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## "CACTUS PETE'S CAPTURE!"

*Full-of-Thrills Tale of the Wild West!*

ANOTHER ROARING WESTERN YARN, STARRING THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW!

# CACTUS PETE'S CAPTURE!

by RALPH REDWAY



In his own land of Texas the Rio Kid is an outlaw, and many a sheriff is on the look-out for the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande. But that cuts no ice with the Kid. It is a glad day for him when he leaves the Mexican borders well in his rear and rides over the grassy plains of his own country! Glad to be back once again!

## THE FIRST CHAPTER. Roped In!

"IT'S the Kid!"  
"It's that dog-goned freb-bug, the Rio Kid!"  
"Thunder!"

"Keep close, you 'uns!" growled Cactus Pete. "He's coming right this way, and I guess he's our mutton, with the wool on!"

The four rough, bearded men in the clump of cottonwoods, keeping close in cover, watched the rider on the sunlit prairie.

He was coming on at an easy trot, evidently heading for the clump of trees, where Cactus Pete and his gang lay hid.

The Rio Kid was easy enough to recognise.

The handsome, sunburnt face under the Stetson hat, with its band of silver nuggets, the goatskin chaps, the silver spurs, the blue silken neckscarf that toned with the blue of the Kid's clear, keen eyes, all were well known to many a man in Texas.

The Kid was humming a tune as he rode.

There was no doubt that, for once, the Kid, usually as watchful as a cougar, was off his guard.

His heart was light that sunny day. He was back in his own country again, after a long sojourn on the southern side of the Rio Grande. The Kid had wandered long in Mexico, and had many a wild adventure there; and many times his thoughts had dabbled with the idea of settling on a rancho

in Sonora or Chihuahua, and remaining for keeps in the land of the swarthy Greasers, out of the reach of Texas sheriffs.

But his own land called him, and he had come back, careless of the dangers that dogged his every step in the grasslands of the Lone Star State.

In his own land of Texas the boy outlaw carried his life in his hand; but his swift mustang and his walnut-butted guns had saved him before, and would save him again. His heart was light, and he hummed a tune as he trotted over the sunlit prairie towards the cottonwood clump, where he aimed to camp for noon. And the four watched him with alert, greedy eyes as he came.

"I guess we've got that guy by the short hairs," said Cactus Pete, speaking in a low voice, though the Kid was yet distant. "We sure have got him, you 'uns!"

"We sure have—if we want him!" said one of the watching ruffians. "But that Kid is lightning on the shoot, Pete; and I guess I ain't got no hunch for gun-play with him!"

"It won't come to shooting, Kansas. The darned guy's riding right into our hands!"

"Sure!" said Kansas. "But what's the game, Pete? That guy's an outlaw, and dog don't eat dog!"

"We ain't outlaws, I reckon!" grunted Cactus Pete. "If a heap of g'loots figure that we're horse-thieves they can't prove it up on us."

Kansas chuckled.

"I guess there's a whole heap of cow-

men wouldn't wait for much proof, if they got a holt on us!" he remarked.

"Aw, can it!" growled Cactus Pete. "We're going to rope in that Kid when he walks into our hands, as he's doing right now! There's a thousand dollars on him, and it's easy money for us!"

"If he gets holt of a gun——" said another of the gang dubiously.

"He won't get holt of a gun, Pawnee Bill. I've got him covered already, and if he reaches for his hardware it will be the last thing he will do this side of Jordan!"

Lying in the grass, behind a tree, Cactus Pete was looking along the barrel of his rifle. The rifle, close to the trunk, rested on a projecting root, the muzzle bearing direct on the approaching horseman.

The Kid was within easy range, and it needed only a pressure of the ruffian's finger to send the rider spinning from the saddle of the grey mustang.

"You git your rope ready, Laredo Jim!" went on Cactus Pete. "You're the best hand in this bunch with a rope. Rope him in when I give the word—and you don't want to be scared of his guns. He won't use a gun."

"You've said it," agreed Laredo Jim. And he uncoiled his lasso in the shadow of the cottonwoods.

"They say that Kid is as spry as a gopher!" muttered Kansas. "But he sure is walking into it this time."

"We got him!" said Cactus Pete. "Can it, or he'll hear something—he's got keen ears on him."

In tense silence the gang of horse-

thieves waited for the Kid to come closer.

He came on, trotting, evidently unsuspecting of danger, ignorant of the ambush that awaited him.

Cactus Pete's eyes gleamed along his rifle. Laredo Jim gripped his rope ready. Kansas and Pawnee Bill had six-guns in their hands. And the Rio Kid came on, unsuspecting.

He was only a score of yards from the clump of cottonwoods, when he suddenly pulled in the grey mustang. It was as if some instinct had warned the wary Kid of danger.

Cactus Pete shouted instantly:

"Put 'em up, Kid! I've got you covered!"

He raised the rifle a little, and the sunlight gleamed on the rusty barrel. The gleam caught the Kid's eyes and checked him as his hand was leaping to a gun.

The Rio Kid sat his mustang, motionless, for a moment; and then his hands went slowly above his head. He knew that he was covered, and that he had no time to draw. And the Kid, reckless as he was, was not the galoot to throw his life away. He put up his hands and shrugged his shoulders.

"Your game, pardner!" he called out cheerily. "You take the jackpot this time!"

"Keep 'em up, Kid!"

"Sure!" said the Kid carelessly.

There was a whiz of a circling rope. The Kid knew that it was coming, but he could not help himself. The loop settled over his shoulders, and tightened round his waist, and with a powerful wrench Laredo Jim jerked him from the saddle.

The Kid tumbled into the grass with a heavy fall; and the next instant the four horse-thieves were round him, grasping him.

"Go easy, you 'uns!" said the Kid. "You've got me cinched, and you don't want to get excited! I've sure said it's your game!"

"Fix him!" growled Cactus Pete.

The gang lost no time in fixing the Kid. The strong rope bound his arms down to his sides; and his guns were taken. The Kid sat up in the thick grass, his face cool and careless, but a deep glitter in his eyes. The fall from the saddle had shaken him a good deal.

"I reckon you never wanted to give me that tumble, you 'uns," he said quietly. "You had me cinched."

"I guess we ain't taking chances with you, Kid!" grinned Laredo Jim. "You're too all-fired sudden on the shoot!"

"Bring him into the timber!" said Cactus Pete.

The Kid was lifted to his feet. In a jubilant crowd, the gang of horse-thieves marched him into the clump, the grey mustang following. The Kid was pitched down at the foot of a tree. He struggled to a sitting position, and leaned back on the gnarled trunk.

"You got me!" he said pleasantly. "But I don't rightly get on to this game. You ain't sheriff's men, I reckon."

"We sure ain't!" chuckled Kansas.

"I seen the heap of you before," said the Kid. "Hoss-thieves, every guy of you. I knew you at Frio, Cactus Pete, where you was run out of town on a rail, and warned that you'd be shot up if you ever came back. I reckon you're wanted in the San Pedro country for brand blotting. What's your grouch agin me?"

"Thousand dollars!" said Cactus Pete briefly.

The Kid's lip curled.

"You've roped me in for the reward?" he asked.

"You've said it."

"I guess I knew you was a gang of pizen skunks when I set eyes on you," drawled the Kid. "Say, you durned coyotes, you sure get my goat! I'd give a whole heap of dollars to be standing free this minute, with a gun in my hand. I guess I'd rub out the dirtiest, pizenest gang in Texas!"

"Can it!" said Cactus Pete. "You're riding with us this afternoon to Blue Pine. I guess you'll get a rope there. Chew on that, Kid."

"You pizen skunk!" retorted the Kid. Cactus Pete's eyes gleamed at him.

"You don't want to blow off your mouth too much, Kid," he said threateningly. "You bulldozed me at Frio, and in the San Pedro country; but I've got you by the short hairs now, and if you chew the rag too much I guess I'll make you squirm."

"You're sure full of sand when you're talking to a galoot with his hands tied," said the Kid contemptuously. "Unloose me, you ornery polecat, and I'll make you go on your knees and beg!"

Cactus Pete picked up his quirt, swung it in the air, and brought down the thong sharply across the Kid's shoulders.

"That for you!" he said.

The Kid's eyes burned at him.

"I guess I'll remember that, Cactus Pete," he said.

"Can it!"

"It's your say-so!" said the Kid philosophically, and he relapsed into silence.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### The Apache!

CHIEF MANY PONIES lifted his dusky head, with the draggled feather in the matted black hair, from his bed of leaves, and listened.

The eyes of the outcast Apache were gleaming.

In the deepest recess of the timber clump, Chief Many Ponies had lain down to rest in the heat of the day, seeking concealment, as he always did when he camped. Many weary miles had the outcast Apache covered on foot that day, for he had no horse. His blanket was tattered, his moccasins worn and ragged, his leggings in shreds. Chief Many Ponies could remember the day when he had ridden the prairie at the head of a hundred warriors, when he had raided cattle and lifted the scalps of palefaces. But that day was long past, and the Apache chief was an outcast and a beggar, hanging about the camps of the palefaces cadging drinks, stealing horses when opportunity offered, stealing even chickens like a coon. That morning the chief had left Blue Pine, "fanned" out of camp by a crowd of merry cow-punchers who had caught him too near a horse tethered outside the camp saloon. A rain of bullets had fanned the Apache out of camp, many of them going near enough to tear shreds from his ragged leggings and blanket, one of them cutting a gash along his bronzed cheek. Chief Many Ponies had fed for his life, and the prairie had swallowed him—footsore, dusty, fatigued, his heart burning with rage and rancour. In the deep thicket, in the bed of leaves, the Apache had lain down to rest, till the voices among the cottonwoods had awakened him. And the Apache lifted his head and listened, without a sound.

White men were in the timber, and it behoved the Apache to be wary. Fanning with bullets was a joke to the cow-

men; but it was no joke to the Redskin, and he had had enough of it. He lay and listened, his dark head raised like that of an adder, his black eyes gleaming.

It was long before he stirred from his covert. But he stirred at last, moving with the noiselessness of a creeping serpent. White men were camped in the timber, and that meant that there were horses, and a chance for the most expert horse-thief in Texas. A chance, perhaps, of using the knife that was his only weapon, and repaying in part the long and bitter grudge that he owed to the whole white race. The whole race—with one exception; for there was one white man in the land of Texas who had been a friend to him, who had helped him when he was helpless, fed him when he was starving, cared for him when he was wounded. But that white man, himself a hunted outlaw, Chief Many Ponies never expected to see again.

From deep cover, silent, the Apache looked, at last, on the camp of the white men in the timber. His eyes read the rough bearded faces of the four horse-thieves, and he crouched closer into cover. These men were not cow-punchers, from whom he might have expected fanning with bullets. They were desperate ruffians, more likely than not to shoot at sight, and to shoot to kill, if they spotted the Apache lurking round their camp. The life of an outcast Redskin meant nothing to Cactus Pete and his gang.

But the Apache's keen black eyes picked out a fifth figure, sitting at the foot of a tree, bound with rope. And in his surprise, Chief Many Ponies almost betrayed himself by a start. His gaze fixed incredulously on the handsome, sunburnt face of the Rio Kid—the one face that he ever desired to see; the face of the boy outlaw to whom he owed a debt of gratitude, as unforgotten as his bitter grudge against all other white men.

Long the Indian gazed at that face before he crept away again into the deep shadows of the cottonwoods.

His coming, and his going, remained unknown to the gang of horse-thieves. The timber clump, solitary in the vast spaces of the prairie, was, so far as they knew, untenant by any save themselves and their prisoner. Chief Many Ponies had left no trace of his footprints for the keenest eyes to see; he had made no sound that could have alarmed a coyote. Neither the horse-thieves nor their prisoner dreamed that the trees and thickets hid a lurking Apache.

Four horses were tethered at a little distance, lying in the grass under the trees. The Rio Kid's mustang had been tethered with them. The animals had cropped the rich grass, drunk their fill at the little spring in the timber, and were lying in the grass now, resting until they were wanted for the trail. Under the spreading branches of the cottonwoods there was shade, though it was hot. Outside the radius of the trees burning sunshine blazed down on a scorched plain, dazzling to the eye. Leaning back idly against tree-trunks, Cactus Pete and his gang smoked, and played poker with a pack of greasy cards, while they waited for the burning heat of the day to pass before hitting the trail for Blue Pine. The Kid sat apart from them, bound cruelly with the riata. To make assurance doubly sure, the horse-thieves had knotted the rope round his legs as well as his arms, and taken a turn with it round the tree against which he sat.

The Kid was cinched, and he knew it. He had no more mercy to expect from

this gang of outcast cutthroats than from a sheriff's posse who might have roped him in in their way of duty. A reward of a thousand dollars was out for the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande, and there was not a man in this gang who would not have sold his own brother for a tenth of the sum. And Cactus Pete had an old grudge against the Kid.

The game was up so far as the Kid could see, though his face was still cool, and even cheerful. While there was life there was hope. The rope waited for him at Blue Pine; but Blue Pine was many a long mile distant across the prairie, and could not be reached before night at the earliest. Many chances might turn up in the interval, and one might be enough to save the Kid. He did not give up hope, but he was well aware that it was only his own sanguine nature that could see any gleam of hope in his present circum-

stances. The game was up; the Kid's long trail was bearing its end. And he was thinking of the land he had quitted, of friends he had left behind in Mexico. The call of his own country had been too strong for him to resist, and this was what it had led him to. The Kid called himself a dog-goned gink as he sat in his bonds, waiting till it should please his captors to hit the trail and take him where blood-money awaited them.

His keen ear caught, without heeding, a sound of uneasiness among the tethered horses a dozen yards distant in the timber. The horse-thieves, intent on their game, did not heed it, if they heard it. But the Kid stirred at last and moved his head to look round at the animals. His own mustang was with them, and even in his own situation the Rio Kid was not likely to forget his faithful cayuse.

He suppressed an exclamation as he looked. Something was stirring in the thickets amid which the horses lay—something that was not a horse. The Kid felt a sudden beat of his heart. Someone was stirring in the timber—someone who was, evidently, not a member of the horse-thief gang. A momentary glimpse of a tattered blanket told the Kid that it was an Indian.

"Gee-whiz!" murmured the Kid under his breath.

There was a Redskin in the timber, and he was silently, cautiously busy among the tethered horses. The Kid grinned. If some copper-skinned horse-thief was at work, it was all to the good for the Kid; if the gang were once dismounted, it was a far cry to Blue Pine and the sheriff's office there. But he shook his head. A creeping Redskin was there, he was certain of that; but the cunningest Redskin could never get away with the cayuses. They were in full sight of the camped gang, and not one of the animals could have risen to its feet without drawing a glance. The Kid wondered how long it would be before the gang became aware that they had an enemy close at hand. That thought was in his mind, when a sudden shrill squeal from one of the horses rang and echoed through the timber, and the whole gang stared round.

"What the thunder's the rookus with the critters?" growled Kansas.

Cactus Pete sprang to his feet, grasping a revolver. His glance went instantly to the Rio Kid. But he was relieved at once to see the prisoner still safe in his place. The Kid grinned at him.

"I guess I'm safe here, feller," he drawled. "You don't want to worry about this infant."

Cactus Pete scowled by way of reply and ran towards the horses. There was another shrill squeal. The next moment Cactus Pete's six-gun was roaring, and he yelled to his followers:

"Injuns!"

**THE THIRD CHAPTER.**  
Foe or Friend ?

"I NJUNS!" Cards and cigars had been thrown aside and forgotten; every man in the gang was grasping a gun—savagely wary and alert. Even the Kid for the moment was forgotten in the alarm.

Bang, bang, bang!

Cactus Pete had fired at a glimpse of a dragged feather in a matted black head. But he had had only an instant's glimpse, and the half-seen Redskin had vanished. Now he was firing into the thickets, blazing away shot after shot, with a savage oath to each.

Bang, bang!

The other three ruffians began to blaze away, though they could see nothing but the trunks of trees, the straggling lianas, the bushes, and the thick grass.

The Redskin had vanished. For several minutes the timber rung and thundered with the roar of firearms. The horse-thieves were in fear of whizzing arrows or bullets from the trees; but no missile flew. In a few minutes they realised that they were wasting their lead, and ceased to fire.

Cactus Pete stood looking down at the horses, curses streaming from his bearded lips.

"Killed!" ejaculated Kansas.

"That durned Redskin—"

"Great gophers!" gasped Laredo Jim. "He's killed the cayuses!"

Cactus Pete swore furiously.

Do you know the art of trailing, of blazing a track through the woods, and of seeking "sign"? Our contributor gives you a few useful tips on this very important part of scouting, tips that will help you in your next outing!

## SCOUTING DAYS!

**ON THE TRAIL!**

**E**VER met the Scout who can see things on the ground and all round about that are absolutely invisible to other fellows' eyes? He's the trained trail-finder and tracker. Did it take him years to get that skill—or was it a miracle? Neither is as easy as pie! And here's how!

Unless you are scouting over ground where animals are plentiful or birds obligingly leave plenty of footprints, there is not much fun to be had in going after these natural trails. You want to make your own—or get another Scout to make his trail, and then you can put in some jolly practice in tracking him.

Shall we start with the blazing of a trail? That means deliberately making a track which you yourself can follow, and your chums who are in the know. Useful, that, for practice, and for marking the way to and from a camping place or other site which you want to be kept secret.

You blaze the trail in one of several ways: by breaking twigs on shrubs or the low branches of trees—quite small pieces, which are to be left hanging where you snap them. Or they can be bent only, pointing in a certain direction as required.

The age of such a trail can easily be told by the condition of the leaves on the twig. If these are quite dead, that means the twigs were broken a good time back. If the leaves are only wilting, the trail may have been blazed only an hour or two ago.

The same trail-blazing can be carried out by knotting together three or four blades of tall grass here and there, at intervals of eight or ten feet, the knotted blades being bent over in the direction that leads to your camp or elsewhere. Of course, the grass you thus mark must be left standing where it is growing.

All these are natural signposts, which mean everything to the fellow in the know and absolutely nothing to anyone else. Always beware of faked trails. If your chums have started off ahead and the game is for you to track them, you can be sure that they will try hard to conceal their path. They won't purposely make huge footprints in mud, nor will they cleave a great path through long grass.

If you do meet with such tracks, in practice, you can depend upon it that the fellows who made them did so to mislead you. They later turned back in those very obvious tracks and then took a real Scout's path—one that leaves practically not a clue behind!

You can get splendid tracking practice by persuading one of your number to walk ahead, trailing behind him a rather heavy stick connected by string to his wrist. In the business-end of the stick should be several large nails or spikes. As these spikes or nails pass over the ground or through grass they will leave signs, the finding of which will test your powers of observation severely.

Especially as it is the playful habit of that trailing spiked stick to "jump" in places and not leave a visible mark anywhere! The fellow laying this trail should walk in an erratic course, letting his spiked apparatus do whatever it will in his rear.



In the grass lay four dead horses. The knife of the creeping Indian had done the work.

The rustlers stared down at the still carcasses in rage and fury. Of the horses that had lain in the grass after their feed only one lived, and that was the Kid's grey mustang. Why the Redskin had spared Side - Kicker the ruffians could not guess; he had had time for one more plunge of the long, deadly knife. But he had spared him; the mustang was unhurt. Four bronchos lay dead in the grass.

"That durned red skunk!" said Cactus Pete hoarsely. "The dog-goned pole-cat! Thunder! We'll root him out and shoot him to rags!"

"Might be a gang of them," said Kansas, with an uneasy stare round at the trees.

Cactus Pete spat out an oath.

"If there was a gang of the Reds, you bonehead, they'd be on us afore this. Can't you see there's a single track there? Jest one of the bucks."

"Gee! What'd he kill the cayuses for?" said Pawnee Bill. "I reckon he'd lift them if he could; but what'd he kill them for?"

"Because he couldn't lift them, you loosed gink! Get after him, and shoot him to pieces!" said Cactus Pete hoarsely.

The single track among the slain horses showed that only one Indian had been at work; and the mark of the moccasin told that it was a Red man, not a white. And that the savage had no firearm was fairly clear, or a shot would have rung out ere this. Taking courage from that knowledge, the horse-thief gang rushed into the timber in search of him.

Cactus Pete, however, checked himself, and ran back to where the Kid was bound to the tree. He was savagely anxious for vengeance on the ruthless Redskin who had dismounted the bunch; but he was more anxious about the prisoner, who was worth a thousand dollars to him.

"Thunder!" he yelled. Behind the tree to which the Kid was bound was a stealing figure in a tattered blanket, knife in hand.

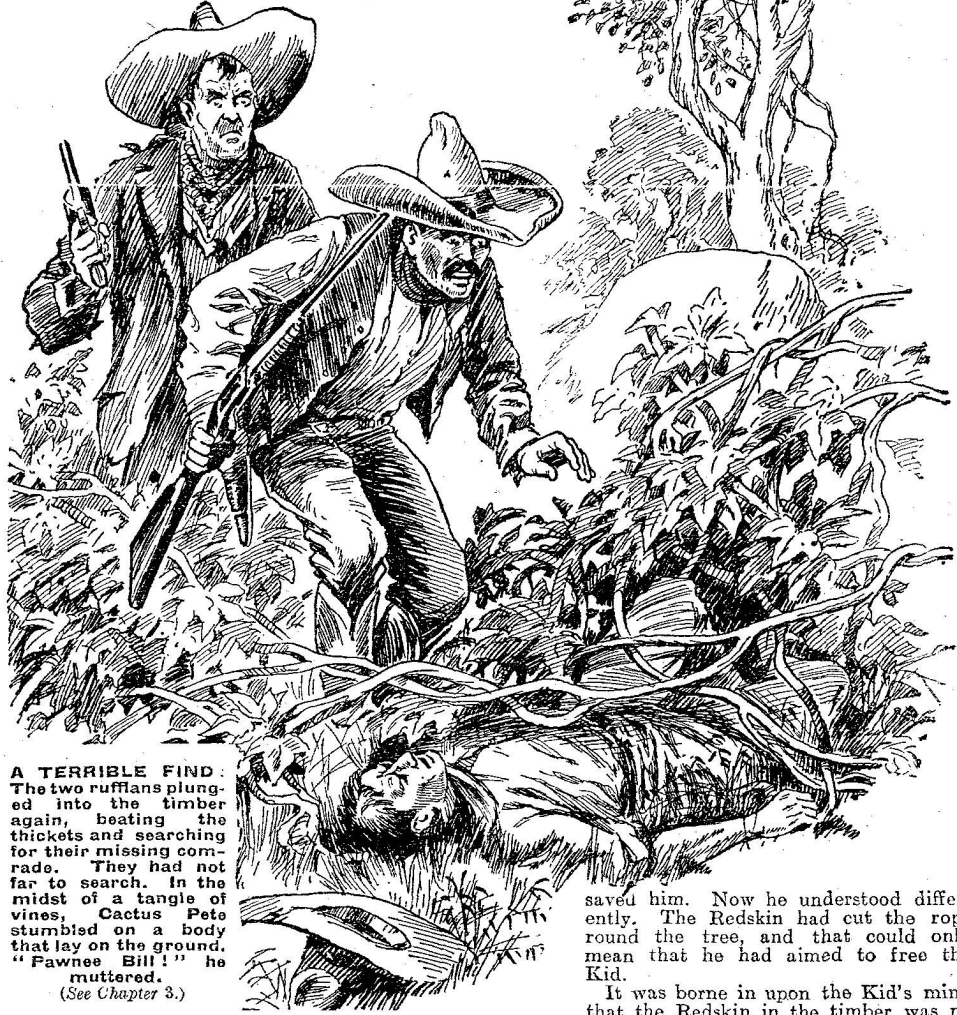
Bang! Chief Many Ponies leaped away into cover as Cactus Pete came rushing upon him, firing as he came.

The ruffian halted, panting before the Kid.

"Gee! I guess that Red nearly got you!" he panted.

The Kid nodded coolly. He had heard the creeping Indian behind the tree, and he had expected the knife. But he had disdained to call out to the horse-thieves. Prisoner as he was, he had not expected the Redskin to spare him, little dreaming that the

He had taken it for granted, when he heard the Redskin creeping there, that the unseen brave came as a foe, intending to plunge his knife into the heart of the white man who was bound and helpless. He had reckoned that it was Cactus Pete's swift return that had



**A TERRIBLE FIND:** The two ruffians plunged into the timber again, beating the thickets and searching for their missing comrade. They had not far to search. In the midst of a tangle of vines, Cactus Pete stumbled on a body that lay on the ground. "Pawnee Bill!" he muttered. (See Chapter 3.)

Apache who lurked in the timber was an old acquaintance and a friend.

"I reckon the Red was after my scalp, feller," said the Kid, with perfect coolness. "It was sure a near thing."

"I guess I'd let him lift it, too, only I want to tote you safe into Blue Pine and rope in a thousand dollars!" snarled Cactus Pete.

"I sure ain't asking you to protect me, feller!" said the Kid disdainfully.

Cactus Pete snarled out an oath and turned away from him. The other three ruffians had disappeared in the thickets, and could be heard shouting to one another, and occasionally loosing off a shot. Cactus Pete strode away towards the horses to secure the grey mustang, the only mount now left in the bunch.

"Gee!" whispered the Kid.

He had made a sudden strange discovery. As he moved, the rope that bound him to the tree-trunk fell loose.

For a moment or two the Kid sat quite still in astonishment. The rope that passed round the tree-trunk had been cut through. It could only have been cut by the Indian who had crept behind the tree.

The Kid was amazed.

saved him. Now he understood differently. The Redskin had cut the rope round the tree, and that could only mean that he had aimed to free the Kid.

It was borne in upon the Kid's mind that the Redskin in the timber was no foe to him, but a friend. But for Cactus Pete's intervention he would have freed the Kid from the bonds on his limbs, as well as from the rope that fastened him to the tree. So the Kid figured.

"Gee!" murmured the Kid again.

He looked round. But nothing was to be seen of the Redskin, hunted through the timber by the four horse-thieves.

No doubt he had slunk into the deepest cover, or taken to the branches of the cottonwoods, wide-spreading and thick with foliage, where it was scarcely possible for Cactus Pete and his gang to seek him.

Shot rang through the timber, the rustlers hunted for the Indian, snorts and oaths and trampling footsteps sounded incessantly. But there was no sound that told that the Redskin had been found.

The Kid was not idle in those moments. The release from the tree-trunk gave him more freedom of movement, and he was wrestling with the rope on his arms, seeking to loosen it.

The stalwart Kid exerted all his strength, struggling with the rope until

the sweat poured down his face. But the rustlers had taken care to secure him; the rope was strong and the knots were tight. The Kid ceased his struggle at last, almost exhausted by his efforts, and almost as tightly secured as before.

Cactus Pete was standing at a little distance, keeping guard over the grey mustang, and occasionally firing a shot into the trees. Kansas, Pawnee Bill, and Laredo Jim were out of sight. But their leader shouted to them at last to desist from the useless search.

It had lasted long, but the lurking Redskin had not been found.

"Let up, you 'uns!" shouted Cactus Pete. "Let up! I guess we want to hit the trail before sundown!"

Kansas and Laredo Jim came out of the thickets, panting, and joined their leader.

"I guess that durned Red has taken to the trees," said Kansas, with a stare up at the thick, spreading branches overhead. "I guess I ain't a pesky monkey to go after him there, Pete."

"Dog-gone him!" snarled Cactus Pete. "We got to let him slide; it's more'n time to hit the trail."

"One cayuse for the heap of us!" said Laredo Jim. "I guess we'll have to ride that mustang in turns, Pete, with the rest hoofing it!"

"Sure!" growled Pete.

"Dog-gone that durned Red! It's all of thirty-five miles to Blue Pine!" growled Kansas. "We ain't hitting Blue Pine this side of to-morrow, Pete, on foot."

"I guess I know that!" snarled Cactus Pete. "Say, where's that galoot Pawnee? Why in thunder don't he show up?"

He shouted angrily to the member of the bunch who had not yet reappeared from the thickets.

"You, Pawnee Bill! Come out of it, you gink; we're going to hit the trail!"

There was no answer from Pawnee Bill; no sound of rustling in the timber, no sound of shooting. Silence reigned as Cactus Pete's angry roar died away.

"Bill!" roared Cactus Pete angrily. "You dog-goned geck! Ain't I a-shoutin' to you to let up! Come back, you loosed gink!"

Only the echo of his voice answered.

"Thunder!" ejaculated Laredo Jim suddenly. "That Injun sure ain't got Pawnee Bill, Pete!"

Cactus Pete started.

"Bill ain't no such fool!" he snarled. "I guess—" He broke off and yelled again to Pawnee Bill to return.

But there was no answer, and no footstep. And the three ruffians looked at one another with scared faces. They had separated in the timber, hunting for the Redskin. And the thought was in all their minds now, that the hunted savage had found one of the hunters.

"Let's git!" muttered Kansas uneasily. "If that gink, Bill, had got himself sent over the range, more durn fool he! Let's beat it!"

"We ain't going without Bill!" growled Laredo Jim.

"I guess he's got his."

Cactus Pete grated his teeth.

"We got to look for him," he said. "You stop here with this hoss, Kansas, and keep an eye on that fire-bug yonder! You come with me, Laredo, and keep close to me, and shoot on sight if you see that gol-darned Red!"

"You bet!"

The two ruffians plunged into the timber again, beating the thickets and searching for their missing comrade.

They had not far to search,

In the midst of a tangled mass of trailing lianas, Cactus Pete stumbled over a body that lay on the ground. He bent down, with an oath.

"Pawnee Bill!"

"Thunder!" breathed Laredo Jim. "He's got his, Pete! Look!"

Pawnee Bill lay on his back among the lianas, his eyes wide open and staring up at his comrades. But the staring eyes could not see them. The rough, flannel shirt was thick with blood, from a terrible wound in his breast, where the Redskin's knife had found his heart.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

##### The Hoot of the Owl!

**B**EAT it!" Cactus Pete spoke in a hoarse tone.

There was no longer any thought in the minds of the horse-thieves of searching the timber for the hidden Redskin. The fate of Pawnee Bill had sickened them of that. They had only one thought now—to get out of the timber, out into the open plains, where there was no cover to conceal the treacherous Redskin. Every shadow in the deep timber was full of terror for them now.

The grey mustang was unpicketed, hastily loaded with as much of the truck as he could carry, and led away. The Rio Kid, jerked to his feet by a rough hand, had the rope cut from his legs, so that he could walk. In a bunch, staring back uneasily over their shoulders, the horse-thieves left the timber, taking their prisoner with them.

Safe out of the shadows of the trees they slowed down, and Cactus Pete looked back with a vicious curse.

"I guess I'd give all we're getting for the Kid to lay that Redskin out!" he said hoarsely. "I'd sure give a whole heap of dollars to get him afore my gun. But—"

"Beat it!" grunted Kansas. "I guess I wouldn't go back into that timber for all the dollars in the bank at Blue Pine. I'd sure like to shoot up that Injun; but I ain't looking for him any more."

"Not in your lifetime!" said Laredo Jim.

The Rio Kid grinned.

"That Red sure has got you scared stiff," he said lightly. "Say, you guys, let me loose, and I'll sure go back and look for him!"

Cactus Pete gave him a suspicious glare.

"That Red cut you loose from the tree," he muttered. "I guess I found the rope out. You savvy that durned Redskin?"

The Kid laughed.

"I reckon I ain't set eyes on him," he answered. "But I sure hope he'll get you and your gang, Pete, even if he gets me at the same time. I reckon I'd hit the long trail with pleasure, if you guys was hitting it along with me."

"Shut up, you!" snarled Pete.

He stared back at the timber. He dared not enter its dark shades again, with the Redskin lurking there; but he was reluctant to go without vengeance on the unseen, unknown Indian.

"Aw, beat it!" exclaimed Laredo Jim impatiently. "That Red lifted poor Pawnee's gun, and I guess if he knows how to handle it, we ain't too safe standing here chewing the rag."

As if to give point to the words, there came a sudden crack from the timber—the crack of a revolver. Cactus Pete started and howled out an oath as the Stetson hat spun on his head. The bullet had gone close.

"Beat it!" yelled Kansas.

And he grasped the grey mustang's reins, and hurried the animal on, Laredo and Cactus Pete following fast, the latter dragging the Kid after him. The Kid, at least, was in no hurry. The Redskin, whoever he was, had proved that he was no foe to the rustlers' prisoner. And the Kid would have been glad to remain within range of his shooting. But Cactus Pete dragged him savagely on, and as the Kid gave him all the trouble he could, the ruffian jerked a revolver from his belt, and jammed the muzzle to his chest.

"Beat it, you!" he hissed. "By thunder, you beat it, you durned lobo-wolf, or I'll leave you dead on the llano, here in your tracks."

"It's your say-so, feller," grinned the Kid. "You can put away your hardware. I guess I'm coming quiet."

"Hustle then, durn you!" snarled Cactus Pete.

Another shot rang from the timber, but the horse-thieves were already out of effective range.

At a safe distance Cactus Pete called on his followers to halt. Rifle in hand, he looked back at the distant clump.

"If that Injun breaks cover—" he muttered.

For several minutes the bunch waited and watched. But there was no sign of the Redskin. Evidently he did not intend to break cover. They knew that his eyes would be watching them from the trees, but the cautious, cunning savage was not exposing himself to a shot.

With a curse Cactus Pete slung the rifle over his shoulder again.

"Git on!" he growled.

And the bunch pushed on, and the clump of cottonwoods grew hazy in the distance behind.

With a curse at every step the bunch tramped over the rugged, rolling prairie. Side-Kicker was loaded with their "truck," but the ruffians took turns in riding him, in spite of his load. They gave no turn in the saddle to the Rio Kid, however. The Kid tramped on unresting, his aching arms bound down to his sides with the strong rope. Walking, as a means of locomotion, the Kid hated, like all cow-punchers. The high-heeled riding-boots were not suited for hoofing it, and it was weary work over rugged ground.

But there was no help for it, and the Kid took it as cheerfully as he could. But the three horse-thieves did not take it cheerfully. They cursed and swore at every step as they dragged their weary limbs along in a blaze of heat under the sinking sun.

But for the ruthless deed of the Redskin in the timber the bunch would have been mounted, the Kid tied on the mustang, and the ride swift to Blue Pine—to blood-money for the bunch, and the calaboose for the Kid. So the Kid, weary as he was, did not regret that the bunch were hoofing it. One night, at least, they would have to camp on the plain. And the hours of darkness would be full of chances for the Kid.

His captors were growling with rage. They rested in turn in the saddle of the grey mustang; but they could only proceed at a walking pace, as two of the bunch had to go afoot with the prisoner. Weary-mile after mile passed under their tramping feet as the sun sank lower and lower in the west towards the mountains of New Mexico.

The rim of the red sun dipped in the west. Kansas, with an oath, came to a halt.

"I'm beat! We got to camp!"  
 "I guess if we kept on we'd strike Blue Pine by morning," growled Cactus Pete.

But he spoke without heart.  
 "Forget it!" jeered Kansas. "I guess I'm camping, anyhow."  
 "We got to camp, Pete," growled Laredo Jim. "I guess my laigs is fair dropping off'n me."

The sun was gone, and darkness falling upon the boundless prairie. The bunch camped, tethering the grey mustang to a peg in the ground. Cactus Pete, with a savage eye, examined the Kid's bonds, and wound a rope round his legs again, and knotted it with cruel tightness.

"I guess I ain't taking no chances with you, durn you!" he growled.  
 "You better not," said the Kid quietly, "for I'm telling you, Cactus Pete, if I get a chance at you, you're a dead hoss-thief."

With another length of rope the ruffian secured the Kid to a peg. The bunch ate their supper of bully beef and flapjacks, without offering any to the Kid. Not even a panikin of water moistened his dry lips. Supplies were short with the gang, and they had none

to waste on their prisoner. They rolled themselves in their blankets at last and lay down to sleep, round the bound Kid, beside the weary mustang, and silence fell on the lonely camp in the midst of the vast prairie.

But while the three ruffians snored round him, sleep did not come to the Kid. He was weary to the bone; but the aching grip of his bonds kept him awake. And he was thinking—thinking of the solitary chance that remained to him. Cactus Pete and his bunch evidently did not fear or suspect that the unknown Redskin might have tracked them from the timber, ten or fifteen miles across rugged prairie. Neither would the Kid have suspected it, but for the hunch he had that the Redskin had aimed to help him.

From the silence and blackness round the lonely camp, as the night grew older, came the hoot of a night owl.

The Kid heard it without heeding. The night owl's hoot was no unfamiliar sound.

But he took note of it at last. It was repeated, again and again, and each time the Kid thought it was nearer to the camp. That was strange enough, when once he gave it his attention.

And he noted, too, that the hoot ended in a prolonged and dropping note that was unusual. And, suddenly, the Kid gave a start as he remembered.

It was no owl that hooted in the darkness outside the camp. It was an Indian signal. And that peculiar note; he remembered it now, remembered it from the time when he had camped in the chaparral with a wounded Apache whom he had cared for. And into the Kid's heart there came new hope, into his face a flush, and a gleam into his eyes.

For he knew now who was the unseen Redskin of the timber. He knew that that Redskin had followed the trail of Cactus Pete's bunch, and he knew that in the blackness of the prairie, signaling to him that he was at hand, was the outcast Apache, Chief Many Ponies.

THE END.

(Is there any hope for the Rio Kid? Will the outcast Indian chief, Many Ponies, succeed in getting this young outlaw out of the clutches of Cactus Pete & Co. See next week's powerful tale of the West, entitled: "A DEBT REPAID.")

# FAMOUS SCOUTS of the WAR!



Another tribute to a great soldier-scout, whose life has been one long thrill!

### 3.—Field-Marshal Sir William R. Birdwood, Bart., G.C.M.G., G.C.S., K.C.S.I.

ONE of the most famous Scouts in the Great War was Sir William Birdwood, who for some time held the post of Chief Commissioner for Scouts in India.

He enlisted in 1883 in the Royal Scots Fusiliers at the age of seventeen, and he has seen more fighting and taken part in more thrilling scraps than practically any man alive. In fact, it is safe to say that there have been few battles since he became a soldier in which he has not participated.

His life has been one long thrill, and the sum of his hair-breadth escapes is too numerous to mention. For instance, in the Tirah Campaign some thirty-two years ago he was mentioned in dispatches and commended for his sterling courage and resource. Then came the famous Boer War, in which he acquitted himself magnificently, being mentioned no less than five times in dispatches.

Always in the thick of the fray, he escaped death time after time, seemingly by a miracle. In a scrap near Pretoria in the Boer War his horse was shot away from under him, yet he escaped unhurt. But he did not come out entirely unscathed during this South African campaign, for he was badly wounded on more than one occasion.

For some time Sir William was Military Secretary to Lord Kitchener, both in South Africa and India. That was why he was nicknamed "Secretary Birdwood" by some Army-wag, after the "secretary bird," a member of the vulture family, which is to be found in most parts of South Africa. This bird is so named because its quilled feathers give it a clerical appearance. This nickname stuck until Sir William became commander of the Australian and New Zealand forces at Gallipoli.

Sir Ian Hamilton, commander-in-chief at Gallipoli, paid a striking tribute to Birdwood when he wrote in one of his dispatches:

"Lieut.-General Sir W. R. Birdwood has been the soul of Anzac. Not for one single day has he ever quitted his post. Chery and full of human sympathy, he has spent many hours of each twenty-four inspiring the defenders of the front trenches, and if he does not know every soldier in his force, at least every soldier in the force believes he's known to the chief."

Such a tribute was only meet, for indeed Sir William was tremendously popular with the men under his command and, what is more, they trusted and admired him for his courage, coolness, resource, and high qualities of leadership. He kept up his reputation by having innumerable narrow squeaks at Gallipoli during some of the fiercest and most deadly fighting of the Great War.

On one occasion Sir William experienced the weird sensation of having his hair parted by a bullet instead of with a brush and comb. It knocked his hat off, scathed the top of his skull, inflicting a painful cut and rendering him practically insensible.

But when his aides-de-camp implored him to leave his position and go to a dressing station behind the lines he bluntly refused. What was a wound in comparison with his duty! That was the viewpoint he took, and so he stayed.

No wonder so great a soldier, so magnificent a daredevil, so fine a Britisher, is looked up to and admired by every Boy Scout and every boy outside the great movement!

When Sir William Birdwood was asked to set down his opinion of the Boy Scout movement, just after the War, he wrote:

"Although some time has elapsed since I held the appointment of Chief Commissioner for Scouts in India, I have naturally retained a live interest in the welfare and progress of the Boy Scouts' Association. That this movement had great possibilities no one doubted, but I think few people, even among its most enthusiastic supporters, could foresee the success and prominence which it has achieved throughout the British Empire, to the most distant Dominions, and particularly in the willing, loyal, and valuable service which our Boy Scouts have rendered to their country during the Great War.

"One cannot fail to realise the great value of this organisation. We may indeed be proud of the past, of our glorious traditions, and of what our fighting forces have done for us; but it is on the coming generation that the future of our great Empire is to depend. In their hands is the preservation of those noble ideals for which the nation has willingly made the greatest sacrifices."