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The POPULAR

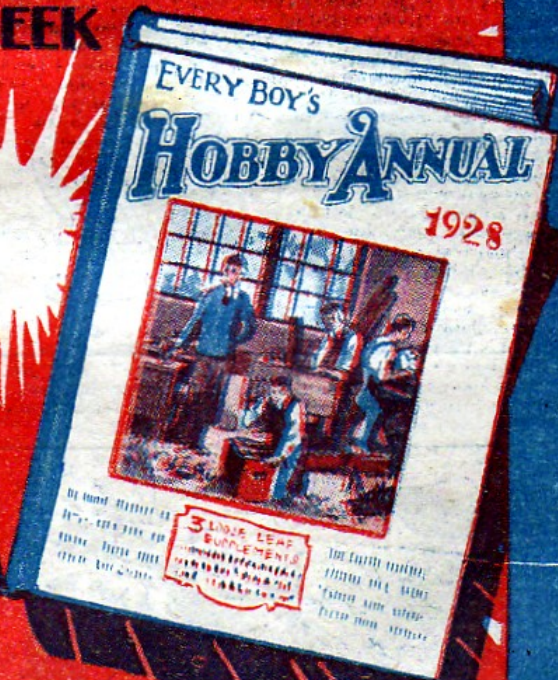
Week Ending
August 4th,
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New Series.
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EVERY
TUESDAY

WONDERFUL SIXSHILLING ANNUALS
GIVEN AWAY
THIS
WEEK



THE GREATEST OFFER
OF THE YEAR!

THE KID'S GOOD DEED!

It's just like the Kid to go out of his way to help a fellow-cowpuncher in dire straits. But he doesn't expect to be made a scapegoat for his pains. That's what actually does happen, however!

The RIO KID!

By RALPH REDWAY



A ROUSING LONG COMPLETE TALE OF THE WEST, FEATURING THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW!

THE FIRST CHAPTER. A Surprise for the Kid!

THE Rio Kid had ridden south from Montana with the intention of hitting the sheep country.

The Kid, like every true cowpuncher, hated sheep, and all they stood for—the barbed-wire fence and the eaten-up range. Sheepmen he detested, on principle. In his own country of Texas he had seen many a wide llano, once a sea of tossing horns, turned into an ocean of woolly backs. But Wyoming was not his own country, and if they raised sheep instead of cows in Wyoming, it was no concern of his, and he had no kick coming on the subject.

The Kid told himself that he was hitting the sheep country because there men did not pack guns, and the two walnut-butted Colts, that had seen service—perhaps too much service—in his hands, would be allowed to rest unused in the leathern holsters.

But perhaps he had another reason for striking southward, that he did not tell himself. It was a far cry from Montana to Texas; but Wyoming lay on the way, and with long hundreds of miles in front of him, he still felt that he was nearer home. The grassy plains of Texas, the murmur of the Rio Frio, drew him. He was an outlaw in his own country, and there men hunted him for his life; and yet the longing for his own country was drawing him homeward. But the Kid hardly realized that. He was going to see the sheep country, anyhow.

It was characteristic of the Kid that his way lay by the Squaw River and the Squaw Mountains, where no railroad had penetrated, and the telephone wires stretched across country uninhabited for many a long mile. Railroads and paved towns he disliked; but he was likely to find neither in the wild region of the Squaw River. And there was cow country by the headwaters of the Squaw—not the cow country he knew, grassy plains extending farther than the eye could reach, dappled with dark chaparral; but the cow country of the uplands, little fertile valleys and mountain pastures. And local gossip by road and trail had told him of troubles between the cowmen of Squaw

This week:

“THE SCAPEGOAT!”

Mountain and the sheepmen of Pawnee Ford.

Knowing nothing of the rights and wrongs of the trouble, the Kid's heartfelt sympathies went out instinctively to the cowmen. But he had no hunch to mix himself up in the trouble. He had come to the sheep country to dodge trouble.

Pawnee Ford, the sheep town, was the Kid's destination now, as he rode the black-muzzled mustang by a dusty trail in the sunset. There were several roads to Pawnee Ford; and the Kid chose a hoof-marked trail in preference. He could see the town in the distance, backed by the mighty mass of Squaw Mountain—a mountain that looked steep, inaccessible, in the distance, but the sides of which were split into canyons, gulches, and deep valleys where there was rich pasture. The Kid was not three miles from his destination, when he made the sudden discovery that sheep country might be as perilous for unwary travellers as cow country. Something that fanned his sunburnt cheek flew from a thicket of aspens by the side of the trail, and the report of the firearm followed.

“Shucks!” ejaculated the Kid in surprise.

It was poor shooting, for he knew by the report that the marksman was not more than thirty yards distant. But the Kid did not give him a chance for doing better with a second shot. The report had not died away when the Kid was off his mustang, and in cover of a knoll on the other side of the trail. There, through the opening of a bunch of sassafras, he watched the trail, in rather amused surprise.

The man who had taken a pot-shot at him was hidden in the aspens. He had used a .45 Colt, as the Kid knew by the report. That was a cowman's weapon—it was the gun to which the

Kid himself was accustomed. The Kid, as he bent in cover, cursed the sheep country and his own folly. They had told him that men did not pack guns in the sheep country; and just now the Kid was not packing a gun. The two walnut-butted, notched guns, carried in the low-slung holsters, that proclaimed the gunman, had been left in safe keeping; and the Kid's only weapon was the little derringer he carried in the pocket of his chaps.

The Kid was not punching cows now, and he was in a sheep country; but he rode as a cowpuncher, in high-heeled boots, chaps, silken neckscarf, and Stetson hat. Cowmen, he had been told, were unpopular round about Pawnee Ford, and he wondered whether some ireful sheepman in the aspens had taken a pot-shot at him simply because he obviously was a cowpuncher. If it was just a hold-up, the hold-up pilgrim was drastic in his methods, firing on a man from cover without giving him a chance to put up his hands.

The Kid's face set grimly as he fingered the little derringer in the pocket of his chaps. It was a weapon he despised; but the Kid had not been able to reconcile himself to riding entirely weaponless, even in sheep country, and he was glad of it now. At a short range, the little derringer was as deadly in his hands as a .45.

The grey mustang with the black muzzle lay down behind the knoll, at a sign from the Kid. The unknown marksman was not likely to shoot his horse, but the Kid was taking no risks of that. He waited for the man to show himself—as he had to do if he wanted to push the matter farther. The open, hoof-trampled trail lay between the Kid and the thicket of aspens, and the man had to cross it to get a bead on him again. And when it came to that the Kid had no doubt how the affair would turn out. He had left the walnut-butted guns behind him, but not his skill in the use of a gun.

There was a trembling in the aspens, and the Kid's eye glinted as he noted it. A Stetson hat came into view, and under it a dark, almost haggard face.

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with a pair of keen, glinting eyes that looked across the trail.

The Kid could have shot the man down with ease; but he did not raise his weapon yet. The man in the Stetson stared across the trail, and up and down, evidently put to a loss by the Kid's sudden vanishing into cover. The Kid grinned as he watched him.

Slowly, uneasily, the man pushed out of the aspens into the trail. There was a revolver, still smoking, in his hand, and a look of savage intensity on his face.

It was a clean-cut, rather handsome face; but the expression on it at that moment was savage and malignant. There was a streak of crimson on one of the cheeks, as if a bullet had grazed there. But what struck the Kid at the first glance was that the man plainly was a cowman—boots and spurs and Stetson hat and baggy chaperejos showed that. It was a cowman who had fired that shot from cover, and the Kid did not like the idea at all. He would much rather have discovered that the pot-shot came from some disgruntled sheepman.

The cowman stepped out into the open trail, and with a crouching, creeping gait, crossed it, evidently to seek the vanished Kid in his cover. The Kid allowed him to come within a dozen paces, and then he was on his feet in a flash, and the little derringer was at a level.

"Put 'em up!" said the Kid pleasantly.

There was a hoarse ejaculation from the cowman; and in spite of the warning and the levelled derringer, he flung up his gun to fire.

Crack!

The gun spun from the cowman's hand, and there was a spurt of blood with it. He gave a fierce yell and staggered back, the gun falling at his feet. The Rio Kid was on him the next second, and the cowman went with a crash into the grass, and the Kid's knee was planted on his chest, and the Kid grabbed up the fallen gun. The muzzle of the hold-up man's own gun looked down into his distorted, infuriated face, and over it grinned the handsome face of the Kid.

"How about it, feller?" drawled the Kid.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Ride, Cowboy!

"YOU'VE got me!"

The words came in a husky gasp.

"I sure have!" grinned the Kid. "Any reason to give why I shouldn't hand out your ticket for soup, you dog-goned coyote?"

The cowman's teeth set, and his eyes flashed defiance at the handsome face bending over him.

"Shoot, and be durned to you!" he said. "You've got me; and I may as well go out now as hang at Pawnee Ford! Shoot!"

"Search me!" said the Kid.

He removed his knee from the man's chest, and rose, allowing the other to rise, but keeping him covered with the six-gun.

"They want you in Pawnee Ford?" he asked.

"Yep."

"You're a cowman, I reckon?"

"Yep."

"Same here," said the Kid cheerily. "And what do you mean by loosing off a bullet at another cowman without warning, durn your hide?"

"I wanted your horse."

"I guess that wasn't the way to ask

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for the loan of a boss," said the Rio Kid chidingly. "I guess I've a hunch for refusing requests made in that-away. What do they want you for in Pawnee Ford?"

The cowman shrugged his shoulders.

"The sheepmen are up agin us cowmen in this section," he answered. "I reckon you're a stranger hyer if you don't know."

"Sure," assented the Kid. "I'm from Texas."

The man's look of savage, sullen defiance changed, and he eyed the Kid searchingly.

"You're a cowman," he said. "I was desperate, or I wouldn't have pulled on you for your horse. It's a necktie party if they get me in Pawnee Ford. I guess I'm expecting to hear their horses at any minute—I dodged them in the valley, but they're after me. You won't hand over a cowpuncher to be strung up by sheepmen."

"Not on your life!" said the Rio Kid promptly.

He paused.

A puncher in flight from sheepmen, dismounted and desperate, appealed to all the Kid's sympathy, and he could see that the tale was true; it was plain that the man was a hunted and desperate fugitive. The Kid was the man to help him escape, at any risk, without asking questions, willing to take it for granted that the sheepmen were the aggressors, or, at least, had deserved anything that had come to them. But he did not like that shooting from cover. The Kid had been a fugitive himself more than once, and perhaps was too willing to make allowances for lawless methods in such a plight; but shooting an unwary man down for his horse was "yellow"—it was the kind of thing that got the Kid's goat. The fellow was a cowman and up against the sheepmen, and so far, so good; but there was a yellow streak in him to make him act as he had done.

And so the Kid paused and thought it out.

From somewhere in the distance came the echoing of horses' hoofs. The cowman gave a sudden, convulsive start.

"They're coming!" he said hoarsely.

That settled it, for the Kid.

"You sure played it low-down, feller, when you pulled trigger on a galoot without warning," he said. "We don't stand for that in Texas. But I ain't handing over any cowpuncher to sheepmen to be strung up. I'm lending you my horse."

The cowman's eyes blazed.

"You're a white man," he panted. "I tell you I'm a dead man if I don't get a cayuse to carry me to Squaw Mountain. You come up there any day and you'll find your horse safe and sound—ask any galoot in Squaw Mountain for Jud Starbuck."

The Kid smiled whimsically. He had been three or four days in the sheep country, and already he was mixed up in the range war. He had parted with the walnut-butted guns too soon! But he nodded.

"I guess I'll remember! Take care of that cayuse—he will carry you as far and as fast as you want, so long as you don't use whip or spur; if you do, look out for his teeth; he's some fighter. Here's your gun, and I guess you'd better beat it lively."

Starbuck stood quite still for a moment, as if unable to believe in his good luck. But the Kid pushed him impatiently towards the horse.

"Ride, cowboy, ride!" he exclaimed.

Starbuck threw himself into the saddle and grasped the reins. The grey mustang did not stir. His dark eyes

turned in surprised inquiry upon his master. But a pat and a word from the Kid made him understand, and with a bound he was gone with his rider. They plunged headlong through the aspen thicket, and vanished from sight; but for several minutes the shaking of the aspens told the way they were going. Then for a moment the Kid caught a glimpse of a Stetson hat as the rider vanished into a deep draw. Hoofbeats echoed back for a few moments, and then all was silent. The Squaw Mountain cowman was gone—mounted upon a horse that was likely to show his heels to any cayuse in Wyoming.

The Kid stood for some minutes in thought.

He was quite aware that he had acted unwisely. He had trusted the grey mustang—his constant and faithful comrade—into the hands of a stranger who, as he knew, had a yellow streak in him; he had helped a fugitive to escape pursuit, without knowing why he was pursued. But he did not regret what he had done. There was a range war between cowman and sheepman, and the Kid's Texan heart went out to the cowmen in the struggle—all the more because he knew that in that section they were outnumbered and likely to come off worse in the struggle. What had Jud Starbuck done to bring the Pawnee Ford citizens on his trail? Shot up a sheepman, perhaps; and if it was a fair break what was the matter with shooting up a sheepman? The Kid made a wry face as he remembered that treacherous shot from the aspens. A man with a yellow streak in him might not have given the other man a fair break—certainly he had not given the Kid a fair break. The Kid whistled softly.

"You're a durn fool, Kid," he said. "You're some gink, you are, sure. You hit the sheep country to dodge trouble, and you horn into the first trouble on the trail. You're plumb loco, Kid—that's what's the matter with you. But"—he grinned—"the sheepmen ain't lynching a cowman so long as I can take a hand in the game, they sure are not."

The Kid pursued his way—on foot!

Going afoot was detestable to him, as to all cowpunchers, and the cowman's high-heeled boots were made for riding, not walking. But the Kid had three miles to walk, and he swung on his way with jingling spurs. He was going to bed down that night at Pawnee Ford, and on the morrow he would have to hire a cayuse to ride up into Squaw Mountain and reclaim the lent mustang. And in Pawnee Ford it would be wise not to say a word about what had happened on the trail. If the sheepmen had wanted to lynch Starbuck, they were likely to be equally keen on lynching a puncher who had helped the man to escape them. The Kid was rather keen to reach Pawnee Ford and to learn what all the trouble was about, anyhow.

The hoofbeats he had heard in the distance, while talking to Starbuck, had died out; the horsemen were not coming down the trail. But from several directions the Kid could hear distant echoes of galloping, and once he heard faintly from afar the crack of a rifle. More than one party was out, he figured, in search of the cowman from Squaw Mountain. The Kid began to wonder whether the man would get clear after all, well-mounted as he now was. He had to make a wide circle to get to Squaw Mountain and the cover of the hilly canyons and draws there. The Kid wished him luck, and, fed-up as he was with walking, he did not regret that he had lent the cowman his horse. But the

Rio Kid was not destined to finish his journey to Pawnee Ford on foot. Suddenly from a fold of the plain a bunch of horsemen dashed out into the trail, and at sight of the Kid three or four guns were levelled.

"We've got him, sheriff!"
"We sure have!" A bronzed man, with the silver star of office dangling over his grey shirt, pushed his horse closer to the Kid. "Put up your hands, puncher, we've got you sure!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Scapegoat!

THE Kid reached his hands above his head, with a rather amused smile on his tanned face.

Sheriffs, in Texas, the Kid had disliked to meet; but sheriffs in Wyoming knew not the Rio Kid, or his name and fame along the Rio Grande. This was not a hold-up; this was the sheriff of Pawnee Ford and his posse; and the Kid had nothing to fear—at least, so he figured. Four guns were lifted to shoot him down if he touched a weapon, and if the Kid had wanted to make a fight of it, there was only one bullet in the little derringer in the pocket of his chaps. But the Kid was not looking for trouble with Wyoming sheriffs.

He held up his hands with the meekness of a lamb, and smiled at the hard-faced horsemen circling round him on panting steeds. Every face held a threat; but threats did not daunt the Rio Kid.

"This hyer is a little surprise party, I reckon," he remarked pleasantly. "Anything I can do for you, gentlemen?"

"You can keep your paws pointing to the sky, if you don't want your cabeza blown into little pieces," grunted one of the riders.

"Sure!" assented the Kid.

"Rope his hands, Peterson," said the sheriff.

The Kid's eyes glistened.

"I'll tell a man!" he said. "Ain't you going to mention what you want? I guess I ain't aware of having trodden on any of your toes since I hit this country, sheriff."

The bronzed man watched his face keenly.

"You're the man we want," he said. "You fit the description! I guess we're going to show your Squaw Mountain crowd that you can't shoot down citizens of Pawnee Ford."

"Search me!" ejaculated the Kid. "Is it any good telling you that I've never seen Squaw Mountain till this afternoon, and I've never been nearer than I am this minute?"

"No good at all," answered the sheriff. "You can tell that tale when

you come to trial for the murder of Billy Ward."

"I sure never heard the name before, sheriff."

"Can it," interrupted one of the riders. "What's the good of that, puncher? You're the man, and we've got you!"

A looped rope was thrown round the

"We know it was a puncher," said the sheriff. "Five or six can swear to that. We know his horse was shot at the ford, and he got away on foot. When we find a cowpuncher on foot, I guess we don't want to know any more. If you ain't the man, where's your cayuse?"

The Kid was silent.



THE PRISONER! An hour later the door of the cell opened, and the sheriff stood in the doorway. He had a gun in his hand, while the gaoler brought in food and drink for the Kid. (See Chapter 4.)

Kid's elevated wrists. For a second his eyes blazed, and he was tempted to draw the derringer and make a fight of it. It was not because all the chances were against him that the Rio Kid gave up that idea. These men were making a mistake—they were hunting for a cowpuncher, whom evidently they did not know by sight, and they had mistaken the Kid for their quarry. It was a mistake that could be set right.

The next minute it was too late. The rope was drawn to a knot, and the Kid's hands were bound, and he was a powerless prisoner. The horsemen sheathed their guns, but kept round the Kid, the man Peterson holding the end of the rope that was fastened to his wrists.

"Take him on your horse, Peterson," said the sheriff. "We want to get him gaoled before dark."

"Ain't you going to listen to a galoot?" complained the Kid. "I keep on telling you I ain't the man you want. Don't you know the galoot you're after?"

"We're after the Squaw Mountain cowman who shot up Billy Ward," answered the sheriff, "and I kinder reckon we've got him."

"Oh sho!" ejaculated the Kid. It came into his mind like a blaze, that the sheriff's posse was in pursuit of Jud Starbuck. That was what the cowman had done—the Kid knew now. He had shot a Pawnee Ford sheepman. The Kid's face grew serious.

"But sure you've got witnesses who know the firebug by sight, if you're after him," he urged.

He had lent his cayuse to the man the sheriff was after; but he was not saying so. But a cowpuncher proceeding on foot was uncommon enough to justify suspicion, at least, that he was the fugitive puncher whose horse had been shot. The sheriff glanced down at the Kid's handsome boots.

"You ain't walked fur in them boots," he grinned. "They ain't got much of the dust of the trail on them. I reckon you was mounted not long back, puncher. Where's your hoss, if you ain't the man we want?"

"I guess I traded him to a galoot way back on the trail," said the Kid. Starbuck was far enough from pursuit now, he reckoned. "A galoot with a gun in his grip asked for him, sheriff, and I was too plumb polite to refuse."

"Can it!" said Peterson.

The sheriff eyed the Kid again. "I guess it might be true—if the man happened on him," he said. "I guess he wouldn't be pertickler how he got a hoss. If we ain't got the right man yet, I guess we'll get him; and jest now, stranger, you're going into the calaboose at Pawnee Ford to make sure. You'll have a fair trial, and if you ain't the man, you're all right."

"I ain't the man, sure!" said the Kid cheerily. "But I'll be glad of a lift to town. I never had any hunch for walking. I guess I'll take that lift on your cayuse with pleasure, Mr. Peterson."

Peterson grunted.

"Git on!"

"Any cuss in this bunch lending me a hand?" asked the cheery Kid. "I sure ain't a frog for hopping!"

One of the horsemen swung the bound puncher to the back of Peterson's horse, behind the rider.

"Beat it," said the sheriff.

The posse turned back on the trail towards the town. The sheriff's eyes lingered on the Kid doubtfully, though the other members of the party seemed to have no doubt that they had the man they wanted. The Kid caught his glance and smiled.

"You've sure roped in the wrong brone, feller," he said. "If I was the man that shot up one of your citizens, do you reckon I should be walking into town, like you found me?"

The sheriff nodded.

"You sure was heading for town when we got you," he said. "I guess I was thinking of that."

"Them Squaw Mountain punchers have sure got gall enough for anything," grunted Peterson. "I reckon he was looking for a chance to steal another horse."

"Yep; that would be it!" agreed the sheriff.

"Not on your life," said the Kid. "I keep on telling you that I'm a stranger here, and not the firebug you want!"

"You say you traded off your hoss to a galoot with a gat in his grip?" the sheriff asked.

"O'rect."

"If that's the straight goods, that galoot is the man we want. Where did it happen, and what way did he take? Take us to the place and put us on his trail."

The Kid did not answer.

"Play up to that, you durned liar!" growled Peterson. "If you've handed out the straight stuff, make it good!"

It was a fair enough offer; but the Kid had not helped the cowman to escape only to put his enemies on his track. He made no answer, though he knew that silence meant condemnation.

"Is it a cinch?" demanded the sheriff.

"Nix. I guess I don't want to lose this lift into town," said the Kid pleasantly. "I'm sure plumb anxious to get a look at a sheep town when it's got its little back up. I never reckoned that sheepmen had anything like a big kick in them."

There was a growl of anger from the party—all of them sheepmen. The sheriff clicked his teeth hard.

"That cinches it—you're the man we want, and a pesky liar, too! Shut up your bean box."

And the party rode into Pawnee Ford with their prisoner, and the Kid, cheery and cool as he still looked, re'used v'ry clearly that he was in as tight a corner as he ever had been, even when he had been hunted for his life on the banks of the Rio Grande.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Lynch Law!

"LYNCH him!"

"String him up!"

"Oh shucks!" murmured the

Rio Kid, with a grin. "They're sure a bunch of ferocious sheepmen in this section."

Pawnee Ford was in an uproar. The town was crowded with men on foot and men on horseback, all wildly excited, and there was a buzz of fierce voices—which gathered to a roar when the sheriff's posse was seen riding in with a prisoner—and that prisoner a

puncher. Wild and fierce faces surrounded the party as they pushed their horses slowly through the crowded street towards the timber gaol. Fists were shaken at the Kid on all sides; fierce eyes glared threats at him. Thicker and thicker grew the crowd, till the party were proceeding at a slow walk.

"Lynch him!"

A hundred voices roared out.

Apparently, the man who had been "shot up" by an unknown puncher was popular at Pawnee Ford. The Kid hated the thought that a cowman had shot up a sheepman without giving him an even break; but the thought was forced into his mind. It was for murder, and not for a fatal fight, that the unknown puncher was wanted at Pawnee Ford; the Kid began to understand that.

Yet, as the exact identity of the culprit was evidently unknown, it was likely that a mistake had been made. The shooting-up could only have been seen from a distance. Billy Ward, the sheepman, had fallen, but it was possible that Starbuck had only beaten him to it; the Kid fervently hoped so. Only, as he remembered that pot-shot from the aspens, he was troubled. He did not like to think that he had saved a man who had shot down even a sheepman without giving him a chance. One cowman was bound to stand by another, especially in a sheep country where the cowmen were in a minority; but there was a limit.

A burly man with a gun in his hand shoved forward, and stood in front of the horsemen, his face dark and fierce.

"Hand him over, sheriff!"

"Step, it lively, Jim Ward," said the sheriff. "We're for the calaboose."

"Hand him over!"

"Lynch him!"

"This here puncher allows he ain't the right man," said the sheriff. "We got to give him a chance to prove it."

"What chance did he give my brother, Billy, when he shot him? Billy never had a gun on him!"

The Kid flinched. It was as he had feared; Jud Starbuck had shot down a man without giving him a chance. The Kid repented him of the hasty sympathy that had induced him to help a red-handed gunman to escape what was coming to him. It was a murderer who was riding the black-muzzled mustang into the wild recesses of Squaw Mountain; safe now from pursuit, while the Kid stood the racket for him. The mob roared and swayed, and surged round the halted horsemen.

"Hand him over, sheriff! We're going to string him up right now!" roared Ward.

"I guess not!" said the sheriff. "I guess he's my prisoner. Stand aside!"

"Have him off'n that hoss, boys!" shouted Ward.

"Gents," said the Rio Kid coolly, "give your sheriff a chance. I ain't the man that did the shooting. I ain't packed a gun for days and days. I never reckoned I should want a gun in the sheep country. You don't want to lynch the wrong galoot, gents. When you figure it out afterwards that you've made a mistake, what about me?"

"I guess you're the man," snarled Ward, "and you're a puncher, anyhow, and you Squaw Mountain galoots are too free with your shooting-irons!"

"But I ain't a Squaw Mountain galoot," protested the Kid. "I never set foot on Squaw Mountain. I'm from Texas."

Ward eyed him savagely.

"If you're from Texas, you're another of the gunmen that come to hide at

Squaw Mountain because the law's after you," he said. "There's too many of them in this section now!"

"Lynch him!"

"He's the man, right enough," said Ward. "I tell you, we're going to string him up, sheriff!"

"I guess not," said the sheriff. "Ride on, men—stand out of the way, Ward, and if you lift that gat, look out for mine!"

The sheriff had a gun in his hand now. Jim Ward hesitated a moment, but he stepped aside.

"Pack him in the gaol, if you like!" he snarled. "I guess we'll have him out before the sun rises agin!"

The posse pushed on their way to the timber building, the crowd roaring and swaying round. Two or three shots were fired, but into the air. The mob, so far at least, were not prepared for a desperate affray with the sheriff and his men. The sheriff gasped with relief when the Kid was taken from Peterson's horse and led into the gaol.

"This town is sure some excited," said the Kid, as he was led into a room with iron-barred windows. "Looks like there'll be a necktie party in Pawnee Ford to-night, feller. I sure don't cotton to the idea."

"I reckon it's likely enough," growled Peterson, "and, I guess, there ain't many will try to stop them, arter the way you shot up Billy Ward, you durned fire-bug!"

"And I never saw the galoot, and never heard tell of him till an hour ago!" sighed the Kid.

"Oh, can it!"

The sheriff closed the door of the gaol against the roaring mob. Outside, they roared and surged, yelling threats—threats which, the Kid knew very well, would not take long to be translated into action. He had seen lynch mobs before, and he knew how likely they were to wait for proofs; indeed, how completely indifferent they were to proofs. What they wanted was a victim; blood called for blood, and the fact that the prisoner was a cowman was enough for them. The long hostility between cowmen and sheepmen on the Squaw River had come to a head with the killing of a sheepman. Any Squaw Mountain puncher who had ridden into town that day would have been in danger of lynching. And the fact that the sheriff had arrested this young puncher of suspicion, was proof enough for the mob, so far as they wanted any proof.

The Kid's hands were unbound when he was safe in the barred room, and the sheriff "went through" him with care. He found the little derringer, and there was a growl from his men as it was seen.

"He sure said he never packed a gun!" growled Peterson.

"I don't call that a gun," said the Kid lightly. "Was the galoot who was shot up, pilled by a derringer, say?"

"He was shot up with a Colt," said the sheriff.

The Kid knew that. He had come near being shot up by the same Colt on the trail to Pawnee Ford.

"Well, if you find a Colt about me, I'll eat it, gents, and swallow that derringer after it," offered the Kid.

They found no Colt about the Kid, but they found the wad of bills in his belt. There was a buzz as the sheriff counted the roll, and announced that they amounted to six thousand dollars. Blacker suspicion was in every face round the Kid now.

"You a puncher, and riding with six

(Continued on page 28.)

THE RIO KID!

(Continued from page 6.)

thousand dollars in your belt!" said the sheriff grimly. "You sure got high pay on your last punching job. I'll tell the world!"

The Kid grinned.

"I never got that wad punching cows, sheriff," he answered.

"You got it in a hold-up, I reckon!"

"Guess again! I got it fossicking down in Arizona," the Kid explained.

"I sure struck luck in the gold country."

"If you can prove it up, all O.K. for you," granted the sheriff. "I reckon if you made that roll in the gold country, you made it by sticking up the man who owned it, feller!"

"The Kid's eyes flashed.

"You can sure talk as you darned like, when you're five to one with guns in your hands!" he said. "I guess I'd make you talk turkey if I had a gat in my grip. Anyhow, I never made it raising sheep—I'd sure punch cows on grub stakes before I'd make a fortune in sheep!"

"You sure have got sass," said the sheriff, while the sheepmen round him growled at the cowman's defiance.

"You'll need it all to see you through, before Pawnee Ford is done with you!"

And the door was shut and locked on the Kid, and he was left alone.

"You're sure for it, Kid!" he said, commencing with himself. "I guess you deserve it for coming into a sheep country—sheep is pizen, and sheepmen is dog-gone geeks. I'd sure give all the dollars I've got cashed away, to be riding up the Rio Frio again, even with Sheriff Watson on my trail."

The Kid sighed as he thought of the Texas plains, and the old Double-Bar ranch, came into his mind. He had pulled out of Texas to find peace, and to get on the right side of the law, and this was where the trail had led him. Stronger than ever in the Kid's heart grew the longing for his own country—which he was never likely to see again. He knew what that savage roar round the gate meant; he had heard it when he was a prisoner in the calaboose at Frio, but this time there was no Double-Bar bunch to ride to the rescue. That night there would be a lynching in Pawnee Ford—with the Kid playing the leading part. And the sheriff could not save him for trial, even if he would. It was too late now to wish that he had made a fight for it on the

trail, but the Kid wished it from the bottom of his heart.

An hour later the door of the cell opened, and the sheriff stood in the doorway. He had a gun in his hand, while the gaoler brought in food and drink for the prisoner. There was a troubled look on the sheriff's face. He, like the Kid, knew what the menacing roar of the mob meant. The Kid glanced past him, and saw two or three armed men in the outer room. He read aright the expression on the sheriff's tanned face.

"They're coming for me, feller!" he asked.

"I reckon so!" answered the sheriff reluctantly. "I'll save you for trial if I can. But—"

"But you don't figure on getting home with it?"

The sheriff shook his head.

"Nope! You'd better make up your mind to it, puncher; you're a gone cown. Before midnight there'll be five hundred men howling for you—they're riding in from all parts."

"It sure is going to be some circus!" said the Kid easily. "They make a big cuss of strangers in this town, sheriff. I guess I never savvyed that sheepmen had all that gail. You're going to let them horn in and take your prisoner, feller?"

"I'm going to stop them all I can," said the sheriff, shrugging his shoulders.

"But don't bank on it. They want the man who shot up Billy Ward, and I guess that all the sheriffs in Wyoming couldn't stop them when they got their mad up. You asked for it, puncher, and you're sure going to get it!"

The door closed on the Kid again.

"Yep!" mused the Kid, "I sure asked for it when I lent that galoot Starbuck my hoss—I sure did! I guess them galoots don't care a continental red cent whether they got the right man or not, so long as they string up a puncher to a cottonwood branch. Kid, they've stacked the cards agin you, and you want all your luck to get out of this with your neck!"

Crash!

A thundering blow shook the door of the timber gaol. A deafening roar followed the crash. The lynch mob was at hand!

THE END.

(You'll be missing a treat if you miss next week's *Roaring Tale of the Rio Kid*, entitled: "The Kid's Close Call!")

TROUBLE ON TRAMP!

(Continued from page 11.)

startling scene in utter bewilderment. Tom Merry jumped up, panting.

"Wot the thunder—" gasped Mr. Greggs.

"We've got them, sir," said Tom.

"You'll find your safe busted, but the stuff's all here—in that sack! And we've got both the burglars."

"Yaaa, wathah!"

"Well, my eye!" said Mr. Greggs.

He picked up the sack in a dazed way.

"There was three hundred pounds in that there safe—"

"Wathah lucky for you we camped outside your gates, sir!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, my eyes!" said Mr. Greggs.

"I—I—I—ahem!—I—I—I'm sorry! I'm real sorry, and—and—and—"

"Pway don't mench!" said Arthur Augustus. "If you will get these wascals locked up somewhah, we will wettire ffrom your grounds, sir. We weally have no desiah to twespas."

And Mr. Greggs actually blushed, probably for the first time in his life.

Mr. Parkinson and Pimples spent the remainder of the night in a room at the farm, with Towser watching them. In the morning they were driven off to the police station. And Mr. Greggs, greatly penitent, fairly begged Tom Merry & Co. to camp on his land as long as they liked, and they graciously consented to do so. And Mr. Greggs did not utter a word of grudging when the extent of Solomon's thieving in his kitchen garden was discovered. Solomon had not been wasting time while Tom Merry & Co. were busy with the burglars. He was a wise donkey, and always made the most of his opportunities. What Mr. Greggs would have said in other circumstances was unimaginable. But in his gratitude to the schoolboy adventurers he said nothing. And he was hospitality itself while Tom Merry & Co. remained in camp, though perhaps he was not in-consolable when he bade good-bye at last to the seven schoolboys and Solomon!

THE END.

(There will be another topping *Tom Merry* complete story of the *St. Jim's* chums in next Tuesday's issue. Look out for "Just Like Caricaw!")



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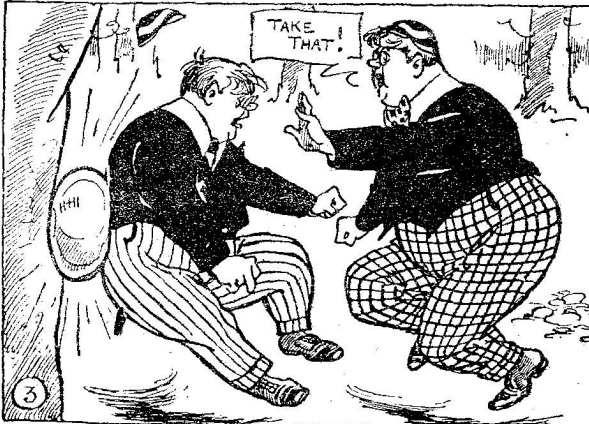
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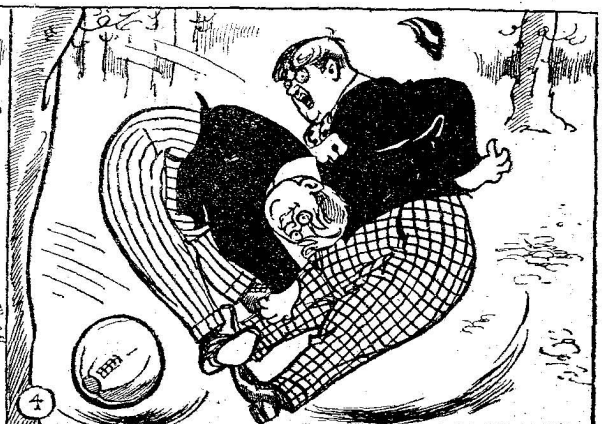
Sammy Bunter had just received a new football, and he was about to try it out, when his brother, Billy, came bounding up. "Hi! Give me that ball, Sammy!" he bawled. "You can't kick a footer for nuts. You watch me play!"



But Sammy did not intend to give up his new footer to Billy. He backed away against a tree, and held the ball behind him, out of his major's grasping grasp. "You go and eat coke, Billy!" he cried. "It's mine!" "Rats!" snorted Billy, advancing on his brother in wrath.



"All right!" snapped Billy. "Take that!" And he brandished a podgy fist, and sent Sammy staggering back against the tree. Biff! Notice the ball between Sammy and the trunk. Now what's going to happen?



The next moment, there was a yell as Sammy bounced off that footer right into Billy's manly lower chest with a crash. "Oooooh!" gasped Billy, and he lost his foothold. "Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Sammy. "Now it's your turn to bawl!"



Having bounced off the tree on to Billy, Sammy bounced back again, and so righted himself. But Billy subsided like a pricked balloon on the ground. "Oh, my stars!" he gasped. "I'm winded!" "You can whistle for the ball, now," said Sammy, breezily.



And whilst Billy was still trying to get his breath back, Sammy captured his footer, and dribbled it off in triumph. "I reckon I got the best of old Billy that time!" he warbled, as he bounced away after that bouncing ball through the trees.