

X A HAPPY NEW YEAR-CHUMS! X

The POPULAR

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2d
EVERY
TUESDAY.



RUCTIONS ON THE SAMPSON RANCH!
A Western Yarn of Thrills & Adventure - inside

RUCTIONS ON THE



How many times has the Rio Kid vowed he would keep out of other people's troubles? It must be dozens of times! But he's never been able to keep to that resolve! The Kid's in the thick of it again this week!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Trouble on the Ranch!

"YOU OO posky, dog-goned, pie-faced gink!"

"Sho!"

"You gel-darned coyote—"

Old Man Sampson paused for breath.

"You're fired!" he spluttered.

For a good five minutes Old Man Sampson, of the Sampson Ranch, in the San Pedro country, had been "shooting off his mouth."

The Rio Kid, standing in the doorway of the bunkhouse at a little distance, looked on, and listened, and wondered.

It was Santa Fe Sam, the range rider, who was getting the rough edge of the boss' tongue.

Every unpleasant name that the boss could think of was hurled at the young rider; and Old Man Sampson occasionally shook his fist to give additional point to his remarks. Santa Fe Sam stood before him, with a meek expression on his sunburnt face, only interjecting a monosyllable or two.

The Rio Kid couldn't help wondering. The Kid had recently joined the Sampson outfit, and for days he had been riding with the punchers. No man on the ranch knew, or dreamed, that the young puncher who had joined the outfit was anything but what he looked; the Kid was hundreds of miles now from the Frio country, and down in San Pedro, on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, they had never heard of the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande. The Kid hoped that they never would hear of him.

Riding with the Sampson outfit was a good deal like the old days at the Double-Bar at Frio, and the Kid was getting a happy and peaceful time. He liked the bunch, and the bunch liked him; and though Old Man Sampson was tart and testy, he never forgot that

the Kid had rendered him a big service in rouncing up the gang who had been stealing beef from the ranch. No doubt that was why the Kid never got the rough edge of Old Man Sampson's tongue, as the rest of the bunch freely did.

The Kid, looking out of the bunkhouse, listening to the Old Man's tirade, wondered why Santa Fe Sam stood as meek as a boy before his schoolmaster, and let the boss bully-rag him to the top of his bent. The Kid certainly would not have been so patient had the boss turned that tirade upon him.

But the range rider did not seem to mind. Two or three other punchers glanced towards the scene, and grinned. The cook looked out of the chuck house and grinned, too. And the Kid wondered.

"You're fired!" roared Old Man Sampson, his white moustache bristling with wrath, his eyes glinting under his shaggy grey eyebrows. "You hear me shout? You can take your time instanter! Get off this ranch, you low-down, lazy, dog-goned geck!"

Awed, tired out by his own eloquence, Old Man Sampson turned and stamped back into the ranch-house and slammed the door after him.

"Sho!" said Santa Fe Sam.

And he wheeled and walked away to the bunkhouse, with a thoughtful expression on his face.

In the doorway he met the Rio Kid and gave him a grin.

"The Old Man was sure mad," he remarked.

"Sounded like," said the Kid. "What you been doing?"

"Me? Nothin'!"

"Shucks!" ejaculated the Kid. "I'll tell the world! Mean to say the Old Man poured all that out for nothing?"

"He's tilled to-day," explained Sam.

He picked up his saddle and quirt from a bench in the bunkhouse.

"You don't seem to be mad with him," said the Kid.

"Nix."

"Leaving the ranch?"

"Nix."

"But you're fired," said the Kid, puzzled.

The rider grinned.

"Half the outfit's been fired lately," he answered. "It's jest the Old Man's way of expressin' his feelin's. He would sure be surprised if I quit."

"Oh!" said the Kid blankly.

"The Old Man's ail right," explained Santa Fe Sam. "He's sure a good man, and a white man. If it helps him any to shoot off his mouth at a galoot, I ain't the feller to stop him. If it does him good, he's more than welcome."

"Oh, sho!" said the Kid.

The Rio Kid had already discovered that the bunch were devoted to their boss. Every day he heard Old Man Sampson slanging some member or other of the outfit; the Old Man's temper seemed to be raw all the time. Every man on the ranch packed a gun, and looked like a man who would use it. But they always took the boss' slanging like lambs.

"I sure reckoned you'd pull a gun on him when he was calling you them fancy names," said the Kid.

"I guess a galoot who pulled a gun on the Old Man would get his so sudden he wouldn't know what hit him," answered Santa Fe Sam. "You ain't had it yet, Carfax; but when you get it, you take it quiet, same as we do. The boss is a good little man, if he does shoot off his mouth to some extent. The boss is a good man and a square man, and don't you forget it."

The Kid nodded. He had a respect for the Old Man; but he could not see himself taking that tall talk as Sam had taken it.

"You're new to the bunch," said Sam. "You don't savvy. The Old Man is up against trouble. But there ain't a man on this ranch that will quit, so long as it holds together. There's a lawyer coyote down at Nuce who's got his teeth into the Old Man's land, and if he's hopping mad, it's no wonder."

"Oh!" said the Kid.

"Get your cayuse and hit the trail

SAMPSON RANCH!

by RALPH REDWAY



OUR ROARING WESTERN YARN WITH A PUNCH AND THRILL IN EVERY LINE—STARRING THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW!

with me," said the rider. "I want you this morning, Carfax."

"Sure," said the Kid.

Ho picked up saddle and quirt and left the bunkhouse with Santa Fe Sam. The rider roped a broncho from the corral; and a call from the Kid brought the black-muzzled mustang trotting up to him. As they mounted to ride, Jeff Barstow, the foreman of the ranch, came up. Barstow's bearded face was grave and grim.

"The Old Man was sure mad this morning, Sam," he said.

"Madder'n a hornet," agreed Sam.

"That durned coyote is coming down from Nuce to-day," growled the foreman. "I reckon if it would do any good I'd fill him with lead when he shows his cabeza hyer."

"I guess I know he's due to-day," said Sam. "And the Old Man being so mad shows that he can't meet the mortgage."

"Sure."

"Mebbe that dog-goned scallyway, Files, won't hit the ranch to-day," said Sam.

"He's due."

"Mebbe he won't, all the same."

The foreman started a little.

"No shootin', Sam," he said.

"Shootin'," said Santa Fe Sam. "I wouldn't draw a gun on a skunk like Files. I got a quirt."

Jeff Barstow chuckled.

Santa Fe Sam gave his broncho a touch of the spur and rode away, the Rio Kid riding with him, in a very perplexed frame of mind.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Roped In!

FAR away from the ranch buildings the trail from Nuce to San Pedro followed the bank of a creek, which later on flowed into the inlet where the little coast town stood. By a big cottonwood tree, on the creek, Santa Fe Sam drew rein, and signed to the Kid to do likewise.

The Kid reined in his mustang.

Not a word had been spoken during the ride, and the Kid wondered what the game was. It was not range riding that morning, at all events; he could see that his companion had quite other ideas in his mind, though he had not explained what they were.

Sitting in the saddle, Santa Fe Sam stared up the trail in the direction of the distant town of Nuce. There was no one in sight on the trail so far.

"I guess he'll be humping along soon," remarked the puncher.

"Who?" demanded the Kid.

"Lawyer Files, from Nuce."

"You're hyer to meet him?"

"Sure."

Santa Fe Sam cracked his quirt in the air.

"You better put me wise," suggested the Kid.

"I guess we're here to meet that durned coyote," said the puncher. "I guess I'm going to give him a quirtin', and then mebbe he'll be glad to hump it back to Nuce and keep there. He's the dog-gonedest, sneaking coyote in Nuce county, and I guess he's pinin' for it."

Far in the distance a hat bobbed on the trail. It announced the coming of a horseman, as yet out of sight.

"I guess I'll put you wise, Carfax," said Santa Fe Sam. "There's a stack of trouble at the ranch. Old Man Sampson's up agin it. Ain't you heard him blowin' off every day since you joined the bunch?"

"I sure have," grinned the Kid.

"There was drought last year, and it hit the Old Man hard," said Sam. "Then there was that pesky gang of thieves down at San Pedro, thinnin' out the herds, stealin' beef to sell to the coasting schooners. I guess you put the lid on that, Carfax, rounding up that gang as you did; but it'd been goin' on for a long time, and I guess it ate up the profits some. And then, the Old Man carries the whole bunch through the winter, instead of firing men like the other ranchers, and that costs money. But I guess the Old Man would have pulled out all right if he'd had a square deal. But he's too white a man to keep his end up with Lawyer Files.

He knows all about cows, but I guess he don't know much about signin' papers."

The Kid nodded; he could understand that.

"He got a loan from Files," went on Santa Fe Sam. "I guess he paid it, too, and a lot more; but there was interest pilin' up, and one thin' and another; and then there was a mortgage on the ranch. Every man in the bunch knows that the Old Man was rooked; Files has made money out of him hand over fist, and still there's the mortgage, and if it ain't met to-day, Files can foreclose if he likes—and you bet he's goin' to. Why, the ranch is worth ten times more'n he could claim on all his durned papers—but he's got the Old Man fixed, and he's got a pull at Nuce in the courts. He's comin' along to-day for ten thousand dollars, and I sure opine that the Old Man hasn't got half of it—that was why he was blowing off at me."

"It was sure mighty unreasonable," remarked the Kid.

"Oh, shucks!" snapped Santa Fe Sam. "Why shouldn't the Old Man blow off, if it does him any good?"

The Kid smiled.

"Ain't he got twice as many men in the bunch as he needs at this time of the year?" demanded the puncher. "He won't fire a man, the boss won't—only in the way of blowing off his mouth, and he don't mean it. I tell you, that coyote at Nuce has been bleedin' the Old Man white, and his game is near up; but so long as he's got a dollar left, he won't fire a man what's served him. Look how he gave you a job, because you rounded up that San Pedro bunch of beef stealers; and do you reckon he wanted an extra man, with half the outfit doin' nothin' at this time of year?"

"He's sure a white man," assented the Kid.

"And the bunch is goin' to stand by him," said Santa Fe Sam, with emphasis. "That Nuce galoot ain't gettin' to the ranch to-day with his dog-goned papers, to worry the Old Man. He sure ain't. Here he comes; and I've got a quirt hyer what says he ain't goin' any farther!"

"Oh, great gophers!" ejaculated the Kid. "I guess it might do him good, feller; but how's that goin' to help the Old Man?"

"Well, it won't hurt him any, I reckon," said Sam reflectively. "That coyote has got him fixed, anyhow."

The Kid whistled softly. He could understand and sympathise with the feelings of the puncher; but law was law, even when it was "squared" by a man with a "pull" in the courts. Quitting the man from Nuce was not likely, in the Kid's opinion, to help Old Man Sampson out of his legal entanglements.

But the Kid was not there to argue. Santa Fe Sam had brought him along to help, if help was necessary; and the Kid was ready to help, though he failed to see where the benefit to the Old Man would come in.

The horseman on the trail was drawing near now.

The Rio Kid watched him rather curiously. Lawyer Files, of Nuce, was not pleasing to the eye. He was a spare man, dressed in store clothes, with a Derby hat; he rode a good horse, but he rode it clumsily. His face was thin, and hard, his mouth like a gash, tight set. One of the hardest cases the Kid had ever seen, he reckoned.

Mr. Files, of Nuce, came up at a canter; and stopped as the two cow-punchers barred his way. His little, close-set black eyes gleamed at them.

"What's this?" he snapped. "Mr. Sampson sent you to meet me?"

"Nix! I reckon we've moseyed along sort of promiscuous," answered Santa Fe Sam. "You want to ride back to Nuce, Mr. Files, jest as quick as you know how."

"I'm going to the ranch."

"I guess not," said Sam coolly. "You're goin' back to Nuce, you dog-goned coyote, and you tell the galoots there what it's like to feel a cow-man's quirt across your pesky shoulders."

Santa Fe Sam's quirt whistled in the air. The lawyer from Nuce backed his horse swiftly, wheeled from the trail, and dashed into the plain, the quirt missing him by feet as it descended.

"Oh, sho!" ejaculated Sam.

With a thunder of hoofs, the man from Nuce dashed away at top speed, and the enraged puncher wheeled his broncho to pursue. But the cow-pony would never have overtaken the big-limbed "American" horse ridden by the man from Nuce, and Santa Fe Sam realised that at a glance; and his face flushed with rage as he dropped his hand to his gun.

There was a whiz in the air as the Rio Kid's riata flew.

The fifty-foot rope whirled in the air, and the loop dropped over the shoulders of the hard riding man from Nuce.

The Kid's mustang planted his forefeet firmly against the shock, as he was accustomed to do when the rider roped a steer.

For a second the man from Nuce rode wildly on; then the rope tautened, and he was plucked from the saddle like a bag of alfalfa.

Crash!

The horse dashed on, with swinging stirrups; and Lawyer Files, of Nuce, lay in the grass, wriggling in the rope and dazed by the shock. He lay there

gasping, as the two punchers rode up, and Santa Fe Sam dropped from the saddle, quirt in hand.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Quitting a Coyote!

THE Rio Kid shook loose his rope and coiled it. Lawyer Files sat up in the grass, spluttering with rage.

His horse, startled and scared, was already at a distance, and going at a gallop. The man from Nuce made a furious gesture after the vanishing animal.

"Rope in that horse!" he howled. The Kid looked at him, and continued coiling his lasso.

"I guess you ain't giving orders hyer, Mr. Files," he remarked. "You want that cayuse, you hop after it."

"You ruffian!" roared Files.

Santa Fe Sam's grip closed on the coat collar, and Files was jerked to his feet. He stood panting for breath, glaring at the two punchers in mingled rage and dread. His foxy eyes were apprehensively on the quirt in Santa Fe Sam's grasp.

"You dare to touch me?" he panted.

"I guess I'd rather touch a polecat," drawled the Rio Kid. "You ain't a nice man to touch, Mr. Files."

"Git!" said Santa Fe Sam. "Turn round to Nuce, Lawyer Files, and hit the trail pronto."

The cowboy swung himself into the saddle.

"Do you think I can hoof it ten miles?" yelled Files.

"Sure! You got to."

"I'm going on to the ranch! This is a trick—Sampson has put you up to this!" shrieked Files furiously. "I'll sell him up! I'll beggar him! I'll drive him out of the country—"

The quirt cracked.

"You starting up the trail?" asked Santa Fe Sam. "Old Man Sampson don't know nothin' of this hyer stunt, and I guess he will jaw me like mad when he does know. But that don't cut no ice. I'm goin' to quirt you back to Nuce. Git goin'!"

And as Files still stood where he was, raving, the cow-puncher cracked the squirt round his long, thin legs, and the man from Nuce yelled with anguish, and started up the trail at a run.

Santa Fe Sam rode after him, the quirt singing in the air.

Lash after lash rang round the lawyer's legs, and across his back, and he ran frantically, yelling at every jump.

"Oh, shucks!" ejaculated the Rio Kid, staring after them. "I guess this ain't no funeral of mine, but that sure won't make the galoot feel any more sweet towards the Sampson outfit, and I'm a-shoutin' it! I reckon it ain't for me to horn in, but that sure will make the scallywag hoppin' mad."

For a moneylender who had got his grip on a rancher's land, the Kid was not likely to feel any sympathy. But he did not figure that Santa Fe Sam was doing any good, apart from the personal satisfaction he derived from quirting the lawyer.

But no doubt he had a heap of satisfaction from that. He looked like it, as he spurred his broncho after the fleeing man from Nuce, and lashed and lashed with the cracking thong.

For a mile up the trail, Santa Fe Sam pursued the hopping, bounding, yelling lawyer, lashing with the quirt, and then, at last he cantered back and rejoined the Rio Kid, grinning.

Lawyer Files, hatless, yelling raving, vanished up the creek.

"I guess that scallywag has been

asking for that, for dog's aggs," said Santa Fe Sam, breathing hard. "It's sure come home to him now. He can tell them in Nuce how lawyer coyotes are handled on the Sampson ranch."

"He sure can," agreed the Kid. "You reckon that will keep him clear of the Old Man, feller?"

"Waal, I guess he won't come moseying on this ranch agin in a hurry, nebhow," said the puncher.

The Kid chuckled.

"I guess that's a cinch," he agreed. "Not unless he comes with a sheriff's posse to see him through."

"I guess the boys will give the sheriff and his posse fits, if Old Man Sampson says the word," answered Santa Fe Sam. "Now we got to ride, feller—there's a bunch to be drove in from the chaparral."

And the two punchers rode away on duty, and the Kid dismissed the matter of Lawyer Files from his mind. Cattle had strayed into a patch of chaparral, and Santa Fe Sam and the Kid were busy all day rounding them up and driving them back to their pasture.

It was night when they returned to the ranch. Except for the men out with the herds, the outfit were in the bunk-house, and there was a general shout to the two as they came in. Every face was turned towards Santa Fe Sam, in the light of the kerosene lamps. Evidently the outfit knew what Sam had gone out to do that morning.

"Lawyer Files ain't turned up hyer to-day," said Jeff Barstow. "You 'uns seen anything of him?"

"I guess I sorter saw a scallywag about his size," answered Sam.

"What was he doin'?"

"Hoppin' back to Nuce with a quirt round his laigs."

There was a roar of laughter in the bunk-house. Santa Fe Sam's drastic methods with the "coyote" met with the full approval of the Sampson bunch.

But the Kid could not help having his doubts. Sam was giving a description of the encounter with Lawyer Files, and loud chuckles from the bunch when Old Man Sampson looked into the bunk-house doorway. There was silence at once at sight of the rancher. The Old Man was not in a temper now—but all the bunch would have preferred to see him in a rage, to seeing him with the anxious, harassed look that was on his kind old face now.

"You 'uns seen anything of that coyote from Nuce?" the Old Man, asked looking from face to face. "He sure ain't come."

"I—I guess he ain't coming, boss," faltered Santa Fe Sam.

"He sure was coming," said Old Man Sampson, looking more harassed than before. "I sure hope you 'uns ain't been cavorting around playing any locoed tricks on that coyote."

"What's the harm in quirting him a few, boss?" asked Sam.

"Oh, thunder," said the rancher. "That's it, is it? I sort of allowed it might be. You gink, you!"

Santa Fe Sam stood abashed.

"I guess you can jaw me all you want, boss," he said meekly. "I ain't got no kick coming."

But the boss, rather to the surprise of the bunk-house crowd, did not "jaw" the reckless puncher.

He sighed.

"I reckon you meant well, Sam," he said. "You're a dog-goned gink, but you sure meant well. I dunno that it makes any pow'ful difference, either. Forget it."

And the rancher turned away, and walked back to the house, leaving the outfit looking at one another in silence.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Guns to the Fore!

THE Rio Kid had gone into the chuck house for bacon and beans at noon the next day, when Santa Fe Sam put his head in at the door and shouted:

"Hyar, you Carfax!"
 "Hallo!" drawled the Kid.
 "Got your gun?"
 "Sure."

"You'll want it, come and join the boys."
 The puncher hurried away, and the Kid, leaving his dinner untasted, followed him from the chuck house, hitching round his holster as he went, to bring his gun within easy reach.

A dozen men of the outfit were gathering before the ranch-house, with Jeff Barstow the foreman at their head. Every man packed a gun, and one or two had brought out rifles. Even the cook came out of the chuck house with a Colt in his grip. The Rio Kid joined the crowd cheerfully, he was ready to draw a gun along with the bunch in any trouble that came along.

Far across the plain, bobbing over the grass, appeared a bunch of horsemen, heading for the ranch.

The Rio Kid eyed them curiously.

"What's the gol-darned rookus?" he asked.

Barstow glanced at him.
 "You're new here, Carfax, you can vamoose if you like. I guess this ain't no quarrel of yours. Slide out if you want."

"Aw, forget it," drawled the Kid. "If this bunch is pulling guns, I guess my gun is talking as soon as any. But put a feller wise. What's the pesky trouble?"

Barstow pointed to the distant bunch of riders. Seven men were to be counted. One, dressed in black with a Derby hat, the Kid recognised, even at the distance as Lawyer Files. The others he did not know.

"That's the sheriff's posse from Nuce!" said the foreman of the ranch.

"Great gophers!" ejaculated the Kid, in amazement. "You'uns pulling guns on a sheriff's posse?"

"We sure are," said the foreman. "If that bunch is coming to give the Old Man trouble we're pulling guns fast enough. They ain't serving any of their durned papers on the Old Man, while this outfit is around, and don't you forget it."

The Kid whistled.

"But you ain't no call to horn in," went on Jeff. "You're a stranger in this hyer country and a kid at that, and you don't want to hunt trouble with any sheriff. You slide."

The Kid chuckled involuntary. He had had more trouble with sheriffs, in many parts of Texas, than the whole of the Sampson bunch were ever likely to see.

"Feller, I don't take that kind," said the Kid. "You sure hurt my feelin's. I allow you're a bunch of locoed moss-heads if you start anything with a sheriff and his posse, but if you do, I guess it's me for a front seat."

"Just as you like," said the foreman, shrugging his shoulders. He turned to the grim-looking bunch. "Don't you boys loose off a shot till I give the word. But them scallywags ain't getting this hyer ranch off the Old Man while we pack guns, nchow."

"I reckon not," said Santa Fe Sam. And there was a fierce, deep murmur from the group of punchers. All eyes were fixed on the horsemen from Nuce, as they came up at a gallop. The sheriff, a burly man with a tanned face, rode a little ahead, on his coat gleaming the silver star that was his badge of office. No doubt the sheriff of Nuce displayed that badge of authority intentionally, as a warning to the Sampson outfit.

The horsemen clattered up and halted. The Kid eyed them. The sheriff looked a determined man. His five deputies carried rifles across their saddles, and looked the men to use them. Lawyer Files glanced at the crowd of punchers,

in the ranch, pending the proceedings of the court!" rapped out Files. "If the money ain't paid down on the nail this very day, the mortgage is foreclosed, and I guess I ain't allowing cattle to be driven off into the hills, not if I know it. Not a stick stirs from that house, and not a hoof or a horn from the ranch. You get me?"

"I sure get you," assented the foreman. "And now you get me! Ride back the way you come, afore we pull on you!"

Files' eyes glinted.

"Sheriff, do your duty!" he rapped out.

"Boys," said the sheriff of Nuce, "You can't buck agin the law that-a-way. I ain't here for burning powder, if I can help it. But Mr. Files is within his legal rights, and I got to see him through. Don't you draw a gun, any of you bunch—in the name of the law!"

The name of the law seemed to have no terrors for the Sampson bunch. Guns were drawn on all sides.

The sheriff's hard face grew grimmer. His men were handling their rifles now; and Lawyer Files backed his horse. The Rio Kid pushed forward a little, between the two groups.

"Fellers," he said, "I reckon it ain't for me to chew the rag, but I sure do advise you to let up on this. Old Man Sampson would never stand for it if he was here. I guess we can wipe out that crowd, if we want. But what then? You'll be a bunch of outlaws, after shooting up a sheriff and his posse. Fellers, I reckon you've really got another guess coming."

The Kid spoke earnestly. He was heart and soul with the devoted bunch that were prepared to risk everything to defend their boss, the hapless rancher who had been caught in the toils of chicane. But the consequences, of which the excited punchers did not think, were very clear to the



TO SAVE HIS BOSS! From the inside of his belt the Kid drew the leather pouch in which he kept his roll. From the pouch he jerked a roll of bills and counted out ten thousand dollars. "There's the money," he said, and flung it on the table in front of Files. (See Chapter 5.)

and his foxy eyes glittered at Santa Fe Sam and the Kid. But he did not speak. It was the sheriff who opened the proceedings

"Mornin', you 'uns!" he said gruffly. "Old Man Sampson to home?"

Barstow moved forward.

"Never mind Old Man Sampson," he answered curtly. "Afore you light down from that cayuse, sheriff, jest spill what you've come for."

The sheriff of Nuce made a gesture towards Files.

"Mr. Files came along yesterday, and was turned back by a puncher," he said. "He claimed protection to call on Mr. Sampson and serve him with a paper. That's why we're here!"

"I figured that it was that-a-way," assented Barstow. "I guess that coyote is hyer to collect ten thousand dollars that the Old Man don't owe him. Waal, I can tell him it won't be paid to-day. I guess the whole bunch is wise to that, and it ain't no secret. So you can ride back to Nuce and take Lawyer Files along."

"I demand to see Mr. Sampson!" snapped Files.

"He sure ain't to home at present," drawled the foreman. "Not bein' around, you can't see him!"

"Then the sheriff will leave two men

Kid's mind.

It was strange enough that the Kid, hunted by half the sheriffs of Texas, an outlaw, with a price on his head, should be the one to call for peace and obedience to the law. But the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande knew only too well the heavy price to be paid for defiance of the law, and his heart ached for the brave and reckless men who were bringing upon themselves the penalty of outlawry.

"I guess that kid's giving you good advice, fellers," said the sheriff of Nuce. "He's sure talking hoss-sense."

There was a growl of rage from the bunch.

"You pesky scallywag, if you ain't got any sand in your craw, slide out afore we burn powder!" shouted Jeff.

"Quit chewing the rag and beat it!"

The Kid flushed crimson.

"I reckon it ain't that, feller," he said. "If you come to shooting, you'll sure find my gun barking with the rest. But it's a fool game, and the Old Man wouldn't stand for it!"

"You shet your yaup-trap and git!" snapped Barstow.

"I'll shut my yaup-trap, but I ain't gitting any," answered the Kid, and he ranged himself with the Sampson bunch, revolver in hand. "I'm with

this bunch, tooth and toenail, till the cows come home."

There was a clatter of hoofs, and Old Man Sampson came galloping up to the spot. His face was crimson with haste as he spurred on his horse, and he waved his hand excitedly to the bunch. Breathless, he dashed between the two contending parties.

"You loosed ginks, put up your guns!" he roared. "Sharp! Put up them shootin'-irons, you durned gecks! You figure you're going to fire on the sheriff, durn your pesky hides. Do you reckon I want to see this bunch hanged up in a row on the cottonwoods at Nuce? Put up them guns!"

"Look hyer, boss—" growled Barstow.

"Aw, can it!" snapped the rancher. "Put up them guns, I'm telling you!"

There was hesitation among the punchers. But the Kid was deeply relieved. He had seen the Old Man spurring up from the distance, and he had gained time for the rancher's arrival. The threatened bloodshed was postponed now, at least.

As the punchers growled and muttered, Old Man Sampson's anger faded out of his face, and he spoke more gently.

"Boys, this hyer ain't a matter for gun-play," he said quietly. "I been cinched by an ornery coyote, but the law's the law. No man hyer is goin' to buck agin the law. I ask you, boys, as a last favour, put up them guns, and go to the bunkhouse quiet. You ain't refusing the last thing I'm ever likely to ask, boys!"

Jeff Barstow shoved his gun back into its holster.

"It's your say-so, boss!" he granted. And he strode away to the bunkhouse, and the punchers slowly followed him, with glares of defiance back at the horsemen from Nuce. But the Rio Kid did not follow.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Kid Works the Rifle!

OLD MAN SAMPSON turned to the sheriff.

"I reckon you don't want to be mad with the boys, sheriff," he said quietly. "They was sure a little on the prod. You can come into the house, Mr. Files; I guess it belongs to you from now on."

The "coyote" from Nuce smiled sourly as he slid from his saddle. The sheriff and his men stood by their horses as the man in black followed the rancher into the house. The Rio Kid stood for some moments in thought, and then he, too, went into the porch.

Mr. Files had sat down, already with an air of proprietorship. Old Man Sampson did not sit down. He stood facing the man from Nuce, with a grim

expression on his grizzled face. The lawyer had taken a bundie of papers from his pocket; but the old man waved them aside.

"I reckon it ain't no use chewing the rug, Files," he said. "You've come here for ten thousand dollars, and I guess you won't take half and renew."

"I guess not," said Mr. Files, showing his teeth in a smile.

"I reckoned that was the sort of ornery cuss you was," said the rancher. "You want the ranch, and you've got me fixed."

The Rio Kid stepped lightly into the room.

"I guess if you'll let a galoot born in, boss—" he said.

The rancher turned to him.

"Durn it!" he said. "You ain't no pesy hyer, Carfax. I'm sure sorry your job here ain't likely to last; I allow you're a good man. But I reckon Files won't be keeping on the bunch."

"You're said it," assented the man from Nuce.

"This hyer ranch don't belong to that dog-goned coyote yet, boss," said the Rio Kid cheerfully, "and I reckon I can help you keep it out of his grip."

"Forget it," said the rancher. "Ain't I told you there ain't to be any gun-play? Quit!"

"Gun-play nothin'!" said the Kid. "You want ten thousand dollars to get clear of that buzzard, boss."

"You going to lend it to me, puncher?" asked Old Man Sampson, with a faint smile.

"Sure!" said the Kid coolly.

"What?"

The rancher spun round, and Lawyer Files and rose from his chair in alarm. But he sat down again with a contemptuous smile.

"We're wasting time!" he snapped.

"I reckon that's so," said the rancher. "You git, Carfax; and don't talk foolish!"

The Kid smiled.

"Money talks!" he answered.

From the inside of his belt the Kid drew the leather pouch in which he packed his roll. From the pouch he jerked a roll of bills.

The rancher stared at him open-eyed, open-mouthed. Files sat as if glued to his chair, gasping.

One by one the Kid peeled bills from his roll; ten bills, one after another, each of the denomination of a thousand dollars.

"Carry me home to die!" murmured the astounded rancher.

Files sat as if stunned.

"Money talks!" said the Kid cheerfully. "I reckon, Mr. Sampson, that I want's exactly broke to the world when I asked you for a place on your payroll. I sure wanted to punch cows with

the bunch, seein' that I was bred to cows. But once I went fossicking for gold in Arizona, and I sure struck it rich; and when I hit the trail out of Arizona, feller, I took a hundred thousand dollars in my roll. I guess some of it's spread its ornery wings and flew; but there's sure a heap left." He turned to the man from Nuce. "Count them bills, you ornery gink, and give a receipt!"

The lawyer only gasped.

"I guess I'm dreamin' this," said Old Man Sampson, passing his hand across his brow. "I'm sure dreamin' this hyer."

"Dreamin' nothin'!" said the Kid. "Don't I keep on telling you that money talks?"

The rancher stared at the bills, and stared at the Kid. For a long minute he was silent.

"I guess I can't touch it, feller," he said at last.

"Aw, forget it!" said the Kid. "I sure know what this ranch is worth, and you'll pay it buck easy after the next round-up. I'll sure be glad to leave it in safe hands; you'll be doin' me a favour to take care of it, boss." And as the rancher still hesitated, the Kid went on: "Call it a cinch, or, by gum, I'll drill that ornery coyote there where he sits, and cinch it that-a-way!"

And the Kid whipped out a gun; and the man from Nuce started to his feet with a yell of terror.

"Is it a cinch, boss?" demanded the Kid, covering the lawyer with a gun.

The rancher grinned.

"It's a cinch," he said.

"Good enough!" drawled the Kid; and he holstered his gun and walked out.

He was humming a tune as he joined the bunch at the bunkhouse. The punchers glared at him.

"What makes you so durned spry, you gink?" snapped Jeff Barstow. "You figure that it's funny to see the Old Man sold up?"

"Sold up nothin'!" drawled the Kid. "The Old Man's fixed to square that coyote, and I'm telling you so. You watch out, and you'll see him beat it like a whipped dog!"

"You don't say!" exclaimed Santa Fe Sam.

"Watch out!" answered the Kid.

"By gum!"

Ten minutes later Lawyer Files, with a face that was white with rage and chagrin, was riding away with the sheriff's posse to Nuce. He had ten thousand dollars in his pocket, but he had lost his grip on the Sampson ranch, and lost it for ever.

And the bunch marvelled and rejoiced—and they marvelled still more a day or two later when they learned that Carfax, the new puncher, had become a partner in the ranch. So the Old Man had decided; and the Kid let him have his way. But, partner as he was, the bunch found no change in the Kid; still the same cheery comrade in the bunkhouse and on the range.

THE END.

(What do you think of these Wild West yarns? Aren't they GREAT? There's nothing like them on the market—nothing! And isn't the Rio Kid a lad for adventures? Every week he falls into some new and fearful peril, or bumps into someone's troubles! Next week this boy outlaw finds himself landed in the greatest adventure of his life. Look out for: "SILANGHAIED!")



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