

SAVED BY AN OUTLAW!

But for the friendly intrusion of the Rio Kid, little Carlos Alvaro, the tenderfoot, would have found his life in wild Colorado not worth a red cent. But with the Kid behind him, matters are very different!

The RIO KID!

by RALPH REDWAY



ANOTHER ROARING WESTERN YARN FEATURING A VERY POPULAR CHARACTER—THE RIO KID!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Kid on the Trail!

"SHUCKS!" grunted the Rio Kid in disgust.

He had to give it up.

The Kid hated quitting, but he knew when he was beaten.

In his own country of Texas the Kid could have followed a trail with the skill and unerring certainty of an Apache, over boundless llano and through the thickest chaparral. But here, high up in the rocky sierra of Colorado, it was a different proposition. The hard, sun-baked rocks left no sign, and the vastness of the rocky wilderness was baffling. Mile on mile, on all sides, stretched canyon and gulch, deep arroyo and stony draw, towering hillside and yawning barranca, and searching for sign was a hopeless task.

Here and there, on the hard trail that ran along the canyon bottom, the Kid picked up sign of hoof-prints. But the tenderfoot, he knew, had gone afoot, and there was no trace of him.

The Kid grunted discontentedly.

Somewhere in that wilderness of rock the tenderfoot had vanished, and that he had fallen into the hands of his enemies the Rio Kid had no doubt.

"The dog-goned geck!" growled the Kid. "I guess he's asked for it, and he's sure got it! If you had as much hoss-sense as a gopher, Kid Carfax, you'd mount and ride, and leave him to it—you sure would!"

The Kid was feeling sore and angry as he turned his footsteps at last in the direction of the camp of Hard Tack.

Fatigue did not come easily to the hardy Kid; but he was a cowpuncher born and bred, used to the saddle, and for hours he had been hoofing it. He hated going afoot; still more, he hated failure. His handsome sunburnt face was dark as he tramped back towards the mining-camp high up in the Colorado sierra. He called himself a loosed gink for bothering about the tenderfoot at all, but he knew that he would never mount and ride and leave him to his fate. The boy's timid helplessness got the Kid's goat; but, at the same time, it appealed to him. The galoot had horned into the hardest camp in Colorado, and did not even pack a

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gun. He had fallen among foes like a lost calf among wolves, and if the Kid did not help him out there was no help for him.

Hard Tack was almost deserted when the Kid lounged in under the afternoon sun. The miners were out on the claims along the mountain creek. The ringing of picks and the creaking of cradles echoed on the air. Two or three men loafed outside the Hard Tack hotel, and from within came the sound of One-Eye washing glasses.

The Kid dropped on a bench outside the shack hotel and pondered, with his eyes fixed on a cabin at a little distance—the cabin that belonged to Jeff Oakes, the Marshal of Hard Tack. Once or twice the burly marshal came out of the cabin and looked away up the street into the sunlit canyon, as if in expectation, and the Kid smiled quietly as he noted it.

Oakes was not working his claim that day, and the Kid guessed that he had other matters on his mind. He was waiting for word from Euchre and Denver Dave, who had followed the tenderfoot out of the camp that morning, as the Kid easily guessed. The Rio Kid had lost the trail in the hills, but he had hopes of picking it up again in the camp.

The Kid was patient. When he ate a late lunch, he ate it sitting on the bench outside One-Eye's shack, his eyes on the cabin farther along the straggling street. As the Kid figured it out, Euchre and Denver Dave had roped in the tenderfoot and corralled him somewhere in the trackless hills.

Denver Dave had been on his way back to the camp when the Kid had met him, and the ruffian had drawn on him and had been beaten to it. Euchre, he reckoned, was watching the prisoner till the marshal came; but from Dave, assuredly, the marshal would never get any news. If he wanted to know how

his confederates had fared, he would have to go and seek them; and when he went, the Kid would not lose sight of him.

Oakes left his cabin again and came along to the saloon. He glanced at the Kid, sitting on the bench, as he entered with a keen, suspicious glance. The Kid, leaning back against the wall, with his Stetson-tilted a little over his face, seemed to be half-dozing.

The marshal went into the shack, and the Kid heard One-Eye serving him with a drink. In a few minutes Oakes came out again. He came over to the boy puncher and spoke abruptly.

"You staying on in Hard Tack, puncher?"

The Kid started as if from a doze.

"Yep," he assented; "just a piece."

"You ain't fossicking here?"

"Nope. I reckon fossicking ain't in my line," smiled the Kid. "I did a piece once down in the gold country of Arizona, but I sure ain't come up here to Colorado to prospect for dust."

"You ain't here to punch cows, I reckon?"

The Kid grinned.

"Right in once!" he agreed.

"You came into camp with that young greaser who calls himself Carlos Alvaro, and that all the camp reckons to be the son of old Escobedo," said the marshal. "I reckon he's your pardner."

"Never saw hide or hair of the critter before I picked him up on the trail," answered the Kid cheerfully. "And I reckon I only picked him up because his cayuse had dropped him."

"Then you ain't here after the Escobedo Mine?"

"I guess I'm the only pilgrim in this camp who ain't after it!" said the Kid, laughing. "I never heard of it before I struck Hard Tack. But if that tenderfoot is the son of old Escobedo, and has come up here after the old man's mine, he's sure up against a tough proposition. I allow there's a heap galoots in this burg who won't stand for letting him get away with it."

"That's a cinch!" said the marshal. "Why, only last night," said the Kid, with an air of easy frankness, "some fire-bugs tried to butt into his window in this very shack, and I scared them off with a pop from my gun."

The marshal eyed him fixedly.

"You saw them?" he asked.

"I ain't a cat to see in the dark," answered the Kid amiably. "But I sure saw the galoot who butted into my room, and I cinched him with the butt of my Colt. I reckon that's why he pulled a gun on me a piece ago down in the canyon."

The marshal started.

"He pulled a gun on you—to-day?"

"He sure did."

"Then I reckon you beat him to it, as you're here and he ain't."

"You've got it."

The Marshal of Hard Tack drew a deep breath. He could guess now why Denver Dave had not come in with news.

For a second the marshal's hand went towards the gun that was in the holster at his thigh.

But he did not draw it.

Idle and careless as the boy puncher looked, his hand was close to a gun, and the marshal had seen how quick he was on the draw. The Kid was watching him with a smiling face, but with a glint of steel in his eyes.

"Not a friend of yours, marshal?" he asked. "I sure reckon that a durned fire-bug like that wouldn't be in cahoots with a town marshal."

"Nope," said the marshal. "I don't even savvy what galoot you're speaking of."

"I guess he called himself Denver Dave."

Again the marshal drew a hard, deep breath.

"And you made it last sickness for him?"

"I sure had to, marshal, or I reckon I shouldn't be here now chewing the rag with you," answered the Kid amiably. "It was a fair break, and he came out at the little end of the horn. I reckon he was mad because of that tap I hit him on the cabeza at my window last night. But we learn to handle a gun mighty quick down in Texas."

Again the marshal was tempted to draw, and again he realised that the puncher was watching him like a cat, and was ready to beat him to it.

He turned away and walked down to his cabin.

The Kid smiled after him.

The marshal knew now that Denver Dave would never bring him news. The Kid had been glad of the chance to tell him. The marshal stood at his cabin door, his back to the Kid, staring up the street into the canyon, where the dusk of evening was falling. The Kid could follow his thoughts with ease.

All day Oakes had been expecting one of his men to come in with the news that the tenderfoot had been corralled and that the other was guarding him in the secret place in the hills. Now he knew why the messenger had not come. The Rio Kid was not surprised to see Jeff Oakes stride away at last in the falling dusk. And then the Kid, who had been inactive so long, woke to sudden activity.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. The Secret of the Mine!

"MADRE DE DIOS!" murmured the little Mexican wearily, as the deep dusk thickened in the cave high up in the rocky gulch.

At the entrance of the cave Euchre sat with his back to a rock and smoked, and stared into the thickening shadows and muttered curses. Long since Denver Dave should have carried the news to the Marshal of Hard Tack that the tenderfoot had been corralled—that

the supposed son of Escobedo was at his mercy. Yet the marshal had not come, and Euchre grew more puzzled and angry with every passing hour.

To the prisoner in the cave the hours passed still more wearily.

The Rio Kid had warned him that the Hard Tack country was no place for him, and he had not heeded the warning. Now he was in the hands of his enemies, and there was no escape for him—no escape and no help. Weary as the long hours were, he dreaded the coming of the Marshal of Hard Tack.

But in the deepening gloom there came a sound at last in the rocky gulch, and Euchre started up and grasped his revolver.

Someone unseen was coming up the gulch from the great canyon.

Euchre's revolver rose to a level as a dim figure loomed from the gloom in front of the cave in the hillside.

"Put 'em up!" he snapped. "I've got you covered."

"Quit that, Euchre!"

It was the marshal's voice.

Euchre lowered the revolver.

"You, marshal! Why in thunder ain't you horned in afore this? I guess I've been waiting hours!" he growled.

"Didn't you get word from Dave?"

Oakes muttered a curse.

"Dave pulled on that fire-bug from Texas and got his!" he growled. "I've jest heard it from the puncher himself. You got the tenderfoot?"

"Sure."

"He's here?"

"Yep! Is Dave gone up?" asked Euchre.

"He sure is. And I reckon that durned puncher will never pull out of Hard Tack alive!" growled the marshal. "He allows he ain't here after the Escobedo Mine, but I reckon he's lying."

The Marshal of Hard Tack strode into the cave.

In the dimness he could only faintly make out the little figure of the Mexican, crouching away from him in fear against the rugged, rocky wall. His eyes gleamed with triumph as he looked at him.

"I reckon you're cinched now," he said. "You've got the lantern here, Euchre?"

"Sure."

"Put on the light."

Euchre lighted a large kerosene-lamp that hung on a projection of rock on the cave wall.

The light streamed down on the white, troubled face of the little Mexican.

The marshal's triumphant glance searched his features.

"You durned young gink!" he said. "You allow you ain't the son of old Escobedo, who located the richest mine ever struck in Colorado, and you're as like him as a young gopher is like an old gopher! You want to give me the straight goods now. You're the son of Escobedo?"

The tenderfoot shook his head.

"No, senor."

Darker and more threatening grew the brow of the Marshal of Hard Tack. His eyes glinted at the boy under his betting brows.

"Look here," he said in a low, menacing voice, "ever since that old greaser Escobedo was here, ten years ago, nothing's been known of his mine. Nobody ever located it, and since Escobedo was shot up it's been a lost mine—and a fortune lost with it. Every man in Hard Tack has hunted for it one time or another, and I sure reckon I've hunted as hard as any. Every galoot in this section allowed that Escobedo's son would come after it some day, and I guess any greaser coming nigh the camp was enough to set all Hard Tack in a fluster. We all knew that old Escobedo had a family back in Mexico; we knew he used to send them dust from White Pine down the mountains. You're his son!"

"I am not his son, senor."

The marshal gritted his teeth.

"There ain't many Mexicans come up here," he said. "If you ain't the son of Escobedo, that dog-goned old fossicker, what are you doing here at all up in Colorado?"

The little Mexican flinched before his savage stare.

"We are poor, senor," he faltered.

"We have lost all we had in the revolutions in Mexico. I have a mother who is in want, and a brother who is sick. I came to hunt for gold." His voice trembled. "I was mad to come, as the gringo warned me. But I have some knowledge of mining, and I hoped to make some strike. I did not know that I should fall among enemies in this country."

"You swear that you are not old Escobedo's son?" exclaimed Oakes, scowling at the boy.

"Senor, I swear it by all the saints! Por todos los santos!" said the boy earnestly.

The marshal seemed nonplussed.

There was an accent of truth in the boy's voice. The Marshal of Hard Tack seemed to be in doubt. Euchre broke in.

"I guess he's lying, marshal. What would a Mexican be doing here in Colorado prospecting for gold? What would he know about this country if he's jest a kid from old Mexico? Old Escobedo was an old fossicker, and had been half over the States in his time, but this young galoot is fresh from home. Why did he strike for Hard Tack when he left Mexico? There ain't many galoots in his country ever heard of it."

The marshal nodded.

"That's a cinch," he said. "The ornery galoot knew something before he started. What did you know about Hard Tack, boy, when you was back in Mexico to make you strike for this section?"

"I will tell you the truth, senor. I had heard of Escobedo. I had heard that he had made a strike here; it was told through the aldea where I lived. It was known in the aldea that the Senora Escobedo had received gold from the Senor Escobedo who was here—till at last there came no more gold and no word from him."

"I reckon that was when he was shot up!" grinned Euchre.

Oakes knitted his brows again.

"And you hit the trail for Hard Tack all the way from Mexico because you'd heard that another Mexican had struck it rich here?" he asked.

"Si, senor."

"And you ain't Escobedo's son?"

"No, senor."

"You're a relation, at least, on your looks!" growled the marshal.

"Si, senor—a relative."

There was a pause.

The marshal leaned on the rock wall, scanning the boy's face in the glare of the kerosene lamp.

"I guess, boss, it's easy to make him squeal if he knows anything," suggested Euchre. "A rope twisted round his thumbs—"

The boy shivered.

"I swear that I am not the son of Escobedo!" he said huskily. "If you

torture me, you cannot make me tell more than the truth."

"Old Escobedo used to talk when he was full," said the marshal slowly. "He chewed the rag a lot when he had had too much fire-water. We knew he sent dust to his folks in Mexico, and that he had sent a map of his mine. He used to say that if any galoot who was after his mine should get him, the secret would die with him, but his son would get the mine some day. Well, at the finish a galoot got him, and the mine's been lost. You allow you ain't the old greaser's son, and you may be telling the truth. But you're some connection, and you've come to Hard Tack looking for his mine. I reckon you've got the map that he sent back to Mexico. If you've got it, that is what we want, and I reckon we'll begin by searching you for it, feller; and if it ain't on you, we'll find a way to make you talk. You go through him, Euchre, and see if he's got any papers in his rags."

The boy started back, the crimson coming into his pale face.

"Oh, senior! I—"

The marshal gave a scoffing laugh. "That hits you, does it?" he jeered. "You've got the map! I reckon you may as well hand it over. We'll sure get it."

"Madre de Dios!" murmured the boy hopelessly.

Euchre, grinning, made a step towards him, his hands outstretched. The Mexican, with a sudden passionate gesture, threw his sombrero at the feet of the ruffian.

"It is there!" he panted. "It is hidden in the lining of the hat! Take it—thieves that you are!"

He covered his face with his hands and burst into a torrent of weeping. Neither the marshal nor Euchre heeded him, save for a scornful glance. Oakes grasped the hat, and tore the hidden paper from under the lining.

His face was ablaze with greed.

"The secret at last!" he muttered hoarsely.

He held up the old, crinkled paper, scratched with strange lines and marks and dots in the light of the lamp. Euchre glared at it over his arm, equally excited. The tenderfoot, unheeded, wept, with covered face, in despair, while the two ruffians examined the prize.

Euchre gave a whoop of triumph. "It's sure the goods, marshal! Look! There's the Hard Tack canyon, and that's the camp marked, and there's a line leading up towards the pinewood where old Escobedo used to disappear and where he was found at last shot up. It runs on up the hill, and that word—"

"Oro!" said the marshal. "Gold! That marks the mine!" His voice vibrated with triumph. "Why, a day's ride from the camp, and the lost mine's in our hands!"

"Gee!" ejaculated Euchre.

The marshal turned to the weeping Mexican.

"This here is the map of the mine—hay?" he grinned. "This is the map that old Escobedo sent to his son in Mexico years back?"

"Si, si, ladrone!"

"I guess that mine won't be lost much longer!" said the marshal. "I guess that mine is going to be located, and I reckon there ain't any stake in it for you, greaser. I'll sure leave you tied up here till I've located the mine—which I reckon will be by noon tomorrow—"

"I guess not, marshal!" said a soft

voice at the opening of the cave. "You ain't locating that mine worth a red cent, you ain't!"

The marshal swung round, with a furious oath. In the opening of the cave stood the Rio Kid, with a gun in either hand, aimed at the two ruffians standing under the kerosene-lamp.

"Put 'em up!" said the Kid.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Sharp Shot!

THE Rio Kid smiled over the levelled guns. Jeff Oakes and Euchre glared at him like cornered cougars, but they hesitated to reach for their weapons. There was a joyful cry from the little Mexican.

"Senor el Tejano!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, you have come to save me!"

"Jest that!" smiled the Kid.

"They have taken the map—the map of the Escobedo Mine!"

"I guess they'll be handing it back like good little men!" grinned the Kid.

"I'm sure going to ask them nicely to do it!"

The marshal grated his teeth.

"You want to keep clear of this, puncher!" he said hoarsely. "Don't you horn in here, you durned galoot!"

"I guess I'm hornin' it jest a few!" said the Kid cheerily. "Why, ain't I trailed you all the way from Hard Tack, marshal, jest to horn in and spoil your little game? Ain't I been walking behind you all the way up the gulch like a lynx after a deer? And I sure ain't taken all that trouble for nothing. I was jest hoping to horn in and spoil your game, feller."

"You durned puncher!" said the marshal, his voice shaking with rage. "You followed me from the camp—"

"You've said it," agreed the Kid. "That galoot Euchre never left a trail that an Injun could have followed, so I figured I'd get you to guide me, marshal, and you sure did, like a good little man!"

The marshal clenched his hands with passion. Not a sound had warned him that he was being trailed when he had left Hard Tack and struck into the pathless hills. Not a sign or a shadow had he seen of his pursuer. Yet the Rio Kid had followed him to the cave, and he could guess now that that had been the Kid's game when he had sat so idly on the bench outside the shack hotel in the camp. And now the puncher held the drop, and his guns looked unwaveringly at the marshal and his confederate. The Marshal of Hard Tack had gained the map of the lost mine—only to lose it again.

A desperate light was in his eyes.

"You want to ride clear of this, puncher," he said. "You ain't getting this map! I reckon I'm freezing on to it. There'll be gun-play here if you don't beat it lively!"

The Kid laughed.

"There sure will be gun-play if you don't put up your paws, pronto!" he answered. "I ain't waiting long, marshal! You put up your hands, you two ornery galoots, and drop that paper, or Hard Tack will want a new town marshal before sun-up!"

The marshal and Euchre exchanged a glance. The clue to the Escobedo Mine was in their hands, and they were two to one, and they were desperate. But the Kid's eyes gleamed with menace.

"Drop that paper!" he rapped.

The marshal obeyed. As the paper fluttered to the floor the little Mexican snatched it up.

For a second the Kid's eyes followed the paper, and it seemed like a chance to the two desperate men cornered in

the cave. Simultaneously they reached for their guns.

A second more, and the cave was reeking with smoke, thundering with the echoes of exploding firearms.

The tenderfoot, crying out with alarm, crouched back against the rocks, peering wildly through the curling smoke. He saw Euchre pitch back against the cavern wall and crumple up to the ground, never to stir again. He saw the Marshal of Hard Tack reeling, but firing furiously as he reeled, and then there was the crash of a heavy body.

Darkness covered the vision of the little Mexican, but he came to himself as a hand grasped his shoulder.

"Search me!" He heard the Rio Kid's voice. "Dog-gone my boots, if the pesky little cuss ain't fainted! Oh, shucks!"

"Senor—"

"Oh, you've come to!" grinned the Kid. "You're sure the tenderest tenderfoot ever! Get a move on! You ain't stopping here any longer, boy!"

"But—but those hombres—"

"They ain't worrying you any!" said the Kid grimly.

All was dark in the cave; a bullet had smashed the lamp. Darkness, and a reek of oil, and the acrid smell of smoke. The tenderfoot shuddered, and as he moved under the Kid's guiding hand he stumbled over something that lay on the earth, and gave a cry.

But the Kid drew him out of the cave. In the starlight he looked with scared eyes at his rescuer.

"You are wounded, senior!" he exclaimed, as the Kid dashed a streak of crimson from his sunburnt cheek.

"I reckon a ball went close," said the Kid coolly. "But they was sure loco to pull on me when I had the drop. I reckon they got theirs so sudden that they never knew where they was hit. You got the map safe?"

"Si, si, senior."

"They found it where I had put you wise to hide it—in your hat?" asked the Kid.

"No, senior," faltered the boy. "I—I gave it up, for they would have searched me, and—and—" He broke off. "Oh, senior, you have saved me, and saved for me the mine of Escobedo! Senior, you shall take half the gold—"

"Forget it," grinned the Kid.

"But, senior—"

"Oh, cut it out!" said the Kid. "Step out lively! You've got a long trail back to the camp. Beat it!"

And the tenderfoot, weary but patient, trudged by the side of the boy puncher, bewildered by the darkness and the shadows of rocks and pines, amid which the Kid never paused or hesitated for a moment.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. The Seniorita!

THE Rio Kid was early astir the next morning.

In the shack hotel there was discussion of the absence of the Marshal of Hard Tack—a topic on which the Kid said no word.

He made purchases at the camp store and packed his slicker pack for a trail in the hills, and the hour was still early when he mounted the black-muzzled mustang and rode out of Hard Tack with the Mexican.

Many eyes followed them; but if any of the Hard Tack pilgrims had a hunch to follow the supposed son of Escobedo, the presence of the Rio Kid caused them to give up the idea. While the Kid was riding herd, the tenderfoot had nothing to fear.

In the canyon, out of sight of the

camp, the Kid pulled rein and gave his companion a whimsical glance.

"I guess you want to hit the trail for the Escobedo Mine, feller?" he said. "You figure that you can trust me so far as to see you through with it? Or do you want me to quit?"

The boy coloured.

"Oh, senior, I will trust you with my mine and with my life!" he exclaimed. "I know now that without your help I can do nothing—though I do not know why you should help me, a stranger to you."

"Same here," said the Kid coolly. "It's jest my way of horning in, that's all; never was a galoot for minding my own business. You reckon that map will fake you to the old man's mine?"

"Si, senior! Look!" said the Mexican.

He held the map under the Kid's eyes.

The Kid studied it carefully.

"I reckon that's plain sailing," he said. "The old galoot put it down easy to follow." He laughed. "You dog-goned gink, you come up here with old Escobedo's map to the mine, and you allow that you ain't the son of the old fossicker!"

"I am not Escobedo's son, senior," said the boy, his flush deepening. "I have told only the truth. Escobedo's son lies sick in his home in Old Mexico, and Escobedo's widow is in want. It is for that reason that I made this journey to locate the mine if I could."

The Kid eyed him curiously.

"You're an Escobedo, then?" he asked.

"Si, senior. I am an Escobedo." The boy smiled faintly. "The task was too great for me without your help. I shall never be able to thank you for your generosity to me!"

"Oh, shucks!" said the Kid.

He studied the map again carefully. Whether the Mexican boy could have traced out the lost mine or not, it was not a difficult task to the Kid with the map under his eyes. He turned his mustang from the canyon, and the boy followed him. Once or twice the Kid cast a keen glance behind, but there was no sign of pursuit from Hard Tack.

In the noontide they camped in a deep pine wood long miles from the camp. There the Kid lighted a fire and cooked bacon and beans. The boy, weary with the ride, slept in his blanket, while the Kid studied the map again and pondered. When they resumed the trail in the afternoon the Kid was very thoughtful.

A lingering doubt troubled the Rio Kid.

If the boy was not the son of Escobedo, as he declared, he was not the rightful owner of the old Mexican's claim. The Kid could not know how the map had come into his possession. The secret of Escobedo belonged to the son or the widow of the old fossicker, or to both, and the Kid was a little troubled.

But he'd said nothing on the subject so far, and devoted his attention to the task of locating the mine.

With the carefully-drawn map in hand, that old Escobedo had sent to his son in Mexico long years before. The task was not a difficult one to the Kid. The wilderness of rock and pine that bewildered the tenderfoot did not baffle the boy puncher.

At sundown they rode into the deep valley high up in the lonely mountains. A foaming torrent brawled along the rocks—a mountain stream that was marked on the chart. They camped that night by the stream, the Kid build-



IN MERCILESS HANDS! "The secret of the mine at last!" cried the marshal. He held up the old paper, scratched with strange lines and marks, in the light of the lamp. Euchre glared at it over his arm, equally excited. The tenderfoot, unheeded, wept, with covered face, in despair, while the two ruffians examined their prize.

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ing a jacal of branches for the weary tenderfoot before he rolled up in his blanket in the open air under the side of a towering rock.

After breakfast the next morning the Kid took the map and searched through the valley, while the little Mexican rested in the camp.

It was three hours later that the Kid rejoined his companion, with a smile on his face.

He tossed the map back to the tenderfoot.

"I reckon that won't be wanted any more," he said.

The Mexican gave him a quick look.

"Senior, you have found it?"

The Kid grinned, and held out his hand. In the palm lay a nugget of solid gold.

"El oro!" the boy ejaculated.

"Sure! And there's lots more where that came from," said the Kid. "I guess old Escobedo was wise to keep it dark—it's sure a rich strike. You could pick up a fortune in a few days!"

"Oh, senior!" exclaimed the boy breathlessly.

"Come and see!" said the Kid.

The Mexican, almost trembling with eagerness, followed the puncher. They stopped in a deep hollow that had once been the bed of the stream, which had followed a different course in ancient days.

In the old river-bed lay a rusted pick, and there were signs of primitive workings still to be seen.

The Kid pointed to the dried, sandy bed where the pick lay.

"I reckon that's the spot that's marked 'Oro' on your map, feller," he said. "There's oro there a-plenty, that's a cinch. I guess this old river-bed is thick with it."

The boy nodded. His eyes were on the rusted pick, not on the glistening particles that showed in the sand in the bright sunrays.

"And that pick——" he said in a low voice.

"I guess old Escobedo left it there before his last trip down to Hard Tack ten years and more ago," said the Kid. "He was shot up by a galoot who was after his claim, and never came back for it. I reckon no pilgrim ever nosed into this hyer valley—it's right off the track. That old pick's lain there ever since Escobedo dropped it ten years ago."

The boy trembled.

"Padre mio!" he murmured.

The Kid made no comment. The boy had said, again and again, that he was not the son of Escobedo, yet he murmured "My father!" as he looked, with tears in his dark eyes, at the pick that had been left by the old fossicker—all that remained of Joaquin Escobedo.

For some moments the tenderfoot stood still, as if buried in painful thought. He stirred himself at last.

"And this is the Escobedo Mine, senior?" he said.

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"Sure! It's all alluvial," said the Kid. "The gold there was washed down when the stream ran this way—I guess a long time before Christopher Columbus hit America. It can be taken out by hand. I reckon a few weeks' work would clean up most of it, and there would be twenty thousand dollars' worth or more to carry away." But—

He paused. "Old Escobedo never staked out a claim and registered the mine," he said. "I reckon he knew that in a lonely section like this there were heap galeots wouldn't take much notice of pre-emption rights; he'd have had his claim jumped as soon as it was known. The pilgrims hereabouts wouldn't have worried any about knocking a greaser on the head to keep him quiet. He kept it dark, and worked the claim, and took the gold away little by little. I reckon he was wise, though he got shot up at last."

"And we, senior—"

"I guess I ain't in a hurry to hit the trail," said the Kid. "I'm ready to stand by you and clean up what Escobedo left—clean it up, and yamoose. You'd never hold it if it was known; the law don't go much up here at the top of the sierra. I guess you can take out twenty thousand dollars and more in a few weeks."

"I should be more than satisfied, senior," said the little Mexican, with a smile. "But you must share for I owe it all to you."

The Kid shook his head. "Nary a red cent," he answered. "I guess when I started in to ride herd over you, feller, it wasn't for a share in the Escobedo Mine. But—"

He paused and looked at the tenderfoot squarely.

"I reckon you got to put me wise," he said. "This hyer claim was never registered, so it belongs, fur as the law goes, to the first galeot to locate it—"

"Yourself, senior," said the tenderfoot in a tremulous voice.

"Oh, shucks!" said the Kid. "I ain't meaning that. I reckon the law and me ain't on speaking terms, come to that, and ain't been for a long time. What I'm aiming at is this—it's a derelict claim so far as law goes, but right is right, and in justice it belongs to

the widow and the son of old Escobedo, and that's what's bitin' me. You got to tell me the truth, feller. If you're Escobedo's son, the claim's yours, and I'm standing by you to get out what's left of the gold and to get away with it. But if you're butting in to jump a claim that belongs to some other hombre, I don't stand for it."

The boy stood silent. "Put it plain," said the Kid. "I've a hunch that you're straight, but I ain't got it clear. Down in my own country, Texas, they call me an outlaw; but I reckon the Rio Kid don't stand for robbing the widow and the orphan. I ain't gone on greasers, come to that; but right's right, and you can't travel around it. What's your title to this hyer bonanza, if you ain't the son of Escobedo?"

The colour crept into the tenderfoot's soft cheeks.

"Justo!" he said. "You have a right to ask that, senior."

"Sure!" said the Kid. "Spill it!"

"I am not the son of Escobedo, as I have said, but—"

"But what?"

"But I am his daughter, senior!"

The Rio Kid almost fell down.

"Search me!" he gasped. "You—you—Great gophers! You—his daughter!"

"Si, senior!"

The Rio Kid gazed at the tenderfoot. He had never dreamed of guessing it. Even when he had found the little Mexican weeping on the Hard Tack trail, he had never guessed.

"Great snakes!" he gasped at last.

It was the surprise of his life to the Rio Kid.

In spite of his surprise, the Kid kept his word, and the rich spoil of old Escobedo's mine found its way safely into the hands of the Mexican's family down on the plains. The Kid would take no reward, and no one in the Hard Tack district even guessed the tenderfoot's secret!

THE END.

(This is another roaring Western tale of the Rio Kid next Tuesday, entitled "THE MYSTERIOUS TRAIL." Don't miss this thrilling adventure whatever you do, chums.)

THE BOY FROM JAPAN!

(Continued from page 12.)

The Japs were arrested, and Okito taken care of by the inspector.

A few days later Dr. Locke called Harry Wharton into his room and had a long talk with him. Wharton's chums waited eagerly to know what the news was. The little Jap boy, although he had come to Greyfriars under false pretences, had been well liked by the juniors, and they did not rank him with the other members of the gang, for it had been made quite clear to them that Okito had been forced to play the part of traitor, that he had not been a willing accomplice to his countrymen's crimes.

"It's all serene, chaps!" grinned Harry Wharton, when they were back in Study No. 1. "The Head says that the authorities are taking no action against Okito. They are going to give him another chance."

"Oh, good!" said Bob Cherry in great relief.

"It was Okito whom Smithy saw last night," said Wharton. "He was at work on the wall."

"Oh!"

"Still, we don't bear any grudge against Okito," said Wharton. "He was a funny little chap, and I'm glad he's come to no harm. The authorities have sent him back to Japan in safe keeping, so we shan't see him any more."

Greyfriars heard the news with satisfaction. Only fellows like Skinner & Co. wished the little Jap boy any harm. But those fellows did not matter. On the whole, the school was sorry to have seen the last of the boy from the Land of the Rising Sun.

THE END.

(Next week's POPULAR will contain another rattling fine yarn of Harry Wharton & Co. Make a note of the title, chums: "ALONZO, THE ATHLETE!" You'll enjoy every line of it.)

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