

**THE RIO KID'S RESOLVE!**

When the Rio Kid rides into the cow-country, full of the idea of starting life afresh, he resolves to steer clear of trouble. But Fate is against him, and the resolution he makes is broken!

# The RIO KID!

by **Ralph Redway**



**ANOTHER ROARING WESTERN YARN, DEALING WITH THE BREATHLESS EXPLOITS OF THE RIO KID—BOY OUTLAW!**

## THE FIRST CHAPTER. Trouble on the Trail!

**W**HEN the Rio Kid rode away from Horse-Thief, he had no fixed plan in his mind, only to get away from that town as fast and as far as he could. His experiences at Horse-Thief had been unusual, and the Kid wanted to forget them. Back of his mind was the intention of hitting the cow country—a country that would remind him of his own Texas, but where the name and fame of the Rio Kid were unknown, where no man would reach instinctively for his gun at the sight of his handsome face, and where no sheriff's hand would be lifted to drop on his shoulder. But the Rio Kid was in no hurry. He had a fat roll now, and could have loafed away the rest of his life if he had liked, had loafing been in the Kid's line, which it never had been. But at least he could afford to take it easy, and easy accordingly the Kid took it.

If there was one thing that the Kid wanted to avoid it was trouble.

Trouble had dogged his steps in the old days in Texas, and when he had made a new break in the gold country of Arizona, it had dogged him in the same way. The Kid could honestly say that it was not his own fault, it just happened. Now that he was in Nevada—a new country to the Kid—he was firmly resolved that trouble should be kept at arm's length, that the walnut-butted guns in his low-slung holsters should never see the light. In many ways the Rio Kid was lucky, but in that one little matter he had no luck; he seemed to be born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards.

Riding the black-muzzled mustang at an easy trot in the golden afternoon, while the sun was sinking in a crimson blaze towards the Sierra Nevada, the Kid was feeling at peace with all the world, even with Sheriff Watson, of Frio in far-off Texas. The trail was a lonely one. The Kid had no use for railways, or even for stage-coaches; the grey mustang with the black muzzle could carry him wherever he wanted to go. If the Kid was thinking at all as he trotted easily along the rocky trail, it was of bedding down at the town of Silver Cloud, which he aimed to hit at sundown. There was silence round him, broken only by the chirrup of cicadas in

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This week:

## THE BOOTLEGGER!

the sassafras, and the sigh of the wind in the tall pines on the hillsides. And then, all of a sudden, the silence was broken by a loud clatter on the trail behind the Kid, a clatter that grew wilder and louder every second, and approached him rapidly.

The Kid's idea was that a runaway buckboard was coming up, too fast for the driver to hold in his critters, and he moved to the side of the trail to allow a clear passage for it. His hand dropped on the riata coiled at his saddle; if it was a runaway the Kid had not forgotten his skill with the rope, and there was no cayuse on four legs that he could not have roped in.

But, looking back along the trail, he saw that it was not a runaway. A light wagon drawn by two horses was coming up the trail at a frantic speed, the horses panting, leaping, tearing, and the driver, standing up, was lashing them furiously to drive them to greater efforts. On the rocks of the trail the wagon bounded and bounced, and looked every moment, to the Kid's eyes, as if it would turn over in utter wreck. But the driver, hurried and reckless as he was, knew his business; almost as if by magic he held his horses in hand, while he beat and drove them to frantic speed.

"Great snakes!" ejaculated the Kid in astonishment.

The big, raw-boned man standing in the wagon in blue jeans and Stetson, did not see the horseman by the trail till he was quite near at hand. All his attention was given to the straining horses. His face was set, the perspiration rolled down it. He drove like a man who was running a race with death, and the Kid could guess that there was hot pursuit, as yet out of sight. What it all meant the Kid could not figure, unless some gang of rustlers had tried to hold up the teamster and he was getting away from them at the risk of smashing up his wagon, his horses, and himself.

Clatter, clatter, clatter! Crash!

It was deafening. The Rio Kid looked on in wonder. All of a sudden the teamster saw him. He did not check his horses for a second; but he dropped the whip, grabbed at a six-gun in his belt, and fired at the Kid as he came clattering and crashing up.

Bang!

The bark of the revolver rang sharply over the clattering of the hoofs and bumping wheels.

For once the Rio Kid was taken by surprise.

Why the man, a stranger to him, should fire at sight, at a horseman quietly sitting his mustang by the side of the trail, was simply a mystery. It was good shooting, too, for the Kid felt the wind of the bullet as it passed within a foot of him. Few marksmen could have planted their lead with a hasty shot from a rocking, bumping, tearing wagon, but the teamster's shot had gone very close.

The Kid's eyes blazed.

The hand that had rested on the riata dropped on a gun.

But he did not draw it. It flashed into his mind that if the teamster had been held up on the trail he had figured that the lone horseman sitting his mustang there was one of the gang ahead of him; at any rate, the man must have taken him for an enemy. In a few seconds more the thundering wagon was past the spot where the Kid sat his horse; but there was ample time for the best marksman in Texas to drop the driver with a bullet through the brain, if he had chosen. The Kid did not choose. The wagon thundered by, roaring on down the rocky trail, and the Kid stared after it with a half-amused grin on his sun-burnt face.

"That galoot is sure in a hurry," murmured the Rio Kid. "I reckon he allowed I was here to stop him, and that's why he burned powder. I guess a miss is as good as a mile, old boss."

He moved out into the trail again, and gazed after the disappearing wagon. The wild clatter still came to his ears, but faintly and more faintly. The wagon turned from the trail, which lay through a wide canyon bottom, and vanished into an opening in the hillside—a wild and rocky gulch where few teamsters would have had the nerve to drive.

The clatter died into silence at last.

"Gee-whiz!" murmured the Kid,

In the silence and stillness of the mountains he could almost have fancied that the whole thing had been a figment of his imagination. But from behind him, on the rocky trail, came new sounds—the sounds of thundering hoofs, booming louder and louder every moment. The pursuit was coming on. Pursuers, as he guessed, were on the trail of that desperately-driven wagon, and now they were coming into sight.

The Kid looked back. A bunch of horsemen swept into view, crouched in their saddles, riding hard and spurring fiercely.

The Kid counted four. Perhaps it would have been wise, having lighted unexpectedly on this rookus on the lonely Nevada trail, for the Rio Kid to have taken cover among the rocks and pines till the horsemen were past. He did not think of it at the moment, and perhaps he would not have done so had he thought of it. The Rio Kid was afraid of no man, and it was not his way to hide. Whether the wild riders were rustlers pursuing their quarry, or whether the teamster was some law-breaker fleeing from justice, the Kid could not tell, but, knowing nothing of the rights or wrongs of the matter, he had no intention of chipping in. He drew aside to allow the riders to pass, as he had done for the wagon, asking nothing better than that they should pass and leave him to jog on in peace, which was not much for a pilgrim of the Rio Kid's reputation to ask. But this time he had a gun handy. He did not stand for allowing strangers to take pot-shots at him unimproved.

The bunch of horsemen came on with a swoop, but as they spotted the Kid by the trail there was a sudden wrenching in of steeds, and the whole bunch clustered to a halt, one or two of the horses almost falling back on their haunches with the suddenness of the stop. The four of them turned on the Rio Kid at once, and there was a gripping of guns. But before a gun could be dragged from a holster the Rio Kid was ready. No man in the West was quicker on the draw than the Kid from the Rio Grande.

The two noted walnut-butted guns leaped into his hands as if of their own volition, and they bore on the bunch of breathless riders, the Kid's cool eyes gleaming over them.

"Forget it, fellers," drawled the Kid. "The galoot that lifts a gun gets his, mighty sudden. Forget it!"

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Hands Up!

"FORGET it!" The Rio Kid grinned over his levelled guns.

He was ready to shoot, if need were; and that readiness showed in his look, in spite of the good-natured grin. There was death in the levelled six-guns: death in the cool eyes behind them; and the four riders released their weapons as suddenly as if the butts had become red-hot. They held in their trampling horses, glaring at the Kid; but no weapon was lifted.

One of the riders, a brawny man with a thick, red beard, and a manner of authority as the Kid noticed at once, pushed his horse forward, ahead of the others, closer to the puncher from Texas. His heavy, rugged face was black with anger, and the Kid could see that he was itching to draw a gun. But it was clear to him that if he drew a gun he would never pull the trigger: the Kid's eyes told him that.

"Put down that gun!" The Kid laughed. "Put it down!" said the big man

with the red beard. "There are four of us, you durned galoot, and you'll never get away with it alive. I warn you to put down that gun."

"I guess I'm keeping this gun handy, feller," smiled the Kid. "I ain't looking for trouble—never was! But you gents seem too mighty sudden on the shoot to please me. I reckon I'm keeping you covered while you ride on, and leave the trail clear for a peaceful pilgrim. How about that?"

"He's one of the gang, sheriff," said a horseman behind the big man. "They've left him behind to hold up the pursuit."

"I guess I know that!" snapped the big man.

The Kid's eyes widened. "Sheriff?" he said. "Sheriff of Silver Cloud, looking for you and the rest of the gang," said the red-bearded man. "You ain't getting away, gun or no gun."

The Rio Kid smiled, a little bitterly. He had drawn his gun only in time to stop the burning of powder, he knew that. But he was put in the position—that position he knew so well—of standing up against the law.

"Make it a pow-wow, sheriff," suggested the Kid. "I ain't the galoot you want! I never heard of you before this minute! I'm sure just riding on to Silver Cloud to bed down for the night. Honest Injun."

The red-bearded man scanned him. "Who are you, then?" he demanded.

"I call myself Kid Carfax." "You don't belong to this country?" "Right in once! I guess if you size me up as a puncher from Texas, sheriff, you won't miss your guess."

"Cow-puncher from Texas?" "Yep!"

"And what are you doing here?" "Just moving along the trail to Silver Cloud," answered the Kid amicably. "I pulled these guns to save my skin, Sheriff. I guess I needn't tell you that your bunch was going to shoot before asking questions. You savvy that?"

The Rio Kid spoke peaceably, amicably. He held the upper hand, but he did not want trouble with any sheriff in Nevada. Trouble with sheriffs in Texas had been enough for him. The Kid really would have been glad to get out of this difficulty without the burning of powder. He wanted to keep on the right side of the law, now that he had ridden into a new country. But life came before law.

"Puncher nothing!" said one of the riders—evidently the sheriff's posse of Silver Cloud. "A gun-man from Texas, more like. I guess only a gun-man could have got us covered so quick."

"You've said it," grunted the sheriff. "A galoot may be handy with a gun, without being a gun-man," urged the Kid. "Let up on it, fellers! What do you want with me, anyhow?"

"You've seen a wagin pass on this trail, driven like mad?" demanded the sheriff of Silver Cloud.

"Correct!" "It passed this spot?"

"Sure, and the teamster gave me a shot in passing," grinned the Kid. "That was why I was wise to you-uns when you came up."

The sheriff eyed him doubtfully. "Where's that durned wagon now?"

"Miles away, I reckon, while you're passing the time with me," said the Kid. "It turned into a gulch ahead in the canyon. I reckon you'll pick up plenty of sign on the rocks if you look. It sure was thundering along."

"And you was left here to hold us

clear, to give the gang a chance to get up with the goods?" said the sheriff.

"Not on your life! I don't even figure what that galoot had in the wagon," answered the Kid. "I reckoned at first he was hitting the horizon to get away from a gang of rustlers."

"Put up that gun!" "Oh, can it, sheriff," said the Kid. "I guess I want to see the lay-out before I put these guns away. What's your game?"

"If you're not one of the Carson gang, you've got nothing to fear. But you'll have to prove it. I guess I'll run you into Silver Cloud, and put you in the calaboose until you do."

The Kid laughed. "I sure ain't looking for a calaboose to bed down in to-night, sheriff. Guess again."

The sheriff gritted his teeth. "I'm giving you a chance," he said. "I know durned well that you're one of the bootleg gang, Mister Puncher from Texas. But I'm giving you a chance."

"Bootleg?" The Kid understood in a flash.

He knew now what had been in the wildly-driven wagon, and why the teamster had lashed on his horses so frantically, at the risk of life and limb. Bootleg whisky was in the wagon—a cargo of illicit spirits brought down from some hidden still in the mountains to be sold in the towns, when the sheriff of Silver Cloud had got on its track.

The Kid's sympathies, so far as that went, were with the sheriff.

He had no use for bootleggers. But he did not stand for trusting himself a prisoner in the hands of the sheriff of Silver Cloud. He was a stranger in the locality; and the sheriff's opinion of him was evidently already formed.

The red-bearded man was chafing with rage, but not daring to draw a gun under the Kid's cool, menacing eye; and the sheriff's prisoner would have to pay for that. And if they searched the Kid, they would find his roll—and the Kid could not account for that roll of bills without telling how he had sold a mine in Arizona—and in the gold country he was an outlaw. If the Kid thought for a moment of carrying his new respect for the law to the extent of yielding himself a prisoner to it, it was only for a moment.

"I'm waiting," said the sheriff of Silver Cloud, between his teeth. "You're my prisoner, Mister Puncher from Texas, guns or no guns. I guess we don't want gun-men from the south in this section, bootlegger or no bootlegger. You're my prisoner. Got that?"

"Not quite," grinned the Kid. The smile left his face, and his eyes gleamed. "I guess you're a sheriff, all O.K., but you're some bull-dozer, too, I reckon. I ain't taking a pass with you, I allow. You're riding on, sheriff! You're hitting the trail pronto, before my guns begin to talk. Catch on to that?"

The sheriff of Silver Cloud breathed hard.

"You're my prisoner," he repeated. "Forget it!" jeered the Kid.

The Silver Cloud sheriff's eyes blazed, and he reached for his gun.

Bang!

There was a crash as the sheriff rolled from his horse, and fell headlong in the trail. Three men behind him reached for weapons, and the Rio Kid's voice rang out like the roar of a mountain lion:

"Hands up!"

And just in time to prevent the blaze of the levelled six-guns, the three horsemen lifted their hands above their heads.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### The Upper Hand!

"GIT!" The Rio Kid rapped the word out sharply.

He was not smiling now; his sunburnt face had set hard, and his eyes glinted.

The three horsemen eyed him. The sheriff and his posse of Silver Cloud were a hard set of men, and it went bitterly against the grain with the three to knuckle under to this puncher, little more than a boy, who held them covered. But the fall of the red-bearded sheriff was less than enough for his men. They did not want any more burning of powder.

"You durned young fire-bug," said one of them hoarsely. "You've got us cinched this time—but watch out for next time—"

"Can it!" interrupted the Kid. "I'm sure tired of you galoots, and I want to see you hit the trail."

"You've killed Sheriff Purkiss—"  
"I keep on telling you to git," said the Kid, his eyes glinting over his guns. "You don't want to give me any back talk. It ain't healthy for you. Pick up that galoot and git. I guess your durned sheriff will be as lively as ever again when you've got a doc to him, though he won't use his gun hand again for six months, I reckon. Pick him up and stick him on his cayuse, and hit the trail, pronto."

That the sheriff was not killed was clear a moment later, as he stirred on the rocky ground and groaned.

"I guess he got it in his gun arm," explained the Kid. "I ain't moseyed into Nevada to shoot up sheriffs. Jest stopped the galoot from getting too fresh with his gun. Pick him up and travel."

Without a word more, and without venturing to touch a gun, they picked up the wounded sheriff, placed him on his horse, and with two of them holding him there, rode away.

Evidently they were anxious to get out of range of the walnut-butted guns; but they cast dark and threatening glances at the Kid as they went.

The Rio Kid looked after them; and dropped the guns back into his holsters when they were at a distance.

The horsemen rode on through the canyon, where lay the trail to Silver Cloud that the Kid had been following. They passed the gulch into which the Kid had seen the bootlegger's wagon disappear, and rode on, vanishing at last in the winding canyon.

With the wounded sheriff on their hands, the Silver Cloud posse had given up the pursuit of the bootlegger.

The Kid's brow was clouded. Bootleggers he loathed; not so much because they were breakers of the law, as for other reasons. Fire-water was not in the Kid's line; and bootleg stuff was not even

good fire-water; the Kid knew that the cargo in the wagon would be a poisonous concoction, compared with which whisky might be regarded as a beneficial medicine. The Kid had seen bloodshed follow indulgence in bootleg spirits. A galoot might be driven outside the law by no fault of his own; only too well the Rio Kid knew that. But the bootleggers drove a vile trade, a trade the mere thought of which got the Kid's goat. And now the Kid was lumped with a gang of bootleggers, in the minds of the men who represented the law in the Silver Cloud section.

The horsemen had ridden on to Silver Cloud; and that town, now, was wiped off the map for the puncher from Texas. Once more the Kid had woke up trouble.

"I guess it's bedding down in the sierra for us, old hoss," said the Kid to the grey mustang. "I sure reckon Silver Cloud wouldn't be healthy for you and me to-night, critter. We want to hit the trail out of this country bright and early in the morning, old hoss."

The Kid rode away from the spot at last. The sun was dipping behind the sierra, dipping to California and the far Pacific. It was necessary to look for a camp before the light went; a shelter under a roof being out of the question for the Kid after what had happened.

He rode slowly through the deep canyon, and turned into the rocky gulch by which the bootlegger's wagon had gone an hour ago.

Silver Cloud, he knew, was only a couple of miles or so farther on, at the

end of the canyon; and that way was not for the Kid. The gulch led up into the hills, wild and rocky and bristling with pines. That was the way of safety for the Rio Kid, and he followed it. To the escaped bootlegger he gave no thought; he had no doubt that the man in the wagon was far enough away by that time; though the Kid would not have been sorry to meet up again with the man who had taken a pot-shot at him on the trail, now that he knew the kind of galoot he was. The Kid would rather have liked to lay his Texas quirt round the broad shoulders of the bootlegger who had been the cause of landing him in trouble again with the law. But though he did not reckon that the bootlegger was anywhere near at hand, the Kid's eyes were watchful as he rode up the gulch; caution was second nature to him. It was for that reason that he sighted a glint among the pine trees, among the piled rocks of the hillside ahead—the glint of the setting sun on the barrel of a rifle. The Kid dropped from his horse as the bullet flew, but he dropped an instant before the bullet came; the crack that followed rang in his ears as he plunged into cover in a mass of sassafras.

"Great snakes!" murmured the Kid.

A moment more, and his horse was in cover at his side. The echoes of the rifle-shot died away among the hills.

The Kid grinned.

He could see the humour of the situation, grim as it was. Sheriff Purkiss, of Silver Cloud, had taken him for one of the bootlegging gang, and he had had to shoot up the sheriff in self-defence. The bootlegger took him for one of the pursuing party; and was firing on him for that reason. The man had not, after all, vanished into the hills with his cargo of poison; the Kid figured it out that the gulch was too rough and rocky even for a reckless driver, and the wagon had been forced to halt. Doubtless the bootlegger hoped for nightfall to give him a chance of getting clear; and till then he was standing at bay, rifle in hand, among the rocks, desperately ready to shoot if the pursuit followed him up the gulch.

The Kid could not help grinning.

Had they not met the Kid on the trail, no doubt Sheriff Purkiss and his men would have followed the wagon-tracks, and met the fire of the cornered bootlegger in the gulch. But owing to that meeting, they had ridden on to Silver Cloud; and it was the Kid—looking for a camp—who came on the cornered desperado.

Crack! Crack!

The bootlegger knew how to handle a gun. The bullets came searching through the sassafras where the Kid lay in cover.

The Kid was grinning; but his eyes glinted.

"You or me now, feller!" he murmured.

When the Kid left his cover, there was no sign to the man up the gulch that he had done so. A creeping Apache stalking his quarry was not more silent than the Kid, a lynx was not more

## Your Editor's Note Book

Another week, chums, and then many of you will know whether to expect the postman at the door with a parcel containing a birthday present! An anxious few days, perhaps. But rest yourselves in patience.

Of course, you've joined the Club? Don't leave these things till to-morrow, for then it may be too late!

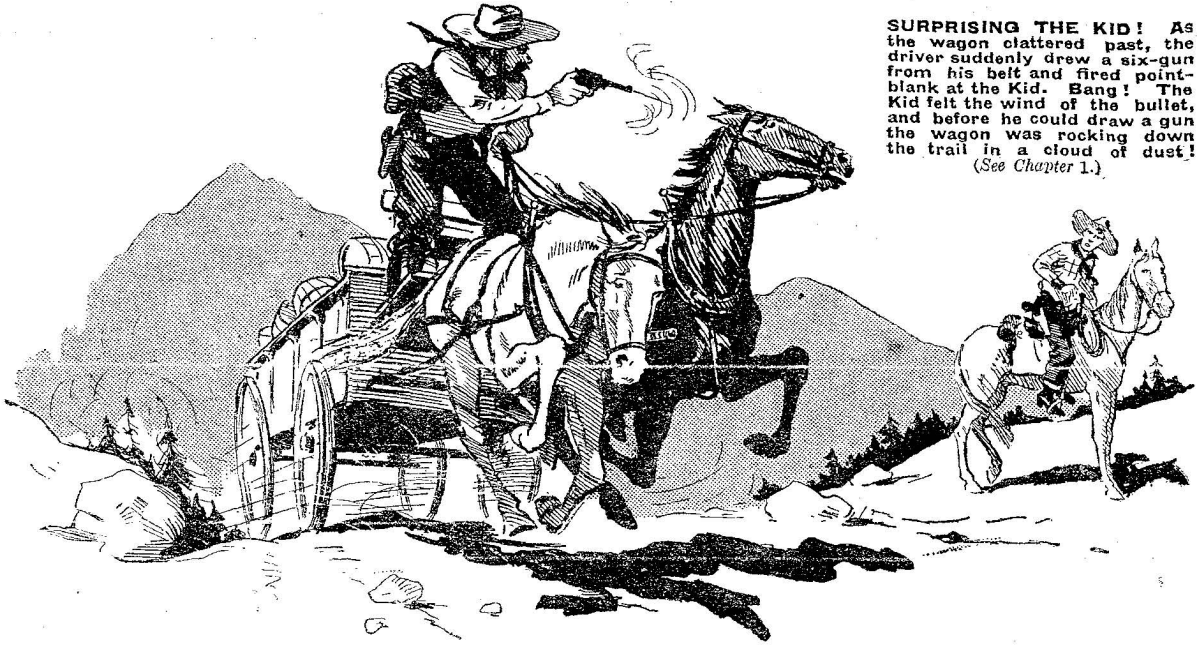
But I take it that you've done the necessary good work by filling in the registration coupon for the Birthday Club, or if you haven't, you will do so just as soon as you have read the rules of the Club. That's the idea, chums!

Now, as I was saying: Next week, Tuesday to be exact, is the time for rejoicing, for the first list of birthday dates will be published. If the date of your birth is the same as one in the list that appears, then—it's you for an annual!

Don't be disappointed, chums, when you look down that list of dates, if you find yours is not there. Your turn will come, don't you worry. Every week a new list will be published.

I never knew a fellow to butt into trouble as the Rio Kid does. But he doesn't seem to mind! Somehow, he always gets out of a mess or a tight corner. That's because he's determined never to give in. Whatever the odds, he'll face them without flinching, and, if needs be, go down fighting. That's a great spirit, don't you think, chums?





**SURPRISING THE KID!** As the wagon clattered past, the driver suddenly drew a six-gun from his belt and fired point-blank at the Kid. Bang! The Kid felt the wind of the bullet, and before he could draw a gun the wagon was rocking down the trail in a cloud of dust! (See Chapter 1.)

stealthy. Slowly and cautiously, the Rio Kid worked and wormed his way among rocks and boulders and bushes—slowly, but surely winding his way up the steep gulch, and never giving a sign; till he was above the spot where the bootlegger lay in the rocks. That one glimpse of a glinting gun, and the ring of the shots, sufficed to guide the Kid; he knew exactly where to look for the man who had pulled trigger on him. And when he came at the bootlegger, he came not from below but from above. From a high rock overlooking the clump of pines where the man was kneeling in cover, the Kid looked down grinning at his back. The man who had driven the wagon was kneeling there, rifle to shoulder, finger on trigger, watching the lower gulch, waiting for the Kid to show himself—and never dreaming that his enemy was now behind him, above him on the hillside. The Kid gave a soft chuckle.

At the sound of it, the bootlegger spun round.

He found himself looking into the muzzle of a six-gun. The Kid was only six yards from him, and five or six feet above, on the steep rocks. And the rocks on which he stood were not steeper than the gun in his hand.

"Drop that rifle!"

The Kid's voice was not loud, but it was very distinct. The bootlegger stared at him blankly. The surprise in his bearded face was almost ludicrous.

"I've told you to drop it, feller!"

The bootlegger lifted the rifle desperately.

Bang!

There was a yell from the bootlegger and the rifle dropped clanging on the rocks. The Kid jumped down into the pines as the bootlegger staggered against a tree panting. The bullet had struck the rifle, and the man's arm was numbed by the shock.

"I guess you ain't hurt, feller!" grinned the Kid. "I sure had a hunch to make it last sickness for you, hombre. But you ain't hurt. Put 'em up!"

"Durn you—"

"Cut it out, feller! Are you putting

up your paws, or do you allow you'd rather be left here for the buzzards."

The bootlegger lifted his hands above his head. The Kid stepped to him, and took the revolver from the holster at his belt, and pitched it away down the hillside. The rifle followed it. The big, rawboned man eyed him like a trapped wolf. But the six-gun in the Kid's hand daunted him, and though he eyed the puncher like a wolf, he submitted like a lamb. Now that he was disarmed, the Kid motioned to him to drop his hands.

"You've got me!" muttered the bootlegger.

"I sure have!" assented the Rio Kid with a nod. "I guess I've got you by the short hairs, feller!"

And he laughed cheerily.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Bound for Silver Cloud!

ONE by one the stars came out in a clear sky, glistening down on the Sierra Nevada, and range on range of pine-clad hills. The rocky gulch was deep in shadows. The Rio Kid stood looking at the bootlegger's wagon. With a gun in the Kid's hand, there had been no argument; the bootlegger had walked before him, and led him to the spot where the wagon lay. Near at hand the two horses were tethered. The Kid, as he glanced round him, did not wonder that the bootlegger had halted and turned at bay. Higher up, the gulch was too steep and narrow for the lightest buck-board, and the wagon could not have gone on. By a dozen paths the bootlegger could have escaped, abandoning his cargo; but there were thousands of dollars of illicit profit in the wagon stacked with liquid poison, and the ruffian had taken a more desperate choice. The Kid understood.

"I reckon you'd have got away with it, if the sheriff's crowd had followed you up here," he remarked. "You could sure have potted those galoots from cover like a bunch of gophers, if you had the sand to do it. And late at night you figured on getting the stuff

away. But you didn't allow for the Rio Kid horning into the trouble, hombre."

The bootlegger muttered a curse. Even now he could not understand how the enemy had doubled on him and taken him by surprise; but he knew very well that the sheriff and his men could never have done what the Rio Kid had done. He had had no doubt of shooting them down, or driving them off under his fire, if they followed him up the steep gulch. But he had not counted upon an adversary of the Kid's calibre. Had he been dealing only with the Silver Cloud posse, the bootlegger would have got away with it.

"Look here, feller," the bootlegger muttered hoarsely. "You've got me, and you've got the stuff. Call it a thousand dollars, and hit the trail."

The Kid whistled.

"A thousand dollars is sure a pot of durocks," he said, "and on the other side the sheriff has promised me a bed in the calaboose, if he can get his hands on me."

The bootlegger stared.

"Ain't you one of the sheriff's crowd?"

"Nope."

"Who the thunder are you, then?"

"Puncher from Texas," answered the Kid cheerily. "Riding the trail to get to the cow country."

"Then what in thunder did you horn in for?"

"I guess I wasn't allowed to say no," chuckled the Kid. "You tried to shoot me up on the trail, and the sheriff allowed he would rope me in on suspicion of being one of the Carson gang, and then you sure tried to pot me again when I was looking this-a-way for a camp. I guess I never wanted to horn in, feller; but I've got in the trouble up to my neck. I don't stand for being potted at like a gopher, feller, and I was sure glad to meet up with you again."

He laughed again.

"You're an ornery cuss, Mister Carson, if that's your name," he said. "That sheriff is some bull-dozer, and I reckon I can't say I like his manners; but

you're a pesky polecat of a galoot, and you do get my goat. You allowed you was going to shoot up the sheriff's crowd and get away with that poison. You've slipped up on it, feller. Get those hosses hitched."

"What's the game?" hissed the bootlegger.

"You're some driver," grinned the Kid. "I've seen that! I guess you can drive that team after dark and get home, with a gun just at hand to see that you do it."

"I guess—"

"This ain't your say-so, hombre," reminded the Kid. "You're hooked by your short hairs, feller, and I'm the galoot to chew the rag jest now. Are you going to hitch up them hosses?"

The bootlegger looked the Rio Kid in the eyes. What he read there was enough for him. Without a further word, he led the horses to the wagon and hitched them.

"That's better," approved the Kid. "I sure like to see a galoot do as he's told peaceable like. I guess we're going to have quite a pleasant little pasear, you and me, in that shebang of yours. Get in and take the ribbons; and I reckon I'll rope you to the seat for safety, feller."

"What—" began the bootlegger, hoarse with rage.

The Kid interrupted him. "I keep on telling you this ain't your say-so. You chew the rag too much, feller. If you want my gun to talk instead of me, you've only got to go on chewing the rag instead of doing as you're told like a little man."

With a curse, the bootlegger clambered into the wagon. A rope secured him there. The Rio Kid took a seat by his side. His gun was in his hand, and the muzzle touched the driver's ribs. The contact of that metal muzzle was more than enough to enforce obedience. The wagon creaked and groaned and rumbled on the rough rocks, grinding noisily down the gulch towards the wide canyon. The Kid gave a soft musical whistle, and the grey mustang loped out of the shadows and followed behind the wagon.

Out in the lower canyon, where the trail ran, the going was better. At the trail the bootlegger paused, and fixed a deadly look on the handsome puncher sitting at his side.

"Right or, feller," smiled the Kid. "Silver Cloud, and hustle. I guess I ain't losing my beauty sleep, even for the pleasure of a drive with a pilgrim of your heft. Get going."

"Silver Cloud?" breathed the bootlegger.

"Sure!"

Perhaps the trader in illicit spirits had had some idea that this puncher had intended to rope in the cargo of fire-water for his own behoof. But when the Kid gave him his destination, he understood.

For a long moment he paused. The muzzle of the six-gun jammed hard on his ribs. There was a cold gleam in the eye the Kid turned on him in the starlight.

"Hit the trail, hombre! I guess I could drive this wagon if I left you here for the buzzards to pick. You want to get a move on."

The wagon clattered on the trail. Under the soft starlight the vehicle rumbled and clattered on, sending a thousand echoes booming through the lonely hills.

Far in the distance the lights of Silver Cloud town shone up at last from the night.

The bootlegger had driven in savage silence; but as he saw the lights of the town he half-turned to the Kid again.

"Five thousand dollars, feller—"

"You sure make me tired," said the Rio Kid. "You chew the rag too much, pard. You're too mighty free with your gun for me to leave you moseying around loose in the hills; and I don't stand for bootlegging. You want to hit the camp before I get tired of holding this gun."

The wagon clattered on down the trail and into the street of Silver Cloud camp.

#### THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Kid Calls In!

SHERIFF PURKISS, with a bandaged arm and a white savage face, stared from his office window into the lighted street of Silver Cloud. There was a buzz of voices in the street; a score of idlers were following the wagon that drove up to the sheriff's office, with a grey mustang trotting behind it as it clattered. Sheriff Pur-

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## "HURRAH!"



The First  
List of  
BIRTHDAY  
DATES  
will appear in  
NEXT  
WEEK'S  
issue!

There is still time to  
Register.

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kiss stared at it with unbelieving eyes. The wagon was the one he had trailed and tracked and chased that day in the hills, driven by Carson, the leader of the bootlegging gang; and which had only escaped him by desperate flight; and which, he was assured, he would have roped in but for the intervention of the unknown puncher from Texas. And by the side of the teamster sat that very puncher, with a cool and smiling face. The sheriff, wounded, defeated, enraged, was more bitterly anxious to rope in that puncher, than even Carson, the bootlegger himself; and he could not believe his eyes as they fixed on the handsome, sunburnt, careless face. With a bound, the sheriff was in the street as the wagon thundered up to the building and clattered to a halt.

The Rio Kid swept off his Stetson in polite saluta.

"Evening, sheriff! Glad to see you around so lively after that little rookus! I kinder guessed you wasn't hard hit."

"You!" stammered the sheriff.

The Rio Kid dropped from the wagon. The black-muzzled mustang was at his side a second later, and the Kid vaulted lightly into the saddle. The sheriff stared at him, stupefied, and at the scowling, furious bootlegger, who sat bound to his seat.

"That's your man, sheriff!" drawled the Rio Kid. "You'll find the stuff in the wagon—kegs and kegs of it, enough poison to swamp Silver Cloud. You allowed I was one of the Carson gang, sheriff, and I sure told you you missed your guess, and you wouldn't sit up and take notice. And this galoot allowed I was one of your crowd, and he sure tried to hand out bad medicine for me, but he slipped up on it. I figured that he was too mighty free with his gun, and I don't stand for bootlegging; so I've toted him home, sheriff, and hyer he is, if you want him."

"Waal, carry me home to die!" gasped the sheriff of Silver Cloud. "That's Carson, the bootlegger—and—and—and you—" Amazement choked the sheriff's utterance.

"And I'm a puncher from Texas, same as I told you, sheriff, only you wouldn't take it down," grinned the Kid. "I guess I'd never have horned in if this galoot hadn't started the rookus. Do you want him? He's left his guns behind, and he's roped to his seat; that's why he's taking it so good-temperedly."

"I guess I want him—and you, too, Mister Puncher from Texas!" said the sheriff of Silver Cloud grimly. "I guess I don't get on to the rights of this game, but you sure ain't riding free after plugging me in the arm. Men, take that puncher, and shoot him down if he handles a gun."

Loud and clear rang the laugh of the Rio Kid. He had not expected to find friends in Silver Cloud after what had happened on the canyon trail. But it was like the Kid to ride coolly into a town packed with foes.

A touch of the grey mustang's glossy neck; and the crowd surged back as the heels lashed. With a gun in either hand, the Rio Kid rode on up the street; amid a roar of voices and scurrying of feet.

"After him!" yelled the sheriff. "Shoot him down!"

For the moment the bootlegger's wagon and the bootlegger were unheeded. A crowd surged after the reckless rider, and there was a gun in every hand. The black-muzzled mustang came whirling round and charging back at the crowd, and the Kid's guns were roaring now.

Bang! Bang! Bang! With wild cries the crowd parted and dodged and rushed to escape. Bang! Bang! Bang! rang the six-guns. Not a bullet found a mark—the Kid was firing over the heads of the swarming mob in the street of Silver Cloud; but the crowd dodged and fled wildly from the charging mustang and the roaring six-guns. Right down the street galloped the Rio Kid, his guns roaring, laughing as he rode, and out into the trail under the stars. Silver Cloud was left buzzing and seething with excitement behind him; but not a man followed into the dusk of the hills in pursuit of the puncher from Texas.

The Rio Kid laughed loud and long as he rode by dusky trails that night. Shooting up the town recalled wild old days in Texas when he had ridden with the Double Bar bunch. The Kid had quite enjoyed the episode; but the Kid knew that he would have to pay for his amusement if he lingered. There was no camping for the Rio Kid that night; by the light of the stars he rode, and rode fast and far.

THE END.

(There will be another roaring tale of the Wild West next week, chums, featuring the Rio Kid!)