a galoot wanted to sell or not," grinned the Kid. "That is why it was blown up, because your crowd had me by the short hairs. Now I reckon I'm going to make you buy whether you want to buy or not. You get me?"

"Not a cent!" muttered Eli.

The Kid laughed, and pointed to the teocalli.

"You see that chunk?" he asked. "That's where the Aztecs used to sacrifice prisoners of war, hundreds of years ago, when this desert was peopled. That's where these Apaches deal with their prisoners, Eli. I guess if I wasn't around you'd have been tied to the stake already on the summit of the teocalli, feller! The Apaches haven't changed; I guess they're not like the tame injuns on the Reservations. If I mount my mustang and ride, leaving you here, you're a gone coon!"

"And you'll leave me to the Indians?"

"Why not?" said the Kid coolly. "I guess I'm not hanging around here for long! I'm a cow-puncher, and I guess I don't like injuns; and I've got only one friend in the gang—Rainy Face, the chief. His word goes; but if anything happened to him in the desert these bucks would turn on me like a crowd of wildcats, and I reckon my guns wouldn't save me! I sure don't mean to stay here till that happens!"

"And you will leave me at their mercy?"

"Sure!" said the Kid grimly. "You've asked for it, Eli, and you've got it. You've made an outlaw of me with your gun-games; my bonanza has gone up the flume; I've nothing left but my cayuse and my guns, that I brought with me when I lit out of Texas. The Gambusino Mine is worth nothing now—to you or to me, and you're going to buy it for that very reason! You'll hand out a hundred thousand dollars for it. I guess it was worth a good deal more than that; I'm letting you off cheap. And if you refuse, you've got till to-night to think it over. At sundown I ride—alone!"

"Where am I to find a hundred thousand dollars in this desert?" muttered the mine president.

"I guess you could find five times as much in Tombstone."





**IN CAPTIVITY!** "You see that?" said the Kid, pointing to the huge mound looming in the distance. "That's where the Injuns sacrifice their prisoners—and that's where you'll go unless you sign that draft!" (See Chapter 3.)

"You'll let me go—"

The Kid laughed.

"Forget it, feller. I'll trust you as far as I can see you with both eyes; not farther. You'll give me a draft on Tombstone."

"It would never be paid."

"I'm sure sorry for you in that case; because, unless I draw the dollars, I shall leave you to the Apaches."

"Do your worst," muttered the mine president. "I will not hand over a cent for a ruined mine."

The Kid shrugged his shoulders.

"Please yourself, feller. If you change your mind give me a hail—I shall be within hearing till sundown. After that I shall be gone, and once I hit the trail I'm gone for good."

And the Kid lounged away, humming a tune.

The mine president stepped back into the jacal. Food and water were brought to him by a Mexican peon; evidently some prisoner of the Apaches who had been made a slave by the wandering tribe.

The hot day wore on.

Once the president of the Arizona Con stepped out of the jacal; and in a moment a dozen or more Apaches dived towards him, with ferocious looks. He was glad to step back out of their savage sight. It was clear to him that only the authority of the chief, Rainy Face, saved him from the torture; and only Rainy Face's friendship for the Kid caused him to protect the prisoner. Once the Kid was gone, nothing could save him from the cruelty of the savages; that was quite clear in his mind. But for the Kid, Rainy Face would have been as eager to lift his scalp as any of the dirty, savage-faced braves in that outcast camp. His life hung on a thread—even with the Kid in the camp outside the teocalli. And when the Kid was gone—

Black and bitter thoughts passed through the mind of the man who was accustomed to dealing ruthlessly with others, but who had always, hitherto, defied the hand of vengeance. He

cursed his folly in venturing into the sierra; and yet he had believed that Kid Carfax was dead, that he had perished in the wreck of the Gambusino Mine; and never for a moment had he dreamed of danger from a wandering gang of Apaches. It was a Roland for an Oliver; he had used the gunmen of Los Pinos to gain his ends, and the Kid, in his turn, was making use of these thieves of the desert. In Tombstone he was a powerful man; in the desert he was a helpless prisoner, with the knife almost at his throat.

As the sun sank to the west, and the shadow of the teocalli lengthened on the plain, it was borne in upon the mind of Eli Robinson that he was a beaten man; that the mine for which he had plotted and schemed was to be his, at a price, now that it was no longer a mine, but a worthless stack of shattered rocks.

He had started for Los Pinos when he learned from Jas Drew that the mine had been blown up, in the hope of yet saving something from the wreck—but from what the Kid had told him, he knew that there was nothing to be saved; the bonanza was gone for ever. And he was to buy the wreck of it, and pay for the ruin he had caused—or else—From the jacal he could see the wolfish eyes of the Apaches turned towards him, and those glances told him only too plainly what he had to expect, if the man he had wronged ceased to stand between him and the outcasts of the desert.

In the west the rim of the red sun touched the desert; and the prisoner in the jacal heard the muttering voices of the Indians. The opening of the jacal was darkened by the figure of the boy puncher, booted and spurred. The Kid was ready to ride. Eli gave him a haggard look. The Kid smiled grimly.

"Chewed on it?" he asked. "I guess I'm ready to hit the trail, feller. You want to make up your mind, pronto."

"A thousand dollars—" muttered

"Cut it out. You've wrecked my bonanza; and I'm selling you the wreck for a hundred thousand dollars. I guess I wouldn't take ten cents off," said the Kid. "Yes or no?"

There was a brief pause, while the president of the Arizona Consolidated struggled with himself. Defeat rankled more bitterly in his breast than the loss of money. But he knew that he had to yield.

"Yes," he breathed.

"The mine's yours, then," grinned the Kid. "I guess I was told from the start that the Arizona Con would force me to sell—and I'm selling. But I sure reckon the Con never knew what they would be buying, feller. You want to make out a draft that will be paid on sight at the bank in Tombstone—and you don't want to play any tricks with it, Mr. Robinson. It will sure be had for you if anything happens to me in Tombstone. If I ain't back here in three days, Rainy Face will know that I ain't coming back—and I guess you will want a new scalp on the fourth day. And while I'm gone, feller, you'd better lie low in this hut and sing small; if you try to get away the Indians will get you sure—and Rainy Face won't be able to save you. I guess I'm waiting for that draft, feller!"

Half an hour later the Rio Kid was riding the black-muzzled mustang under the stars of the desert; and the president of the Arizona Consolidated, crouching in the jacal with the murmuring voices of the Redskins in his ears, was hoping and praying that the Kid would ride back safe and on time.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

##### The Kid Hits the Trail!

**F**OR three days the president of the Arizona Consolidated Gold-Mining Company lived with terror for his daily companion, and his bed-fellow at night. In those three days his looks grew haggard. Through the long hot days he watched the desert, hoping for a sign of the Kid's return; through the nights he scarcely closed his eyes, fearing every moment to hear the savage yells of the Apaches, hungry for a victim. Squaws and papooses came to the jacal to jeer and mock him; dark and threatening looks were cast on him by tattered braves who stalked by; more than once he heard loud and excited voices, and

the commanding tones of Rainy Face scolding the truant.

The fear was deep in his heart that Rainy Face would not keep faith with the absent Kid; that even if he kept faith he might fail, to control the savage Apaches; that the Kid might be delayed on his journey; that an accident might prevent his return on time.

Three days passed on leaden wings, and when once more the red sun sank towards the edge of the desert, and the Kid had not returned, the mine president's heart was heavy with despair.

From the jacal he watched a number of the Apaches taking bundles of brushwood to the platform on the teocalli, and he knew what the fuel was for—to be piled round the torture-stake when the hour came. In the red sunset the tall figure of Rainy Face, draped in his blanket, stood at the opening of the jacal, and the chief's black eyes fixed malignantly on the cowering prisoner.

"The little white chief no come!" said the Apache in his guttural voice. "No return to the lodges of the Apaches."

He pointed to the sinking sun.

"When sun him touch the desert, the paleface will be bound to the stake. I have spoken!"

And the Apache stalked away.

Eli groaned aloud in his terror. His haggard eyes swept the desert to the north, the way by which the Kid would come—if he came. Then he looked to the westward; the rim of the round, red sun was almost touching the plains. In those terrible moments perhaps the wretched man repented of the evil he had wrought, and which had brought upon him so fearful a retribution.

Gallop, gallop!

The sound of hoof-beats from the plain came suddenly to his ears, and he

started. Gallop, gallop! It might be only some Apache returning to the camp, but— Suddenly he sighted a Steuben bat far out on the plains, and gave almost a sob of relief. It was the Kid, and he was returning on time!

The black-muzzled mustang, covered with dust, galloped into the camp, and halted in the shadow of the teocalli. The Rio Kid slid from the saddle. Eli's eyes sought the west again; the sun's rim was touching the horizon. The Kid had returned only just in time to save him!

From the jacal he watched with beating heart. There was something like disappointment in the dark features of Rainy Face; and from the mob of tattered Apaches there rose a deep murmur. The sun slid behind the edge of the desert, and darkness fell on the Indian camp. Louder and deeper through the darkness came the murmur of the savages, and the heart of the prisoner sickened with the fear that the Kid, after all, might not be able to save him.

"Feller!" it was the Kid's voice. "I guess I've put it through—the Cambusino Mine is ours, for what it's worth!" He chuckled softly. "I reckon I've sure touched the dollars, and the mine's yours. That's what you sure wanted, ain't it?"

"For mercy's sake get me out of this!" muttered Eli huskily.

"Sure! I've got a bronco waiting, and we're hitting the trail, pronto, if some buck don't drop us with a bullet in the back; I reckon they're sure mad about losing you!" chuckled the Kid.

He grasped the arm of the mine president, and drew him out of the jacal in the darkness. Behind the jacal stood the black-muzzled mustang and a broncho saddled and bridled. Eli climbed dazedly into the saddle; the Kid took the bridle and led the way. As the hoofs rang on the plains there

came a yell from the Apache encampment that told of the disappointment of the savages; but Rainy Face held his braves in check, and there was no interference and no pursuit. Twice the Kid looked back. The fires of the encampment twinkled in the distance, but died away at last; the great mass of the teocalli was merged in the dark plain.

"Faster, faster!" breathed Eli.

"I guess we're safe now, feller!"

Through the starry night they rode on, side by side. All was dark, trackless, unknown to the men from Tombstone, and he marvelled that the Kid could find his way; but the Kid rode on without a fault and without a pause. Under the rising sun they were still riding; at high noon they rode into a deep canyon in the Gila sierra, and there the Kid pulled rein.

"I guess we part here, feller," he said. "You want to ride on, and in three miles you'll hit Gold Brick. I guess your mine is there—and you're welcome to it!"

Eli looked at him.

"And you?" he said.

The Kid shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess I'm hitting the trail—I'm done with Arizona." For a moment his hand lingered upon a gun. "I was an outlaw in Texas, feller, and I lit out for Arizona to leave it behind me; but I reckon trouble dogs the trail of the Rio Kid. I'm sure tempted to let drive a bullet through your cabeza; but ride on, feller, ride on!"

And the Rio Kid wheeled his mustang, and dashed away, without a backward glance at the man who sat in the saddle watching him go, with a strange expression on his face.

THE END.

(You'll meet the Rio Kid in another roaring Western yarn next week, chums. Don't miss it!)

## The Serpent of the College House!

(Continued from page 7)

"You're sensitive on the subject, of course. I don't wonder at it. But, fairly and squarely, isn't it a fact that the Ancient House leads the way in nearly everything?"

Bob Christine frowned.

"Well, what about it?" he growled. "Do you think you can alter it?"

"That's just the idea!" exclaimed Pitt. "The fact is admitted, isn't it, that the College House takes second place at St. Frank's? Well, I don't exactly see why it should be so. Why can't we buck things up and create a hum?"

"A—a which?" asked Yorke, staring.

"Why can't we show the Ancient House that we're not going to stand any of their old buck?" said Pitt calmly. "You're the leader of the Manks, Christine, and I'm only a new kid—I know that well enough. Don't say I've got cheek. As a matter of fact, I have. Plenty of cheek is a good quality."

Christine & Co. stared at Pitt rather helplessly. Somehow, he always seemed to disarm them. He forestalled them by his remarks concerning cheek, and they hadn't anything to say.

"Well, since you don't seem to be capable of making the Ancient House sit up, I'm willing to take the job on," said Pitt coolly. "How does the idea strike you?"

"You cheeky roiter!" roared Yorke. "You ain't goin' to stand this, I suppose, Christine?"

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"Let him finish!" said Christine coldly.

"I can see well enough that you're all getting wild," remarked Pitt, rising to his feet. "That's silly. I didn't come here to have a scrap with anybody. As I was saying, I'm willing to show you how matters can be altered. Just give me a chance, and I'll make Nipper and all the rest of 'em bite the dust. I want a free hand!"

"A—a free hand?" repeated Talmadge dazedly.

"Exactly!"

"You wouldn't like a free boot, I suppose?" suggested Yorke. "I've got one here, and there's a good kick behind it."

"Oh, don't start any violence!" said Pitt testily. "I'm not afraid of your boots. If it does come to a scrap, I shan't be pitched out easily. But where's the sense in scrapping? My motive is a good one, isn't it? I don't want to dispute your leadership. I'm a College House chap, and I've got the honour of the College House at heart. Why shouldn't we soar above our rivals? Just a few wheezes, and we can make the Fossils hide their heads in humiliation. That's my idea."

Christine took a deep breath.

"I'm not going to get wild with you, Pitt," he said. "Shut up, you far-heads!" he added, turning to his indignant chums. "Pitt come here to suggest an idea, and he's done it. Now he can clear out!"

Reginald Pitt sighed.

"I'm sorry," he said frankly. "I thought you'd be broader-minded, Christine. And I've got some jolly fine wheezes, too!"

Christine's temper gave way at last. "Prove it!" he shouted hotly. "Anybody can jaw like this. Substantiate your words by deeds—and then I'll believe you! Hang it all, I'll give you a free hand!"

"What!" roared Talmadge and Yorke.

"A free hand?" repeated Christine grimly. "You can give us a proof of your marvellous methods, Pitt. I'll allow you just one week. Understand?"

"You—you silly ass!" yelled Yorke. "Do you mean to say that you're going to let Pitt step into your shoes?"

"I didn't say that!" interjected Christine. "He's got a free hand, that's all. He can work some marvellous wheezes of his own, and prove that he's worth his salt! If he hasn't worked the stunt within a week, we shall know that he's all jaw!"

Pitt nodded serenely.

"Good enough!" he said. "A week's all I want, Christine. You'll find that I'm not a boaster. The College House will be cackling over the diddling of the Ancient House before to-day week!"

And Reginald Pitt strolled out of the study.

But neither Bob Christine nor anybody else knew Reginald Pitt yet! He was destined to spring quite a number of surprises on the College House, and the whole of St. Frank's generally!

The Serpent's venom had yet to be revealed!

THE END.

(There will be another topping long story of the boys of St. Frank's next week, entitled, "Pitt the Mysterious!")