

MEET THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW, IN THIS FINE WESTERN YARN!



The RIO KID

To the Rio Kid, adventure is the spice of life. But one can have too much of a good thing as the Kid discovers when he rides into Mexico.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Into the Trap!

SO far as the Rio Kid was aware, nobody at Fanchita knew him from Adam. He had crossed the Rio Grande into Mexico before, more than once, and ridden many mountain trails in Chihuahua, but he had never been anywhere near this little pueblo nesting under a spur of the Sierra Madre. The Kid, in his Stetson hat, and chaps, and silk neck-scarf, looked just a cow-puncher, and a Texas cow-puncher wasn't an uncommon sight on the Mexican side—not uncommon enough to attract a whole heap of attention. Yet, as he rode down the dusty unpaved street of Fanchita, Mexicans stared at him on all sides, and nudged one another, and whispered in the soft liquid Spanish, and a little crowd gathered, and followed him along towards the plaza. The Kid caught the word 'Gringo' uttered many times. Any man from the north side of the border was a 'Gringo,' just as any galoot from the south side was a 'Greaser.' But surely, the puzzled Kid thought, plenty of Gringos must have been in Fanchita before, and there was nothing in the sight of a Gringo to make the whole population of the pueblo 'rubber' at a hombre in this way.

The Kid rode on at a walking pace. It would have been difficult to ride

faster with Mexicans, draped in their cloaks, crowding in the narrow irregular street. The Kid was dusty from a long trail, and he was aiming to find a posada on the plaza to put up for the night. The sun was sinking behind the soaring peaks of the Sierra Madre, and the Kid had figured on passing that night under the shelter of a roof in Fanchita. As he found that his arrival had caused so much sensation, he rather regretted that he had not camped out on the mountain. It looked as if there was going to be trouble, and he was badly placed for trouble, in the middle of a crowd of more than a hundred Mexicans.

Yet why trouble should come, he was puzzled to guess—in the belief that he was unknown to any man at Fanchita. And even if he was known, it was no business of these Greasers that he was wanted by sheriffs on the Texas side of the river. The Kid decided to walk his horse on as far as the plaza, and there, in the wider space, to put the big grey mustang to a gallop, and ride out of the pueblo.

But it was not so easy to carry out that plan. The crowd thickened round him, and several horsemen—evidently vaqueros from the ranchos—had joined it, and some of them were armed. Here and there in the crowd was a gleam of steel, as a cuchillo was half-drawn. So far from getting his mustang to a gallop in the plaza, the Kid found the mob so thick round him there, that he had to draw rein, and fairly halt. Five or six horsemen barred his way, with a crowd of Mexicans on foot, and on either side of him, the throng thickened. Behind him it was thicker still. The Kid was the centre of a sea of dark

faces, glittering black eyes, and big sombreros. But though many weapons were shown, there was no sign of an attack—indeed, many of the swarthy crowd were grinning. But the Kid saw clearly enough that the attack would come, if he tried to drive his way through by force. He was not honing for a fight with a mob of a couple of hundred Greasers, if he could help it. He sat his mustang, the butts of his guns very near his hands, looked over the swarthy faces nearest to him, and spoke with a cool drawl.

"Say, you geeks, what's this pesky circus, anyhow? Ain't you never seen a white man before?"

There was a buzz of voices, and the word 'Gringo' was repeated many times, and then he heard the words "El Nino del Rio."

The Kid swore softly.

El Nino del Rio was Spanish for the Rio Kid.

So he was known—the name and fame that he had hoped to leave behind him in Texas, had followed him into Mexico. And he wondered whether these Greasers knew that a reward of a thousand dollars was placed on his head in the Lone Star State. Likely they did!

"El Nino del Rio!"

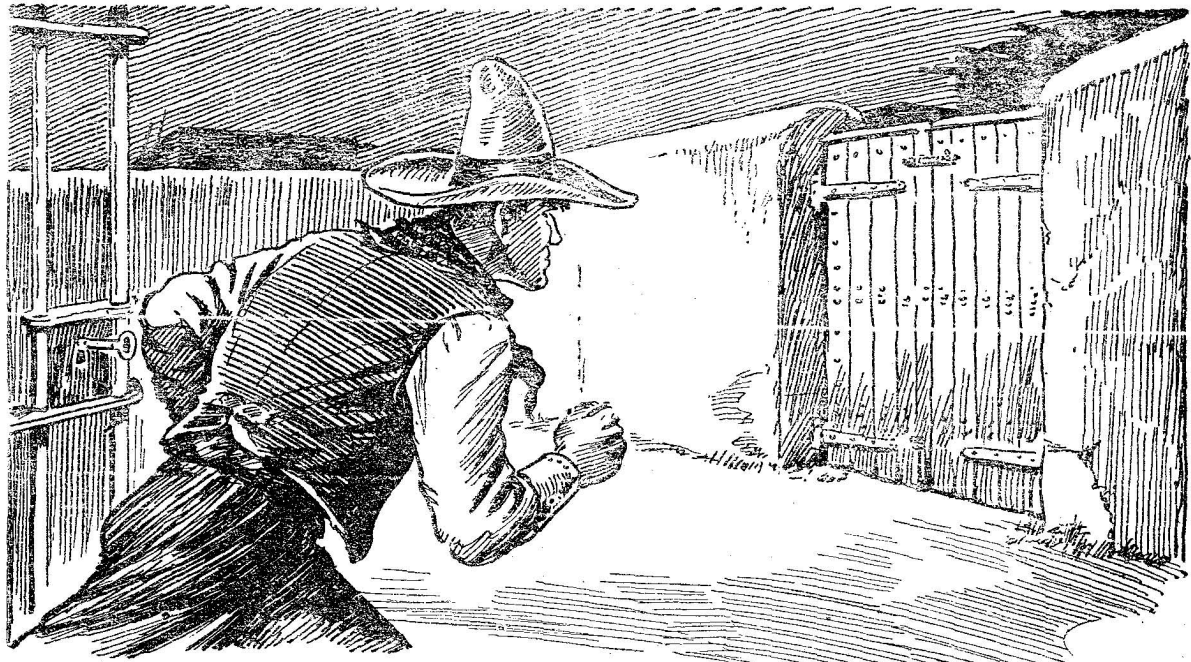
The name was taken up, and buzzed through the crowd.

"El bandolero!"

The Kid flushed.

"Aw, forget it, you'uns," he snapped indignantly. "What you mean calling a galoot a bandolero—which I reckon in your dog-goned lingo means a pesky rustler. Cut it out!"

The dark-skinned crowd grinned at him mockingly. They had him where they wanted him; the Kid was trapped,



'n MEXICO/ RALPH REDWAY

in the midst of the surging mob. He had ridden right into a trap, when he entered Fanchita for a night's lodging at a posada.

There was a shout across the plaza. "El alcalde!"

The Kid looked round. "I'll sure be glad to see the town marshal of this hyer burg," he said.

A tall man with a black beard came majestically across the plaza, from a mansion on one side of the square. The mansion was a one-story rambling stone house, no great shakes of a shebang, in the Texas cowboy's opinion, but a mansion in comparison with the shacks and hovels by which it was surrounded. There was only one other building of any pretensions on the plaza, and that was a square-built adobe house, with barred windows, which the Kid guessed to be the calaboose—a building in which, from the way things looked, he was likely to get his lodging that night.

But he lifted his Stetson politely to the tall, black-bearded Mexican, who was evidently the alcalde. With Spanish courtesy, the alcalde lifted his big sombrero in return to the salute.

"Say, bo," said the Kid cheerily, "you speak English? If you can sling my lingo, hombre, put me wise to what this hyer circus means? I guess I seem to have stirred up this burg like a nest of tarantulas."

Don Salvador Iguerez, alcalde of Fanchita, bowed gravely.

"Senor, you are known here," he said.

"Search me!" said the Kid.

"You are El Nino del Rio—the Rio Kid?"

"I guess they called me that, back in Frio," assented the Kid. "Is this

hyer a public welcome to a celebrated character, senor?"

Don Salvador smiled. "Senor, I regret it a thousand times," he said. "But the orders are to place you in the calabozo."

"Senor, you sure don't regret it half so much as I do," answered the Kid. "So I guess I can put it at two thousand times."

Senor Iguerez looked a little puzzled. "Don't you reckon you better guess again?" asked the Kid. "I ain't trod on any galoot's toes since I crossed the border. I ain't come into Mexico a-shooting. I'm sure the most peaceable guy in Texas when I'm let alone. If you don't want me in this hyer burg, senor, I allow I'll ride on and look for a camp on the sierra. Say?"

The alcalde shook his head.

"Senor, you were seen on the trail, and the word was passed," he said. "You are well known—an outlaw of Texas—and I have orders to arrest you and keep you in safety till you may be handed over to the Military Commandant at Las Aguas."

"I guess I ain't honing to meet that galoot," said the Kid shaking his head.

"Such are the orders, senor," said the alcalde. "I regret it a thousand times—ten thousand times! You will not be so foolish as to resist. I should be desolated, senor, to give orders to kill you, moreover, the commandant at Las Aguas desires you as a prisoner. Tomorrow, senor, the soldiers will be here to take you. For to-night, I beg you to honour Fanchita with your presence."

"Waal, carry me home to die!" ejaculated the Kid, in disgust.

"You will graciously surrender your

weapons," continued the alcalde. "You will have the overpowering kindness to dismount from your horse, senor."

"Feller," said the Kid, "you sure are the politest lobo-wolf that ever got in a bite on me. There ain't a sheriff in Texas that has a thing on you. Seeing that you're so dog-goned polite, I reckon it would be bad manners for me to say no, senor."

The alcalde of Fanchita smiled gently. "Muy bien, senor," he said. "Give up your arms."

The Kid took one glance round.

Quietly and coolly he calculated the chances of pulling his guns, spurring his mustang, and fighting his way out of the pueblo. He saw that there was nothing in it. Knives and pistols surrounded him, the throng of Mexicans blocked his way, a score of horsemen were at hand. He was fairly trapped—and the Kid was not the man to butt his head against a stone wall.

He slipped from the saddle, took his guns by the barrels, and presented them to the alcalde of Fanchita.

"You win, feller," he said amiably.

Senor Iguerez accepted the walnut-butted guns gravely.

"I am desolated, senor," he said.

"But you savvy—orders are orders! Now I will conduct you to the calabozo. You will find another Gringo there to keep you company—another bandolero, senor, of your own sort, who also is going to Las Aguas to-morrow morning to be shot. Senor, do me the honour to walk with me."

A thronging, grinning crowd marched with the Rio Kid to the calaboose, and an iron-studded door clanged behind him and shut him off from the sight of the pueblo.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Gunman!

"SHUCKS!" growled the Rio Kid. It got the Kid's goat; though he was more angry with himself than with the alcalde and population of Fanchita.

Like a gink, he had ridden into the first Mexican town he came to, figuring that he had left all his foes behind him on the Texas side of the Rio Grande.

Some geek had seen him on the trail and recognised him, and the report had gone ahead of him that a Texas outlaw was riding into Fanchita. That was the cause of the remarkable welcome the Kid had received.

The Kid could have kicked himself, if that had been any use. He had ridden fairly into a trap, and now he was cinched.

No doubt the military commandant at Las Aguas wanted him. That official might have him shot out of hand as a known bandolero, or might hand him over to a sheriff on the Texas side. Neither prospect attracted the Kid.

But it was useless to grouse, or to spill cuss-words. The Kid had been in tight corners before, and he knew how to take trouble philosophically when it came.

He looked round his quarters.

It was a large room with a tiny, barred window high up that let in a glimmer of the setting sun—only a glimmer.

The door was of upright iron bars, rusty with neglect, fastened by an enormous lock.

Outside that door was a little courtyard open to the sky. On the other side of the court was the gaoler's room. And that was all the building. The calaboose of Fanchita was not extensive.

Furniture was sparse. There were a couple of rickety benches and a bundle of dirty straw. They did not give their prisoners luxurious quarters in a Mexican calabozo.

"Shucks!" repeated the Kid.

He was not alone in the dirty, evil-smelling room. A man was seated on one of the benches, leaning back against the wall, smoking a cigarette. He was eyeing the Kid with a cool, searching glance. This was the "other Gringo" that the alcalde had mentioned.

The Kid, looking at him, did not like his looks. The man was a slim, wiry fellow, with a hard, cold face and small, keen eyes that had an ice-cold look in their depths. The Kid knew a gunman when he saw one, and he figured that he had never seen a harder, colder, more ruthless-looking gunman than the companion of his cell.

The Kid was handy with a gun himself; but he was no gunman, and he did not like gunmen. But in his present circumstances the boy puncher of Frio was not disposed to be particular. He had no intention whatever of remaining that night in the calaboose if he could help it; and if the other hombre was game, two heads were better than one in planning escape. So the Kid gave the gunman a nod and a cheery greeting.

"Say, feller, they got us where they want us," he remarked. "You from Texas?"

"Sure!" said the other, watching him keenly, coldly, sharply. "I guess I heard them Greasers yapping suthin about El Nino del Rio when you was toted in. You the Rio Kid?"

"That's me."

"I guess you're the hombre I want to see, then," said the gunman.

"Mebbe you've heard of me—Slick Thayer."

The Kid made a grimace. He had heard of Slick Thayer, though he had never met the man. Thayer was a "killer"; and it was said in Texas that he had killed more men than he had fingers and toes. It was the killer's icy look that the Kid could see in his eyes.

"I guess I've heard of you," said the Kid shortly.

He moved a little back. He hated the sight of a killer like Thayer. But he realised that he was in a tight corner; and Thayer, desperate rascal as he was, was the man for a desperate attempt—more useful in such an emergency than a better man would have been.

Thayer did not fail to note the involuntary repugnance in the Kid's handsome face; and his hard face hardened more, and the icy look in his eyes became intensified. But he, like the Kid, wanted help, and he did not allow a word of anger to escape him.

"I guess we're both cinched," he said. "We want to help one another out of this."

"Sure!" assented the Kid. "What they got you for, Thayer?"

"Holdin' up the alcalde," said the gunman coolly. "That old hombre, Salvador Iguerez, is what these Greasers call a rico hombre; I guess he's plastered with money. I got word from a galoot I can trust that the old Greaser has got the stuff in his adobe shebang—across the plaza here. I had to get out of Texas for a spell—same as you, I reckon. I figured I'd make a raise here."

The Kid set his lips.

The man knew that he was an outlaw, and was speaking as to one of his kidney. It got the Kid's goat.

"I slipped up on it," drawled Thayer. "I got the old galoot under my gun, and I guessed it was jest pie; he lives alone in that shebang 'cept for two peon servants—and I'd watched them clear. But a bunch of vaqueros came in from his ranch and horned in jest as I got him fixed—and roped me in like I was a steer." The gunman's cold eyes gleamed. "It was a cinch on me! They put me in here. I guess I'm going to Las Aguas in the morning. These god-darned Greasers leave everything till to-morrow—that's their pesky way! Hasta manana." He grinned. "I guess it lets me out, fur I ain't staying the night in this shebang, Kid?"

The Kid nodded.

"Now there's two of us I reckon can work the rifle," went on Thayer, lowering his voice. "There's a gaoler—the carcelero they call him—lives in the calaboose; nobody else. That gink will come if you call him; he hands you anything you want if you're heeled. He won't open them bars for love or money; he puts the grub through, and cigarettes—or anything else you can pay for. Have they taken your roll?"

The Kid shook his head.

"Only my guns," he answered. "I'd rather they'd taken the roll. But that old hombre, the alcalde, is sure a polite old cuss."

"They'll get your roll at Las Aguas," drawled Thayer. "Old Iguerez calls himself a caballero; but most of these Greasers would rob their grandmothers of their hair-combs. But we ain't seeing Las Aguas to-morrow, I reckon, if you stand by me."

"Shoot!" said the Kid tersely.

"I'm letting you in on an even break," said Slick Thayer. "I was sure beat to handle this alone, but two's a team."

"You've said it," agreed the Kid.

"I reckon we'll be outside this adobe at midnight," said Thayer. "Then we hit old Iguerez's shebang. I guess none of his ranch hands won't be hornin' in at that time o' night. If the peons wake up, I reckon you know how to put them to sleep again—same as I do." He smiled a slow, cold, merciless smile. "We get the old Greaser's roll—and I'll say it ain't less than ten thousand dollars in good United States. You get me? We divvy even and quit."

The Kid's eyes flashed.

"You durned dog-goned rustler!" he exclaimed.

Thayer stared at him, unmoved.

"What's bitin' you, feller?" he asked evenly.

"Don't you know a white man when you see one?" growled the Kid. "You figure that you've got hold of a thief of your heft, Slick Thayer? Forget it!"

The gunman's eyes glittered.

"You won't stand for it?" he asked.

"Sure not. I guess I'll stand for getting outside this shebang; but I ain't touchin' a man's roll, you pesky rustler; and you ain't, neither," said the Kid.

"You're sure mighty particular for an outlaw with a price on his head," drawled the gunman.

"Aw, can it!" said the Kid. "I guess I'd rather take my chance with the Greasers at Las Aguas, Slick Thayer, than work in cahoots with a rustler like you! Quit chewin' the rag!"

The Kid retreated to the further end of the cell, sat down on a bench, and relapsed into silence. Thayer watched him, without speaking again, and lighted another cigarette from the expiring one. There was silence in the dirty, stuffy adobe cell, as the shadows deepened, and the last red ray of the setting sun died, and the soft Mexican night brooded over Fanchita and its adobe calaboose.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Escape:

THE gaoler came out of his room on the opposite side of the little, unpaved courtyard. He stood, a black silhouette, against the glimmer of the smelly oil-lamp behind him. He was an uptidy, bearded Mexican, greasy of skin, smelling of pulque. Slick Thayer, standing at the iron bars that formed the gate of the cell, was calling.

"El agua! El agua, señor el carcelero!"

The gaoler brought a tin pitcher of water from the fountain in the court, and passed it through the tall iron bars.

"Gracias!" said Thayer civilly.

He drank the water to the last drop. It was hot and stuffy in the adobe cell. The Kid would have been glad of a drink, and he came forward from his seat in the dim shadow. Save for the glimmer of the carcelero's lamp, fifteen feet away, there was no light.

Thayer slipped a silver dollar into the gaoler's greasy hand and returned the tin pitcher to him.

"Say, I guess you can hand me a drink, feller," drawled the Kid.

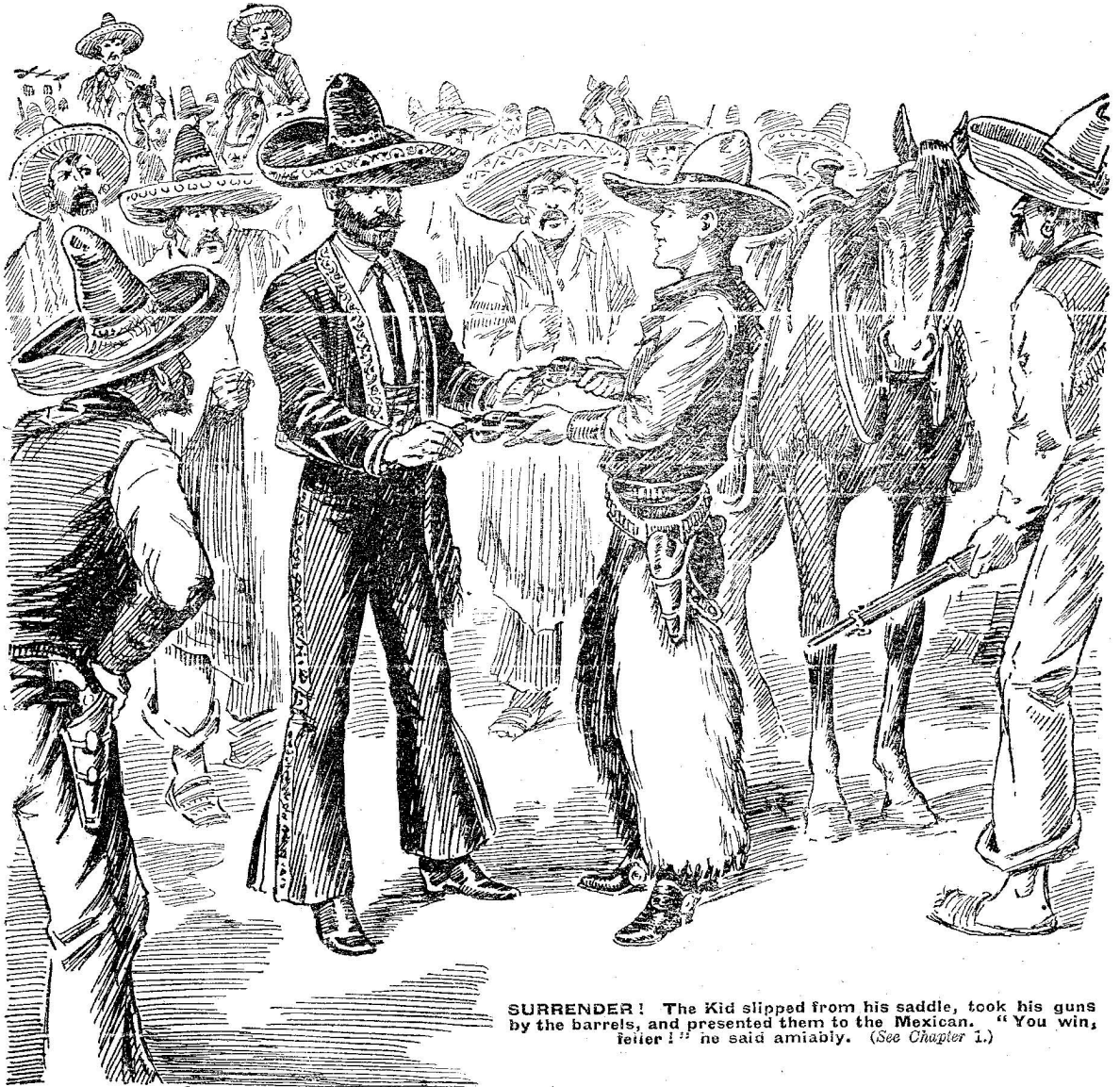
"Que es esto?"

"Agua," said the Kid. "El agua."

"Si, señor."

The carcelero refilled the pitcher, and handed it to the Kid through the bars. And the Kid, like Thayer, passed him a silver dollar. Services were not performed for nothing in the calaboose of Fanchita.

Thayer remained at the bars, speaking to the gaoler in Spanish. The Kid



SURRENDER! The Kid slipped from his saddle, took his guns by the barrels, and presented them to the Mexican. "You win, feiter!" he said amiably. (See Chapter 1.)

went back to his bench at the extremity of the cell. He saw Thayer pass money to the gaoler, and receive a packet of Mexican cigarettes. Then the Mexican went back across the courtyard to his room, closed the door, and all was dark, save for a faint glimmer of starlight over the yard.

The Kid was thinking. A galoot like Thayer got his goat, and he hated to be shut up with him, or to have any dealings with him. But freedom was freedom, and, alone, the Kid saw no way of getting out of this. Thayer had said that he had a plan which the two of them could work together. Apart from the doubtful prospects of the morrow, the Kid hated to spend a night in the filthy Mexican prison. It was dirty and stuffy and in the dirty straw there crawled innumerable insects that were a horror to the cleanly Kid. His objection to acting in concert with the gunman faded a little. He would not speak first; but he resolved that if Thayer opened the subject again, he would give him a patient hearing. And he was assured that Thayer would.

He was right. At a late hour, the gunman came towards the Kid's bench, unseen but audible in the darkness of

the cell. The Kid could see only a black shadow and a glitter of eyes.

"Say, bo," said Thayer, in the same calm, even tones as before. "you don't want to go off on your ear, and land both of us before a firing-party at Las Aguas. Are you going in with me?"

"Spill it," said the Kid briefly.

"That carcelero has the key of the iron gate hung on his belt—"

"I guess I saw it there," said the Kid. "But I reckon he won't unlock them bars for a bribe."

"He sure won't. But he will come across the yard if you call him," answered Thayer. "You ask him for something, and clink one dollar agin another. That'll bring him jumping."

The Kid grinned.

"You get him handing something through the bars," said the gunman softly. "He'll be watching you. He won't be watching me. He'll see the light of my cigarette here, right at the end of the cell. I guess I shall get hold of him through the bars and cinch him. Once he's in my grip I'll see that he doesn't let out a yaup. We get the key off him, and let ourselves out and skip."

"How in thunder is he going to see you smoking a cigarette here, if you're a dog-goned ten feet from here?"

"They forgot you when brains was served out, I reckon," remarked Thayer. "Like this."

He stuck his cigarette in a crack of the adobe wall above the bench, at the height of a man's head.

It glowed there; and, seen from across the cell, it looked as if a man sat there smoking. All was blackness about the bench, save for that glowing spot of fire.

"You got that?" drawled Thayer.

"I sure got it," assented the Kid.

"You're a slick hombre, Thayer, same as they call you. I guess it will work. But look here, you fire-bug, if we get out of this, there ain't any hold-up in the programme. I'll say I don't stand for it."

"If you make a point of it, I've got to agree," answered Thayer. "I guess it will be healthier to beat it right out of town, anyhow. I wouldn't care to try it on without a man to help, after slipping up on it last time. You stand by me, and we'll have the old Greaser's roll—"

"Forget it!" "You're losing a good thing," said Thayer, unmoved. "But if you ain't standing for it, let it drop."

"That goes, then," said the Kid.

And, after the discussion of a few more details, to make all clear, the plan was put into execution. Thayer sat on the bench at the back of the cell, smoking. The Kid went forward to the bars.

He shook the bars and called.
"Say, feller! El carcelero—senor! Say!"

It was some time before the gaoler responded. But he came out of his room at last.

"Senor!"
"El agua," said the Kid.
"Si, senor."

The Mexican filled the tin pitcher, and came back to the bars with it. He was quite wiry, his eyes watchful. But the Kid was full in his view; and across the cell, ten feet away in darkness, glowed a cigarette, showing that the other prisoner sat there, smoking. So the Mexican passed the tin pitcher through the bars, unsuspecting.

A shadow flickered, and a grasp of iron closed on the gaoler's wrist.

"Carambo!"
The tin pitcher clattered to the floor. The gaoler gasped out that one startled word—he had no time for another. He was dragged against the bars, and Thayer's other hand came through and gripped his throat. The Kid horned in instantly, both hands gripping the carcelero. The Mexican made a desperate effort to reach the knife in his belt, but he was held—Thayer had one wrist, the Kid had the other, and all the time the gunman's right hand was gripping his throat and choking his voice.

"Get the sticker and carve him!" breathed Thayer.

With his free hand, the Kid reached through and got the knife from the belt of the carcelero.

He put the point of the knife to the half-choked man's throat, his eyes gleaming over it.

"Kill him!" breathed the gunman.
"Aw, forget it! We've got him fixed," said the Kid. "There ain't going to be any killing here, Slick Thayer."
"You fool!" hissed Thayer.

"That's enough from you!" said the Kid coolly. "The galoot knows he's fixed—get the key off him. Silencio!" he added in Spanish to the gaoler, and the knife pricked the greasy skin.

Thayer freed his hand from the Mexican's throat. The man was close up to the bars, pinned there by the hold on his wrists, and the knife that touched his throat was warning enough for him. He gasped for breath, but uttered no cry.

Thayer reached through the bars with his free hand, and unhooked the long iron key from the Mexican's girdle. A few moments more, and it was in the lock of the iron gate, and turned back. Thayer pushed open one side of the gate and slipped through into the yard, leaving the Kid holding the carcelero to the bars.

"Say, lend me a hand with this hombre," said the Kid. "We got to get him tied safe afore we quit."

Slick Thayer made no answer. He opened the outer gate, slipped through into the plaza, and closed the gate behind him.

The gunman was gone!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Kid Chips In!

THE Rio Kid swore softly. He might have expected that, or any other treachery from the gunman. He was left holding the carcelero, while Slick Thayer made his escape.

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The carcelero's eyes gleamed at him. The Kid gave him a look.

"You just give one yamp, feller, and you'll never give another," he said, pressing the point of the knife a fraction into the greasy skin.

The Mexican did not understand the words, but he understood the look and the action. He shuddered, and was silent.

With Thayer's help, all would have been easy for the Kid. Alone, it was not easy. To get outside the cell, he had to release the man he was holding through the bars. A thrust of the knife would have made all safe, but the Kid was not the man for that. He put the knife between his teeth, and drew both the Mexican's hands through the bars. Holding them in his left, he tore off the Mexican's neck-scarf with his right, and bound the wrists together. As one arm was passed in on either side of a bar, the carcelero was tied to the grate. Then the Kid whipped out and stood beside the man. With the knife, he cut strips from the carcelero's dirty shirt and gagged him.

"I guess that fixes you, hombre," said the Kid.

The Kid crossed to the outer gate, opened it, and stepped out.

It was close on midnight, and the pueblo of Fanchita slept. The last cantina was closed. There were no street lamps in Fanchita. The only light that burned, gleamed from the adobe building where lived the alcalde. Don Salvador Iguerez, apparently, was not yet gone to bed. The Kid scowled at the light.

He was free, but the Kid had no idea of quitting Fanchita without his horse. A man on foot was not likely to keep his freedom long, even had the Kid been willing to part with his faithful mustang. The powerful mustang had been taken to the alcalde's house—he had seen it led there, as he was taken to the calaboose. The Kid had hoped to see the alcalde's house in darkness. But whether the Mexican official slept or waked, the Kid intended to get his horse.

He stepped quietly across the plaza. The house of Iguerez was shut for the night. The Kid circled round it. Behind the building were stables; the Kid figured that the mustang would be there. From a porch at the back of the adobe, came a glimmer of light, and the Kid realised angrily that a door was open.

He listened intently. But all was silent and still. Then he started, and listened more keenly. From the silence came a faint sound—a low, faint, gurgling sound, like that of a man throttling. The sound came from the house—faint, low only audible because all was deathly still. It sent a shiver creeping through the Kid.

Then in a flash he knew.

"That coyote Thayer!"
The Kid gave no further thought to his horse, or to his escape. With a blaze in his eyes, he ran in at the open door. A dim long passage was before him, faintly lighted by lamplight that streamed from the open doorway of a room. From that room came the faint, horrible, gurgling sound.

The Kid reached the doorway. On the floor of that room, on his back, lay Don Salvador Iguerez, his face black, his eyes starting. Kneeling on him was Slick Thayer, his hands gripping the Mexican's throat, slowly, steadily, ruthlessly choking out life.

Thayer had lied to the Kid. He had not intended to go without the alcalde's roll. The Kid knew that now. And he knew that he was barely in time, and he

did not waste a second. One swift spring carried him to the scene, and his clenched fist, hard as iron, struck the killer behind the ear with the force of a mule's kick.

There was a faint grunt from the gunman, as he rolled on his victim.

The Kid hardly glanced at him. He knew that Thayer was stunned. He dropped on his knees beside the choked alcalde.

"All O.K., I guess, hombre," said the Kid pleasantly. "But it sure was a close call, I'm telling you."

The alcalde gasped and choked and sputtered.

"Ei agua," he moaned.
"You bet!" said the Kid.

He rushed from the room, and found water. He placed the jar to the lips of the fainting man.

The alcalde drank. He sat up, the Kid supporting him. But in a few minutes he staggered to his feet, with the Kid's aid, and sank into a chair.

"You don't want to call your peons, senor," said the Kid. "I'd sure be sorry to handle you, seeing as you've been so durned polite to me. But I ain't letting you raise a rookus. You get me, senor? I'm plumb tired of that calaboose. You say you'll keep quiet while I beat it, and I'll trust you. Say!"

The alcalde rubbed his podgy neck, and gasped.

"Senor Nino del Rio, you have saved me the life!" he said. "That dog of a Gringo"—he paused to spit at the unconscious Thayer—"a bandolero—un hombre del cuchillo—carambo! Senor, gracias! Gracias! Muchisimas gracias! You save me the life!"

"I guess that's the size of it," assented the Kid.

"That hombre—he come to kill—to rob! Carambo! But you—"

"I guess I cam for my hoss, when I heard you doing your song and dance," grinned the Kid.

"Senor, I am a thousand times grateful. I am your servant, senor!" The alcalde rose painfully from the chair, gasping for breath and crossed the room to a cabinet. The Kid watched him curiously. Don Salvador opened the cabinet, and took out a pair of leathery holsters with the Kid's walnut-budded guns and a cartridge-belt.

With a low, grave Spanish bow, the alcalde of Fanchita presented the belt and the guns to the boy puncher.

"Senor, follow me. Your cavallo—your horse!"

"I should smile!" said the Kid. He followed the alcalde from the house. A few minutes and the Kid's mustang was nuzzling his muzzle under his master's arm.

"Senor, I am loth to bid you depart," said Don Salvador, with grave courtesy. "But to linger is not safe. Otherwise, my humble house is yours, and all it contains. But if the morning finds you here—"

"I guess the morning will find me hitting the horizon, senor," grinned the Kid. "Adios, senor!"

"Adios, amigo!"

The alcalde bowed. The Kid raised his hat and rode into the darkness. Don Salvador Iguerez listened anxiously to the beat of the horse's hoofs as they died away in the night, and when all was silent he breathed a deep breath of relief, and went back into his house, and called his sleeping peons to deal with the gunman.

THE EN.

(Now, boys! Don't miss next week's gripping story of the Rio Kid, entitled: "CORNERED BY BRIGANDS!" It's full of thrills!)