

YOU'LL FIND THRILLS GALORE IN THIS TOPPING WESTERN YARN!



The Rio Kid, outlaw though he is, is a man of his word. And, although he discovers that he is helping a traitor to freedom, the Kid keeps to the promise he has made!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Fugitive!

THE Rio Kid listened intently. Darkness lay on the Mexican llano.

From the black velvety dome of the sky came a pale gleam of stars that did scarcely more than make the darkness visible.

Save for the sough of the wind in the high grass the prairie was silent, the silence broken only by the soft thudding of the feet of the weary horses. To the ears of the Kid's companions, at least, there was no other sound. But the boy puncher from Frio was listening, as if he caught some other sound from the silence of the night.

The night was growing old. It wanted but an hour to dawn. For long, long hours the weary horses had pushed on, and now they were moving at a walk, almost stumbling with fatigue. Even the grey mustang, the Kid's own almost tireless cow pony, showed weariness.

The Kid pulled in his mustang, the better to listen, and signed to his companions to halt. The soft thudding of hoofs in the thick grass ceased.

"Senor, you hear something?" came a querulous, quavering voice from the shadows.

"Sure!" said the Kid.

"Nombre de Dios! They are behind us, then!" muttered Antonio Pasquale, and his scared eyes stared back fearfully into the darkness.

"I guess they ain't far behind, feller," drawled the Kid. "That pesky guy, Guzman Carrero, is sure powerful anxious to meet up with you, and I reckon he ain't letting the grass grow under the feet of his cayuse. But it

ain't them guys I'm listening for. Can't you hear something?"

"Nada! Nada!" muttered the old Mexican.

"Nor you, senorita?" asked the Kid, peering through the gloom at Donna Estrella.

"Nothing, senor."

"I guess I ain't mistaken," said the Kid slowly. "I reckon I can hear the river. This here is strange country to me, miss. I reckon I ain't rode the trails before in this part of Mexico. If we was in Texas I'd sure guide you anywhere with my eyes shut, but this here is a different proposition—it sure is! But I reckoned when we broke camp that we was hitting for the Rio Rojo, and if my ears ain't telling me lies the river's ahead of us. Send that it is, miss! I guess if we don't strike the Rio Rojo before dawn them galoots on our trail—"

The voice of the old Mexican interrupted him.

"The Rio Rojo, senor? But that does not flow near the border. If we are near the Rio Rojo, we are nowhere near the border—"

"Sure!" assented the Kid.

"But if we do not escape across the border I am a dead man!" wailed Pasquale. "You have led us astray—you are betraying us into the hands of our enemies—"

"Mi padre!" murmured the girl.

"Can it, feller!" said the Kid, unmoved. "I reckon if I was going to hand you over to Carrero's bunch I wouldn't have brought you all these miles to do it. Ain't you any hossense? We got to strike water to blind our trail, or them guys will run us down at sun-up like a bunch of steers. If

that's the river ahead of us we've got a dog's chance; if it ain't you can say your prayers afore Guzman Carrero gets you with his cuchillo, feller."

"Lead on, senor," said Donna Estrella quietly. "We trust you. My father is in terror—"

"We trust you—we trust you, senor!" quavered Pasquale. "Save us from those leperos, caballero, and a rich reward—"

"Aw, can it!" interrupted the Kid rudely.

For the sake of the Mexican girl, brave and calm, who rode by his side in the gloom, the Rio Kid was prepared to face all dangers. For the sake of the old man, with the face of a wolf, he would not have lifted a finger. The Kid had no love for Greasers, and of all the Greasers he had ever met up with Antonio Pasquale got his goat the most. Several times during that weary ride under a black sky the Kid had called himself a dog-goned geek for allowing himself to be drawn into the trouble at all; but it was only on account of Pasquale that such thoughts came into his mind. One glance at the quiet, patient face of the senorita, beautiful in the shadows, was enough to make the Kid glad that he was there to stand between Donna Estrella and her enemies.

He pushed on the mustang again, the weary pack-mule loping behind. The soft thudding of the hoofs in the grass recommenced.

Guided by the faint, distant murmur that had reached his keen ears, the Kid led the way towards the river.

His ears had not deceived him. Ere long the River Rojo was audible to his companions. And at last a

glimmer far ahead in the darkness showed where the stars were reflected in the broad bosom of the river.

"Halt here," said the Kid brusquely. The weary horses dropped their heads to the water. The Kid dismounted and disappeared in the thickets along the bank.

Donna Estrella sat her pony in silence, waiting. But from the old Mexican came a scared muttering.

"He has deserted us, Estrella!" he mumbled, in Spanish. "He fears Don Guzman, and he has fled—"

"Que verguenza, mi padre. He seeks something. He will return—"

"After all, he is a Gringo, and the Gringos are all liars and ladrones," mumbled Don Antonio.

"This Gringo is neither, mi padre." "He has deserted us! We are abandoned here—we are lost—"

"I guess you're shooting off your mouth a whole lot, feller," came the Kid's cool voice from the shadows. The boy puncher loomed up in the darkness.

Pasquale started and trembled.

"No se enfade usted!" he stammered.

"Do not be offended, senior—"

"Forget it!" grunted the Kid. "Seniorita, I guess it's O.K. This here rio is going to save our scalps, for sure."

"We can cross, senior?" asked the girl eagerly.

"Nope. I guess the hosses'd never make the grade. And it wouldn't be any use; them guys would pick up the trail on the other side—it ain't fur to morning now. But the water's shallow a good step out, and we can ride down the river without leaving a trail. I guess that will get them guessing."

The Kid remounted and led the way again. The horses stepped from the bank at the point the Kid had selected into the shallow waters of the Rio Rojo. Farther out, the wide river ran deep, with a headlong current. But there was a wide stretch of shallow water between the deep river-bed and the grassy bank, and the hoofs sank into soft mud, with the water swirling round the horses' legs. Every hoofmark was washed out almost as soon as it was made, and no sign left to guide the keenest trailer in Mexico.

For more than a mile the Kid led on, through shallow, swirling water.

By that time there was a glimmering of grey in the eastern sky that told of the coming dawn.

"I reckon them guys will be got guessing," he said. "They'll know we've taken to the water when they run down the trail, but I reckon they won't know whether we went down or up the river, and we ain't going to leave no sign when we get back to dry-land, seniorita. I guess if that guy, Guzman, ain't a bloodhound we've sure shook him off."

"The holy saints grant it!" murmured Donna Estrella.

"I reckon if the cayuses was fresh we could hit the horizon from here and leave them cussing," said the Kid. "But the critters are sure dead beat, and I guess if we don't stop they'll fall down. We got to take a chance, but I guess I know how to blind our trail when we get ashore, and them guys won't pick it 'up again in a hurry, seniorita. We can lie dogge in some timber island or chaparral, and when the hosses are rested we can hit for the nearest pueblo."

"No, senior—no!" quavered Pasquale.

"My father has as much to fear from the Government, senior, as from the revolutionists who are tracking him," said Donna Estrella.

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"Oh shucks!" said the Kid.

"There is safety only over the border, in Texas or New Mexico," mumbled Pasquale.

"I guess you're a long way from the border, feller," said the Kid. "But I reckon I'll get you there somehow, if a galoot can do it. Anyhow, we got to get into cover afore the sun's up, and lie dogge while the cayuses rest a spell. It won't be safe to break camp again till sundown, with them guys hunting the llano for us. We got to find good cover."

The Kid scanned the rugged, muddy, grassy bank anxiously. The darkness was less deep now that the pale gleam from the east was spreading. Then suddenly the boy puncher uttered an exclamation.

The grassy bank lay on the right of the fugitives; the deep waters of the river on the left. The opposite bank was far away out of sight in the gloom. But from the shadowy river the Kid discerned a bunch of trees, which evidently grew upon an island in the waters of the Rio Rojo.

"This way!" said the Kid.

And he swung his mustang round towards the black patch that loomed in the gloom.

The island was separated from the bank by only a score of yards of shallow water. The horses and mule splashed wearily towards it. Tall cottonwood-trees grew on the isle, laced with masses of liana and Spanish moss, with thickets growing among the trees in an almost impenetrable mass.

"I guess this here is luck!" said the Kid.

He searched along the island shore for a landing-place. He pushed his mustang up the bank at last through the tangled mesquite. In a few minutes he came back on foot, and led the seniorita's pony the same way.

"Mi padre, senior!" whispered the girl anxiously.

"I guess we've got time to burn, miss," said the Kid. "You wait here, and I'll tote him along in two shakes of a coyote's tail."

The girl smiled faintly.

The Kid left her in the blackness under the trees in the centre of the river island, and returned for the old Mexican. In a few minutes Pasquale was with her, and then the Kid led in the pack-mule. Light was spreading over the sky from the east now, but under the thick foliage on the river island all was still black. There were sounds of dawn—the awakening notes of wild birds in the trees, the croaking of bull-frogs in the shallows.

"I guess you camp here," said the Kid. "Leave it to me to blanket the trail."

Leaving them in the darkness, the Kid returned to the landing-place; and for long, long minutes he was busy—erasing tracks in the mud, rearranging even a broken twig or a tuft of grass—"blanketing" the trail with all the cunning skill of an Apache pursued by his foes.

When the Kid rejoined his companions he was satisfied that not a sign remained to tell the keenest eye of the landing on the river island. The Rio Kid had done all that could be done—and the rest was on the knees of the gods.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

In Hiding!

"SILENCIO!"

The Kid whispered in Spanish. Hot and blazing, the semi-tropic sun streamed down on the Rio Rojo, on the muddy rugged

banks, the deep current, and the sluggish shallows. The cold of night—cold enough on the Mexican uplands—had been replaced by the burning heat of day. The river shimmered in blazing sun, and sickly wisps of vapour rose along the banks, and the buzzing of mosquitoes was like a ceaseless chant.

On the river island it was like an oven. When the Rio Rojo was in flood the waters swept over the island; now it was high over the current. But ample irrigation had covered it with luxuriant growths. High over the isle rose a giant cottonwood-tree, towering a hundred feet, with smaller trees round it. Mesquite, maguery, juniper, all kinds of



AT CLOSE QUARTERS! The Rio Kid swung round at the sound of crashing in the thickets. A horse came charging right down on him. The Kid leaped away barely in time, as Don Guzman's arm flashed upwards, and a machete glittered in the sun. (See Chapter 3.)

bramble growths choked the space between the trees. Birds innumerable, insects without number thronged the thickets and the branches. Orchids, sunflowers, blossoms of all gorgeous colours were thick among the sprawling lianas and the pendant masses of Spaniards' beard.

The Kid had cleared a space under the tall cottonwood with a machete for a camp. The old Mexican and Donna Estrella, worn out, had slept; but the boy puncher had scarcely closed his eyes. Inured to fatigue, the Kid seemed to be hardly conscious of it. He had tended the horses and the mule, cleared the ground for a camp, and built a jacal of branches and rushes to shelter the Mexican girl.

Hotter and hotter it grew in the camp on the river island as the blazing sun sailed overhead in a sky of cloudless azure. Through the hot hours of the



morning Don Antonio and Donna Estrella slept, even fear and anxiety banished by utter weariness.

When they awakened, towards noon, the Kid had a meal ready of cold frijoles and bacon and hard bread. He had not ventured to light a cooking-fire; the merest wisp of smoke might have betrayed them to the seeking enemy.

Now the Kid was perched in the high branches of the cottonwood, scanning the banks of the river. At this point the Rio Rojo ran almost directly from south to north. It was from the east bank that the fugitives had come. A score of yards of shallow water lay between them and the bank. On the other side of the island the Rio Rojo was wide and deep; and if they were discovered, attack was not likely to come from that side; few riders or swimmers could have stemmed the current. If attack came,

it would be across the shallows, where horsemen could ride freely; and the Kid guessed that he had a good fighting chance, even against heavy odds. But he had hopes that the hiding-place would not be found.

Scanning the plains eastward of the great river, the Kid picked out a horseman after horseman.

Obviously the hunters had lost the trail. They had followed it, the Kid reckoned, till it ended in the waters of the Rio Rojo. There they were baffled. The fugitives might have gone up the river, or down the river; in either case, they might have landed at any point and struck into the plains again. So far as Guzman Carrero knew, they might have sought to cross the wide river, and either succeeded or perished in the current.

Guzman Carrero had a heavy task before him to pick up the track of the fugitives; and the Kid wondered if he would weary of it and give it up as a failure. But Guzman had not struck him as the kind of pilgrim to give up easily.

Horsemen rode up and down the river, appearing and disappearing among

the inequalities of the llano hunting for sign. The Kid's keen eye picked out the trackers scattered far and wide. They were seeking the spot where the fugitives had left the water; and probably Carrero knew that the Texas cowpuncher had joined the fugitive Mexicans, and guessed that he would know how to blanket the trail.

A splashing in the river drew the Kid's eyes more directly beneath him, and he discerned four or five riders coming along in the shallows under the bank. They were scanning the bank, and not as yet glancing towards the river island. But the Kid knew that their attention must turn that way.

He slid down the branches of the great tree and joined the Mexicans in the camp below. The expression on his face drew an anxious glance from Donna Estrella, a stare of terror from her father.

"Silencio!" breathed the Kid; and they understood.

Pasquale's teeth clattered.

"They come?" he whispered.

The Kid nodded.

"Madre de Dios!" groaned Pasquale.

"We are lost!"

"We ain't lost yet, not by a jugful!" answered the Kid. "I guess they won't read any sign where we landed byer. But you want to keep quiet, you-uns, and I guess the cayuses have got to keep quiet."

"If they find us—" breathed Pasquale.

"We ain't dead yet, even if they root us out!" said the Kid. "I guess if it comes to shooting, we're in a good fix here. Say, you know how to handle a gun, I reckon?"

"Si, si, senior!" muttered the old Mexican. "Si, si! Yes, I will fight for my life—si, si!"

But the claw-like hands were trembling, and the Kid guessed that Don Antonio's shooting would not help much if it came to fighting. The Mexican girl spoke quietly.

"My father is old, senior, and he is a sick man. But I can use a rifle, and I will use it in his defence."

"I guess you sure are the real goods, miss," said the Kid admiringly. "But it ain't come to shooting yet. We want to lie doggo—and I guess we may pull through."

He went to the horses, tethered securely among the trees, and murmured soothing words. A sound from the animals would have betrayed all. The Kid could rely on his own mustang for silence; Side-Kicker knew the game as well as the Kid himself did. But the other horses, and the mule, worried him a little.

The splashing of riders could now be heard by all on the river-island. Pasquale clasped his hands to still their trembling. Donna Estrella remained motionless; pale as death, but quiet and calm. The Kid moved silently through the mass of thickets, to peer out on the river. Keeping in thick cover, he glimpsed the horsemen who were riding the shallows between the island and the bank. They pulled in their steeds, in the channel, and now they were looking towards the island. The Kid heard the muttering of their voices, in Spanish.

"Una isla!" he heard from one of them.

Don Guzman Carrero was not among them. The Kid wondered whether it had been Don Guzman at whom he had fired, the previous night; and whether the leader of the bunch had fallen to the bullet.

The riders pushed closer to the isla, riding close along its bank, and scanning every spot with suspicious eyes.

The Kid watched in silence.

He knew that he had blanketed the trail effectively, and left no sign of the landing. From the river, the dense thickets on the island looked impenetrable, untrampled. The riders passed, slowly, the spot where the fugitives had pushed ashore, and splashed on, and the Kid breathed more freely. They had discerned nothing—he had left nothing for them to discern. Only if they landed to search the isla, would they make a discovery. But it was sign they were looking for. Scattered along the Rio Rojo were a dozen such islas, revealed since day had come. Without a sign to guide them, the Mexicans were not likely to search every one, through tangled thickets and thorny brushwood. A single hoof-mark would have been enough for them. But the Rio Kid had been too careful for that.

The horsemen passed on, much to the Kid's relief. His gun was ready; and had they landed, he would have burned powder at once. But he was reluctant to burn powder if it could be helped. Gladly he saw the riders splashing on down the river, now scanning the muddy banks for sign of the escaped party.

They were gone at last; and the Kid returned to the camp in the clearing under the cottonwood.

"Senor—" muttered Pasquale. "I guess they've gone on," said the Kid. "It's O.K. so far, senor." "They have missed our trail?"

The Kid grinned. "I guess they wouldn't have missed any trail, as big as a mosquito might have left," he answered. "There wasn't any trail for them to miss, feller; I took care of that after we landed."

"You have saved us once more, senor," murmured Donna Estrella. "I sure hope so, miss," said the Kid. "Them guys have absquatulated, anyhow; and I guess they'll report to the rest of the bunch that we ain't come this-a-way. We got to lie doggo till dark, and then I reckon we'll make a break, and strike north for the border. Once we've dropped that bunch off our trail, it will be pie."

The long, hot hours passed slowly. Donna Estrella rested on a bed of rugs in the jacal the Kid had built; the old Mexican lay trembling under the cottonwood. He slept fitfully—his siesta was broken by his nervous fears, and again and again he sat up, and gazed fearfully round him. The Kid, when he glanced at him, did so with strong disavowal. It seemed to the Kid that it was not only the fear of a hunted man, but a guilty conscience, that inspired the terrified uneasiness of the fugitive from Olillo. It was not a pleasant thought to the Kid, that he was helping the escape of a man who was pursued for wrongdoing. Carrero had said that Pasquale had robbed him; and the man with the face of a wolf looked none too good for it, to the Kid's eyes. And how did it happen that, as the Kid now knew, Pasquale was hunted by a bunch of revolutionists, and yet feared the Government officers as much as he feared his pursuers? The man could scarcely be in danger from both parties, without treachery of some sort. Less and less the Kid liked the task he had set himself. But Donna Estrella had firm faith in her father, and looked on him as a wronged man. And the Kid had made Donna Estrella's quarrel his own, and that, at least he did not regret.

Splash!
It was the sound of a horseman in the shallow water.

Don Antonio Pasquale sat up again, trembling in every limb. The Kid glided softly through mesquite and maguay, and scanned the river. One bunch of hunters had passed the island, seeing nothing. But the search was still going patiently, relentlessly on.

And the Kid, as he peered from cover, set his teeth.

Three horsemen were coming down the shallows, and scanning the island as they came. And the man who rode in the middle was Don Guzman Carrero. The Kid recognised at once the keen, black eyes, the square jaw that was shut like a vice. And he knew that the danger was more pressing now. His hand sought a gun, as the three horsemen drew in their horses, almost up to the stirrups in water, and fixed their eyes on the isle.

As the former party had done, they moved along the bank, searching for sign. Evidently Don Guzman was not trusting wholly to the report of his scouts; their failure to find sign had brought him over the same ground.

But the Kid breathed freely again, as the square-jawed Mexican shook his head.

"Nada!" the Kid heard him say. The riders were about to push on past the island. And then the Kid's

luck, that had held good so long, failed him. Don Guzman's horse whinnied, and like an echo from the thickly-wooded island, came the answering whinny of one of the hidden horses.

The Kid gritted his teeth. Instantly, as that sound from the island told of a concealed horse, a change came over the three Mexicans in the river.

They pulled in their steeds, swung round towards the island again, and grasped their weapons. The Kid's gun was out now. The blaze in the black eyes of Don Guzman told that he knew all.

"Un caballo!" exclaimed one of the Mexicans.

"En verdad!" grinned Don Guzman. "Por aqui!"

He spurred his horse to the island, his two companions close behind. From the dense thicket rang the Kid's voice sharply.

"Go slow! I've got you covered, Don Guzman Carrero! Pull in your cayuse, dog-gone you, or you're a dead Greaser!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Face to Face!

"E L TEJANO!" Evidently Don Guzman knew the Kid's voice again. "El Americano!"

"Carambo!" The three Mexicans pulled in their horses.

The Kid's voice had rung out from dense cover. They could not see a sign of him; but they knew that he could see them.

"So you are there, senor el Tejano!" said the Mexican coolly.

"Sure!" assented the Kid.

"Pasquale and his daughter are with you?"

"Search me!" The Mexican laughed softly.

"You need not tell me, senorito. I know that the old wolf is with you. There was the trail of a third horse when we followed their tracks to the river. You have joined them."

"You can search me!" answered the Kid carelessly. He was not giving any information to the Mexican.

"You are fighting in an ill cause, senor," said Don Guzman. "Why you have joined that ladrone I cannot guess; but you cannot know who or what he is, if you are an honest caballero, as I believe."

"Thank you for nothing, feller!"

"Oiga usted!" said the Mexican.

"You are helping a thief to escape with his plunder, senor. Is that your desire?"

The Kid winced.

"That's your say-so, feller," he answered. "I guess Don Antonio would toll a different tale."

"He would lie, senor, but if you searched his mule-pack or his saco, you would find the loot."

"Oh, guff!" said the Kid uneasily. "I guess I ain't likely to search that hombre, and you're wise to it, Greaser."

The Mexican smiled. He was talking to, or rather at, a wall of solid green, with no sign of the Kid to be seen. Only from the Texan's voice he could judge the effect of his words. But the tone of the Kid was uncertain, and Guzman knew that what he said was more than half believed.

"Senor, let us avoid useless bloodshed," he said softly. "I have no quarrel with you. I am no robber or bandolero—my men are honest

caballeros. We seek only justice on a traitor. Will you shed blood to deny us that?"

The Kid made no answer. He was troubled in mind; but in his thought was the sad, beautiful face of Donna Estrella Pasquale, and that made it impossible for him to waver. Daughter of a traitor, perhaps; but pure gold herself; "the straight goods," as the Kid expressed it. Whatever Pasquale was, he was her father; and the Kid could not defend the one without defending the other. And to the senorita's defence he was bound.

"Senor, let me tell you—put you wise, as you would say." Guzman's tone was patient, honeyed. No doubt the strong position of the Rio Kid gave him pause, for he well knew that blood would flow like water before the puncher was overcome. "You are not concerned in this—you are a stranger in this land. You are not one of those meddling, thieving Americans who mix in our national quarrels to find a profit there. A girl's bright eyes have led you into this trouble."

"Aw, can it!" growled the Kid, colouring in his cover. "I guess you've chewed the rag long enough, Greaser!"

"Paciencia, senor! Oiga usted—hear me!" said Guzman. "You know, perhaps, that we are of the revolutionary party—in this province a rising was planned to break out at the pueblo of Olillo. Antonio Pasquale was one of us—and he was the treasurer of the junta—as you would say, the bunch. I am chief of the junta, senor; I, a rich haciendado of Olillo. A large sum was in the hands of Pasquale, to be used for the purposes of the revolution. He speculated with the money, senor, as we learned, and lost much of it—many thousands of pesos, senor, the life-blood of the revolution, went in the stock markets in Mexico City.

"And when we found that he was failing us, and would have given him a traitor's due and sared what was left, he fled in the night, senor, taking with him what remained of the funds. Not less than fifty thousand pesos, senor—perhaps twice as much—we know not exactly. But whatever the sum may be, the traitor has it in his keeping now—not less than twenty-five thousand dollars—the funds of the revolution in Olillo. You are aiding a traitor and a thief, senor."

The Kid stirred uncomfortably in his covert.

The words of the Mexican rang true. That Pasquale was, or had been, one of the revolutionists, was proved by the fact that he feared to place himself under Government protection, even while the bitter foes were seeking his life. And not for nothing, certainly, would the other members of the junta have turned on him.

The wretched man's flight into the prairies, in a wild endeavour to reach the American border and escape into a foreign country, was something like a proof.

Yet it was possible that he had been wrongfully distrusted and suspected by suspicious confederates; distrust and suspicion were inseparable from revolutionary plotting. To that possibility the Kid's mind clung.

There was a long pause. The Rio Kid did not speak; and Don Guzman broke the silence again at last.

"Senor, I have now put you wise! We are trailing a traitor—and we will not let him escape if a thousand Tejanos stood in our way. I have thirty men; but all this country is in my favour. I could call numberless men, from the haciendas and the pueblos, if I needed

them. The traitor must die—his plunder must return to Olillo, to the keeping of the junta. What say you, senior?"

"I don't give a cuss or a Continental red cent, for Pasquale," said the Kid. "But I'm standing between your bunch and the seniorita—and you can come on as soon as you durned well like."

"Yet a moment, senior! We seek not to harm the seniorita—a brave girl, who has done us no harm, except by her devotion to her father, for which no good Mexican would blame her. Should a hand be raised to harm her, senior, I would myself strike it down with my machete. The girl shall go unharmed, in your care, if she so desires. Only Antonio Pasquale is our prey."

"Oh shucks!" growled the Kid un- easily.

A hand was laid on his shoulder in the thickets; he turned, and saw the dark, pleading eyes of Donna Estrella. She had crept from the camp to join him at the sound of the voices.

"Caballero, he lies!" breathed the girl. "He is deceived, or he seeks to deceive. My father, is no traitor! Caballero, you will not abandon him to his enemies."

"You've said it, miss!" said the Kid. "Your answer, senior?" called out the Mexican, his glinting eyes searching the wall of green.

"I guess you've got it, but I'll chirp it over again," said the Kid. "I'm standing by the seniorita and her father."

The Mexican's black eyes blazed, and his teeth shut hard.

"Your fate is on your own head, senior!" he said.

"You're will come first, if you don't beat it, pronto!" retorted the Rio Kid.

Don Guzman backed his horse to where his comrades waited for him in the shallows. The three Mexicans exchanged whisgers.

Donna Estrella clasped her hands. "Oh, caballero, they are gone—gracias, caballero! You have saved my father! I tell you from my heart, senior, that he is innocent—unjustly suspected by those leperos—"

"What you say goes, miss," answered the Kid, though he was by no means convinced. "Anyhow, they're a bunch of rebels, and if they kick up a rookus they can take what's coming to them. They won't find it easy to rush this island with my guns popping."

There was a sudden splashing in the water, a jingling of bridles and spurs, and a crash of pistol-fire. Bullets tore and ploughed through mesquite and maguey.

The three Mexicans had not retreated. From the shallow water they made a sudden desperate rush at the river-island.

There was a shriek from Donna Estrella.

"They come—they come! Nuestra seniora!"

The Kid, with blazing eyes, swung towards the attack. He had figured that Don Guzman was going to call up his men, and the sudden rush took him almost by surprise. Three horses, desperately driven, crashed into the thickets on the low shore of the island before the Kid was ready to receive the rush. As they crashed in the horsemen fired fast, though at random, for they could not see a foe.

Over his lifted six-gun the Kid's eyes flashed.

It had come to burning powder now, and the Kid was the man for it. Doubt and hesitation had to be dismissed now that the struggle had come.

Bang!
There was a fearful yell as the Kid

THIS WEEK'S LIST OF BIRTHDAY DATES!

Readers who were registered in the POPULAR Birthday Gift Club before June 8th, 1929, may claim one of the following gifts:

- Fountain Pen.
- Penknife.
- Table Tennis Set.
- Combined Compass and Magnifying Glass.
- Conjuring Outfit.
- Drawing Set.
- Electric Torch and Battery.
- Leather Pocket Wallet.
- Hobby Annual.
- Holiday Annual.

—if the date of their birth is the same as a date in the following list—

Jan. 5th, 1916.	Sept. 5th, 1917.
Feb. 10th, 1917.	Oct. 1st, 1914.
March 3rd, 1914.	July 18th, 1915.
April 10th, 1921.	Nov. 2nd, 1919.
May 18th, 1916.	August 27th, 1914.
June 7th, 1915.	Nov. 11th, 1916.
July 8th, 1918.	Dec. 7th, 1912.
August 1st, 1914.	Oct. 23rd, 1916.

If you were BORN on any of these dates, fill in the CLAIMS COUPON provided on this page and send it to:

The Editor,
POPULAR Birthday Gift Club,
5, Carmelite Street,
London, E.C.4.

so as to reach this address not later than June 20th, 1929. GIFTS WILL BE DESPATCHED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER THIS DATE. Please write the word "CLAIM" in the top left-hand corner of your envelope.

No reader may claim a Gift unless he or she has already been registered as a member of our Birthday Gift Club.

A published date must be exactly the same in day, month, and year as that given on your registration coupon.

You CANNOT claim and register AT THE SAME TIME. Should your birth date happen to be published in this list, and you are NOT already registered, YOU WILL NOT BE ELIGIBLE FOR A GIFT.

ANOTHER LIST OF BIRTHDAY DATES WILL APPEAR IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE.

BIRTHDAY GIFT CLAIM COUPON

(For the use of REGISTERED READERS ONLY.)

Name

Full Address (please write plainly)

.....

I declare myself to have registered in your Birthday Gift Club, before Saturday June 8th, 1929, and as the date given above (here state date)

is the date of my birth. I wish to claim a (state name of the Gift you would like)

..... in accordance with the rules of the club.

THIS COUPON IS ONLY AVAILABLE UNTIL JUNE 20th, 1929.
POPULAR. JUNE 15th.

tired, and a rider went toppling from a saddle, the horse dashing away into the water.

Bang roared the heavy Colt again, and another saddle was empty, a wounded man splashing back into the river.

Crash came a charging horse, right on the Kid; and he leaped away barely in time as Don Guzman Carrero drove at him through the thickets. A machete flashed in the shadow of the branches and missed the Kid's head by an inch as he leaped back. Guzman Carrero hurled himself from the saddle at the Texan, fierce rage and fury blazing in his swarthy face, his machete whirling up to strike. But his foot caught in a trailing rope of liara as he rushed on the Kid, and he fell almost at the feet of the puncher.

The six-gun was jammed to his head, and the Kid's finger trembled on the trigger. But he did not fire. The Mexican lay at his mercy; his desperate attempt had failed. Through the mesquite peered an old, wrinkled, wolfish face, and Pasquale screamed: "Kill him, caballero—kill him and save us! Death—death!"

The Kid thrust the revolver back into his holster. "Git!" he snapped. "Caballero!" screamed Pasquale.

"You are mad! Kill him and save all

our lives! Nombre de Dios! Shoot—shoot!"

The Kid paid no heed. Guzman Carrero, breathless, bruised, defeated, disappeared through the thickets, and a plunge was heard in the river. There was a howl of rage from the old Mexican which fell upon heedless ears.

The Kid looked out from cover. Guzman had mounted one of the riderless horses and was splashing away up the river in the shallows. At a distance two wounded men were crawling up the muddy bank of the Rio Rojo. Guzman turned in the saddle for a moment to shake a clenched fist at the island, and then disappeared by the winding bank.

He was gone—to return with overpowering force. The Kid whistled through his teeth. Quietly, carefully, he reloaded his six-gun. A struggle was coming—a struggle against overpowering odds, and the Kid would not have given a Continental red cent for his chance of coming through it alive. But a mocking light danced in his eyes, and a smile was on his face. The Kid might be at the end of his rope, but he was game!

THE END.

(The Rio Kid is in the thick of perils again in next week's powerful long yarn of the West. Look out for "FACING FEARFUL ODDS!")