

THE KID-RANCHER TAMES ROUGH-NECKS AND GUNMEN!

# The LAZY O BUNCH!

by RALPH REDWAY

The Rio Kid's first impression of the Lazy O ranch, when he comes to take possession, is that it is going to be a hard fight to keep his newly bought property. But he squares his shoulders for the battle and wades in with grim determination to win through!

## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Punchers of the Lazy O!

**P**ANHANDLE PETE stared, from the doorway of the bunkhouse on the Lazy O ranch, across the sunlit plain, with knitted brows. Coyote Jenson, leaning on the bunkhouse wall, with his arm in a sling, scowled in the same direction. There were six or seven Lazy O punchers near at hand, and they all looked round to follow Panhandle Pete's fixed gaze. From the prairie a horseman came spurting, riding hard towards the ranch. At the distance it could only be seen that he was a puncher, in Stetson and chaps, mounted on a cow-pony.

"Kansas Jake, I reckon," said Panhandle Pete, after a long, silent stare at the approaching rider.

"I reckon!" assented Coyote Jenson.

The Lazy O horse-wrangler, coming over from the corral towards the bunkhouse, paused to stare at the coming rider.

"That's Jake," he said, after a pause. "What's he hitting it like that for? Anything happened at Packsaddle?"

"I guess he's got news for the bunch!" said Panhandle Pete sourly.

The horse-wrangler grinned.

"Suthin' happened in town to that little guy that's bought the Lazy O, you reckon?" he asked.

"Not in town, I guess, but on the trail hyer."

"I figured that he was riding from town with Barney Baker," said the horse-wrangler.

"You've said it."

"But Barney wouldn't pull on him. That guy Mister Fairfax, who's bought the Lazy O, is no slouch," said the horse-wrangler. "He shot up Lariat at Packsaddle yesterday, and Lariat was sure the durndest gunman in the section. Barney wouldn't have no show with the guy who was too good for Lariat. Besides, it ain't his game to come out into the open that-a-way. It wouldn't look good to let folks hear that the new boss had been shot up by the foreman of the ranch."

"Leave Barney alone to know that," grunted Panhandle Pete. "I'm telling you, Long Bill, that Kansas was waiting for them on the trail, and you know how Kansas Jake handles a rifle."

"Sho!" said the horse-wrangler.

He stared at Pete, and his brows knitted. There was a murmur from some of the punchers standing round.

The Lazy O bunch was well known to be the wildest and toughest bunch on the Rio Pecos. They backed up their foreman, Barney Baker, as one man; and all were in the game to keep the ranch out of the hands of the man who had bought it. But, rough as they were, lawless as they were, they had their limit. Quirting the new boss, and scaring him away from the ranch, picking a rookus with him and shooting him up—such methods did not shock the Lazy O bunch. But assassination was outside their rather wide limit. Shooting up a man in a gun-fight was one thing; picking him off like a buzzard, with a rifle at long distance from cover, was quite another. The

murmur among the Lazy O punchers deepened to a growl.

"Mean to say Jake was lying for that guy, to pick him off with his rifle from cover?" asked Long Bill slowly.

"Sure."

"And not giving the guy a chance?" grunted Long Bill. "Was, that's a game that this bunch won't stand for, Pete. That's a dirty game, like we was a bunch of greasers. If that's how, I guess I'm going to ask Barney for my time."

"Same here," grunted a thickset, bow-legged puncher, Shorty by name. "I guess I don't stand for double-crossing a guy that-a-way. That ain't the Texas way. An even break is the Texas way."

Panhandle Pete grunted.

"You give that guy Fairfax an even break, and it's you for the long jump," he answered. "I'll tell the world that galoot is lightning on the draw. Me and Coyote stopped him on the trail, coming to Packsaddle yesterday; and I tell you he hit me the kick of a mule; and look at Coyote's arm!" Pete rubbed a rough hand over a badly-bruised jaw. "Then didn't Lariat pick a rookus with him at the town and get his? I tell you, an even break won't get that guy Mister Fairfax away from this ranch."

"Tain't no good chewing the rag now," grinned Coyote Jenson. "The guy's got his, an' Jake's riding in to tell us so."

Long Bill, the

horse-wrangler grunted.

"It's a dirty game," he said.

"You figure that Barney Baker is going to hand over the ranch to a new boss?" jeered Panhandle Pete. "Ain't the Lazy O been sold seven times, and ain't we always got shut of the new boss every time? This guy Fairfax was warned off, fair and square. If he'd had the boss-sense to hit the trail, he could have humped back to Pecos Bend all in one piece. But he would hunt trouble."

"I don't like it!" growled Shorty.

"Barney ain't asking you what you like," sneered Panhandle Pete. "It's Barney's play, and we're backing it. We all get a finger in the pie. Every man in the Lazy O draws double wages, so long as Barney keeps his grip on the Lazy O. Nobody figured that that guy Fairfax would get away, when Lariat was set on him. But he got away, and Barney fixed it with Jake to lay him on the range. All you guys got to do is to stand pat and shut your mouths."

The spurting horseman was quite near the ranch now.

All eyes were fixed on him; and it was clear that, excepting for Pete and the Coyote, the Lazy O men looked with grim disfavour at the man who was riding up. Had Lariat, the gunman, shot up Mr. Fairfax at Packsaddle, the bunch would have grinned over the episode, but this was quite another matter.

Kansas Jake dashed up to the bunkhouse, pulled in his cow-pony, and jumped down. He nodded and grinned to the waiting punchers.

"You get away with it, Jake?" asked Panhandle Pete.

"I should smile," answered the Kansas man. "Say, it was easy! Barney put me wise that he would ride a white horse from Packsaddle, so all I had



to do was to get the guy on the other horse."

"You fixed him for keeps?" asked the Coyote eagerly.

"How's a guy to say, at eight hundred yards?" answered Kansas Jake. "I know I put the lead right through the guy; that's a cinch. Then I got my cause, and lit out of the timber on the other side, and hit for home. I guess Barney's got a dead guy on his hands. It won't be the first time a new boss of the Lazy O has been shot up mysterious on the range."

Panhandle Pete grinned, and the Coyote gave a chuckle. But the other faces were dark.

"I'll tell the world it's a dirty game, and I won't stand for it!" exclaimed Long Bill, the horse-wrangler. "I'll tell the world—"



morning. He held the reins of his own pinto, on the back of which Barney Baker was hunched, holding on, with a dizzy, half-conscious face that was deadly white. The foreman of the Lazy O, sorely wounded, could scarcely sit the pinto, and but for the Rio Kid's aid he could never have reached the ranch alive. It was like the Kid to lend his aid to the man whose treachery had led him into a deadly snare, from which only his own wariness had saved him.

As the ranch building came in sight in the distance, the Kid spoke to his companion in cheery tones.

"Stick on that cayuse, feller! I guess you ain't far from your bunk now."

Barney Baker turned a glazed eye on "Mister Fairfax."

He did not speak, but there was hate in his look.

For years Barney Baker had run the Lazy O at his own sweet will, and every time the ranch found a new buyer Barney had dealt with him—successfully. No man in the Packsaddle country expected any new boss to make the grade at the Lazy O. Barney and the bunch were too strong for him in a lawless country like the Packsaddle, where the law, such as it was, kept both eyes shut. And if Barney Baker had ever looked for defeat, it would not have been at the hands of a guy who looked little more than a boy. But it was in Mister Fairfax that he had run up against a snag. Even now he did not understand it, though probably he would have understood better had he been wise to it that Mister Fairfax had once been known, all through Texas, as the Rio Kid, the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande. Had Barney Baker known that, he might have realized that he was up against a tough proposition in the new boss of the Lazy O.

The Kid pushed on.

He was wondering a little what sort of a reception he was going to get from the Lazy O bunch, when he horned in at the ranch with the foreman clinging wounded to the back of the pinto.

No man in Packsaddle had expected to see Mister Fairfax alive again after he rode out to take possession of the Lazy O.

But Mister Fairfax had his own ideas about that.

He had bought the Lazy O fair and square, and he did not figure that the wildest bunch in Texas would be able to keep him from taking possession of his own property.

That he was taking his life in his hands in riding out to the Lazy O the Rio Kid was well aware. But that was no new thing to the boy outlaw. But it struck the Kid as curious the way trouble haunted his wandering footsteps. He was an outlaw no longer but a rancher, yet he had to keep his gun as ready as when he was hunted by the Texas Rangers in the rocks of the Mal Pais. Indeed, from what they had told him at Packsaddle, the Kid figured that the ranges of the Lazy O were going to be more dangerous for him than the rocky arroyos of the Mal Pais or the rugged mesas of the Huucas. But the Kid had no grouch. He was accustomed to taking trouble as it came, and hitherto it was not the Rio Kid who had come out at the little end of the horn.

He was riding towards the ranch-house; but at sight of the little crowd of punchers gathered before the bunkhouse, the Kid changed his direction a little and headed for them. These rough-looking guys were some of the Lazy O bunch, and the Kid was quite keen on making their acquaintance. Among them he soon recognized Panhandle Pete, with his bruised jaw, and

the Coyote with his right arm in a sling. Those two, at least, had already learned that Mister Fairfax was a galoot who could keep his end up.

The buzz of voices died away, and the Lazy O punchers stood silent, staring, as the Kid rode up leading Barney Baker's horse. They stared in dumbfounded astonishment. At first they had taken it that Barney Baker was bringing the new boss, dead or wounded, to the ranch. But as the horsemen came closer, the wounded man, drooping over the pinto's neck, was recognized as Barney Baker; and two of the bunch, at least, recognized the man who rode unhurt as Mister Fairfax, the new boss. Kansas Jake stared with his eyes bulging from his head. He had carried out his instructions faithfully; he had brought off a long-distance shot with the rifle, from the cover of the post-oaks beside the trail, and he had sent his lead through the man who was not riding the white horse. The two must have changed horses before they rode by the ambush, for it was now Mister Fairfax who was on the white horse, and Barney Baker who was on the pinto. And Jake felt a trickling of sweat down his back as he realized that it was the foreman who had stopped his bullet.

"I swow!" muttered Kansas Jake. "I swow! Carry me home to die! I guess this sure gets my goat! They must have changed hosses. And why did Barney Baker change hosses with the guy, when he knowed I was waiting in the post-oaks, and couldn't tell one guy from another at the distance, only by the hosses? I tell you, he fixed it up with me."

"It's Barney that's got the ticket for soup!" muttered Panhandle Pete. "It's Barney!"

"It's Barney!" murmured the Coyote, his eyes gleaming. "Gee! If a galoot could use his gun-hand—"

Long Bill, lounging over from the corral, grinned.

"I guess suthin's gone skew-ways with that gun game," he remarked.

Then, in silence, the punchers waited till the horsemen arrived at the bunkhouse and pulled in.

The Rio Kid released the reins of the pinto as Long Bill stepped forward to give a helping hand to the foreman.

With cheery politeness the Kid swept off his Stetson. But the Lazy O punchers only stared grimly in response to the cordial salute.

"Say, you guys," said the Kid, "I guess this is the Lazy O?"

"You've said it," grunted Shorty.

"I reckoned I was hitting it right, though I'm sure a stranger in the Packsaddle country," said the Kid. "I'm sure glad to meet up with you galoots, seeing I'm the boss of the ranch, and you're my bunch. I guess you're wise to it that I've bought this hyer ranch, through Lawyer Lucas at Pecos Bend."

"You Mister Fairfax?" grunted Long Bill.

"You've got it."

Panhandle Pete strode forward. Two or three punchers lifted Barney Baker from the pinto, and placed him on a bench outside the bunkhouse. The foreman of the Lazy O sagged helplessly, and one of the men held him on the bench. He was evidently hard hit, and he could not speak. His half-glazed eyes stared stupidly at the scene.

Pete fixed his eyes on Mister Fairfax, who had slid down from the white horse now. The Kid gave him a cheery nod.

"You're Panhandle Pete, I reckon, who met up with me on the trail yesterday," he remarked. "Didn't I fire you?"

"What's happened to Barney Baker?"

THE POPULAR.—No. 560.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Mister Fairfax Meets His Bunch!

THE Rio Kid rode on towards the Lazy O ranch.

He was riding the white horse on which Barney Baker had ridden with him out of Packsaddle that

"Tell Barney Baker when he humps in," grinned Kansas Jake. "It was his orders, and I'm a guy to jump when my foreman says jump."

"You—you're a dirty, sneaking coyote, shooting a man down from cover," said Long Bill, "and I'm telling you so! I say you're a dog-goned, white-livered greaser; and if you don't like it, draw your gun, you pesky poloccat, and let's see if you've the sand to shoot without hiding yourself in cover."

"Aw, can it!" said Kansas Jake. "If you've got a grouch, blow it off to Barney Baker when he rides in. He won't be long, I guess."

Long Bill gave an angry snort, and tramped back to the corral. There was an excited and angry discussion among the Lazy O punchers. Hitherto, the bunch had backed Barney Baker's play, without hesitation. They stood in with the foreman, to keep the Lazy O out of the hands of the rightful owners. But hitherto Barney's methods had been within the code. This was sheer murder, and the Lazy O bunch did not stand for it.

"Say, is that Barney coming?" exclaimed Shorty suddenly. "Who's he got with him?"

And the discussion, which was rapidly becoming a quarrel, ceased, as two horsemen emerged into view from a fold of the prairie.

demand. Pete surlily. "I guess this bunch wants to know."

"I sure ain't keeping it a secret," grinned the Kid. "Barney Baker rode out of town with me this morning on a white horse. It kinder came into my mabeza that the guy on the white boss was a lot safer than the guy on the other cayuse. So I asked him to change critters."

"You asked him?" said Long Bill. "Jest that."

"And he did it!" gasped Kansas Jake. "You telling us that Barney Baker was willing?"

The Kid shook his head.

"I ain't telling you he was willing," he answered. "I never saw a guy who was so unwilling. Why, feller, he was so unwilling to change hosses with me that I knew he'd got a man fixed up in cover on the trail to pick me off like a buzzard—a sneaking, pesky coyote of a man, I guess, who was afraid to show himself in the open, but figured that he could cook my goose with a long-distance rifle-shot." The Kid's eyes were intently on Kansas Jake. "I had to persuade Barney to change horses at the end of a six-gun. You get me?"

"Sho!" ejaculated Long Bill.

"That foreman of mine," said the Kid, shaking his head again, "don't seem to be pleased to get a new boss. He fixed up a galoot to put it across me on the trail. But he slipped up on it. He was riding my cayuse, and his man got him by mistake. I reckoned he would!"

There was a groan from the foreman. "It was a dirty game," went on the Kid—"a mean game! I guess that guy Baker is a powerful mean cuss! I allow I don't expect that sort of game in my bunch here."

"Your bunch?" said Panhandle Pete between his teeth.

"My bunch," said the Kid quietly. "Any man that don't want to jump to orders when I wag my chin, can walk up to the office and ask for his time."

There was a growl.

Most of the punchers on the spot had condemned the murderous game that had been played on the prairie trail. But the sight of Barney Baker crumpled up with a severe wound, and the presence of the new boss, made a change in their feelings. All Packsaddle knew that the Lazy O bunch scorned the idea of letting a new boss run the Lazy O. Taking orders from a boss, and a boy at that, got the goat of the bunch at once.

"I opine," went on the Kid, "that we're going to pull together on this ranch O.K. We only got to know one another better. You don't want to forget that I'm boss; but I guess I shan't forget that I've been a cow-puncher myself, and ridden with a bunch; and if any guy here has anything to worry him, he's only got to get up on his hind legs and say so, and I guess I'll put it right. Ain't that good enough for you?"

Silence.

"Barney Baker has been playing a gum game, years on end, with this ranch," continued the Kid. "That sort of shenanigan is going to stop right now. He sent Panhandle Pete and Coyote to scare me away with quirts, and they can tell you 'uns jest how much they scared me. Then he put up Lariat to get me in gun-fighting—and they'll tell you in Packsaddle that Lariat's got a front seat in the town cemetery." Then he fixed up with an all-fired dirty skunk to get me from cover on the trail, and the skunk got him instead. I guess you're wise to it

now that you're not dealing with a tenderfoot from Tendertown! I don't want any trouble with this bunch; but if there's trouble, you'll know I'm around. Chew on that!"

Grim silence.

"You, Panhandle Pete and Coyote, I've said you're fired," added the Kid. "But you didn't rightly know me then, and I guess I'm giving you another chance. Stick to the bunch—so long as you toe the line. But then on it that you've got a boss now that is going to run the Lazy O, and run it his own way."

"You reckon?" muttered Panhandle Pete.

"Sure thing! Now that's enough chewing the rag," said the Kid. "Get that man Baker to his bunk, and look after him. He's a pizen scallywag, but he ain't going to bleed to death like a stuck pig. Fix him up the best you can."

The punchers looked at one another.

More than one was tempted to reach for a gun, and settle the matter there and then. Long Bill, the horse-wrangler, was the only one who translated the thought into action. But before his hand reached the holster a gun was in the Kid's hand.

"Drop it, feller," said the Kid.

Long Bill stared at the Kid's gun. He jerked his hands away from his belt with almost comic precipitation.

"Say, Mister Fairfax, you ain't no slouch on the draw!" he said. "Your game, sir! And lookye here, Mister Fairfax, this hyer is a tough bunch, and I guess you've bitten off more'n you'll ever chew at the Lazy O, but this bunch don't stand for shooting a man in the back from cover, and I'll tell you that we never knowed anything of that dirty game on the trail. If there's two-three guys here who stand for it, that ain't the whole bunch. You don't want to get it into your cabeza that you're up agin a bunch of murdering Greasers."

The Kid smiled.

"I guess I've sized up this bunch," he said. "You ain't no tender infants, I'll tell the world, and I don't aim to feed you on milk and candy. But I guess you're white, and I ain't got it agin you that you've backed Barney Baker's play. But I want you to get wise to it that that play's over, an' start fair with your boss. You won't find me a worse man than Baker to deal with."

And, with a cheery nod to the punchers, the Kid walked away to the ranch-house.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Kid Takes Control!

"THIS sure puts it over the Mal Pais!" murmured the Rio Kid. "This sure goes one better than the Huecas."

The boy outlaw of the Rio Grande, transformed into Mister Fairfax, boss of the Lazy O, walked through the ranch-house, and was satisfied with what he saw therein.

It was a timber house, well-built, with a veranda in front, and the furnishings, though rough and a good deal knocked about, were serviceable. The Kid guessed that he would make himself comfortable in that rancho, when he had had time to fix things a little. He had ridden hard trails for a long time, and he figured that he was entitled to take it easy on his own ranch. Not that the Kid was the man to live an easy life. Rancher as he was, he was likely to put in as much work on the ranges as any puncher in the bunch. But he was going to have pleasant fixings, and make things comfortable. But there were two things about the ranch-house that dis-

pleased the Kid. First, the place was ill-kept; second, there was no service at hand. Obviously, the house had been lived in, and the Kid knew that Barney Baker must have lived in it, instead of bunking with the outfit. And he guessed that Barney hadn't lived in it without a chore man. The Kid was ready for food after his ride out from Packsaddle; and, after walking through the house and looking round some, the Kid called and then shouted; but no one came in reply.

So the Kid walked out again, and called across to a puncher who was coming away from the bunkhouse.

"Say, feller!"

Shorty looked round.

"Who does the chores in this shebang, feller?" asked the Kid.

Shorty grinned.

"There's a Greaser cook," he answered. "But I reckon that Diego is Barney's man."

"Do you?" said the Kid pleasantly.

"I guess I ain't no use for a foreman keeping a cook. Where's that Diego?"

"I guess you can find him, if you want him."

Shorty was turning away with that.

"Say, feller, walk this-a-way," said the Kid softly. "I guess I ain't done talking to you yet."

Shorty, walking away without heeding, gave a sudden jump as a bullet flicked his chaps. He spun round, his hands at his belt.

The Kid's gun looked at him.

"You pull that gun, feller, and the bunch will have a buryin' job on hand," remarked the Kid. "You want to learn not to give your boss back-chat, feller. You surely do! Step this-a-way."

Shorty relinquished the gun, but he did not stir. He stared at the new boss of the Lazy O from where he stood.

"You walking this-a-way?" inquired the Kid.

"I guess not!"

Bang!

Shorty gave a howl as a bullet grazed his ankle.

Bang!

Shorty jumped.

"Keep jumping," said the Kid grimly. "I guess I'm fanning you some. Keep jumping, you pesky bonehead, if you don't want lead in your toes."

Bang, bang!

Shorty, the puncher, had played the game of "fanning" more than once, with a Chinaman or some nervous tenderfoot for a victim. It was the first time it had been played on Shorty himself.

The thickset, heavy cowman jumped desperately as the bullets crashed round his feet. He had to jump, for the Kid meant business, and a broken ankle or a shattered foot would have been the penalty of disobedience.

There was a shout, and two or three punchers ran towards the ranch-house. They stared at the sight of the new boss fanning Shorty with bullets.

"Jump, you bonehead!" roared the Kid.

There was a shout of laughter from the Lazy O punchers. This was the kind of game that appealed to their rough sense of humour.

"Hump it, Shorty!" shouted Long Bill. "Say, you are some jumper! You sure do beat a prairie rabbit."

Six shots rattled out, and the Kid lowered a smoking gun. Shorty came to a breathless halt, his face burning with rage and mortification. In his rage, he forgot that he was dealing with the man who had shot up Lariat, the gunman, and as the firing ceased, and he came to a standstill, he grabbed a revolver from his hip. But the Kid's second gun was in his left hand, ready.

Bang!



THE KID MEETS HIS PUNCHERS! "I'm glad to meet with you galoots, seeing that I'm boss of this ranch, and you're my bunch," said the Kid. He looked round the group, and lowering faces met his glance. "You Mister Fairfax?" grunted Long Bill surlily. (See Chapter 2.)

Shorty's Colt flew from his hand. With a howl of agony the puncher clapped his numbed hand to his mouth, sucking desperately at fingers that felt paralysed, and yelling with pain.

"Aw, can it!" drawled the Kid. "You ain't hurt any. Think I'd spill the juice of a good little man like you? Not by a jugful! I guess you'll want a new gun, but your fist'll be as good as new. You don't want to wake up all the coyotes in the Packsaddle country that-a-way."

He glanced at the staring punchers. "I sure ain't asked for an audience hyer," he remarked. "Me, I'm talking pleasant and peaceful to this guy."

The punchers, with dubious looks, faded out of the picture. The Kid walked over to Shorty, who was still sucking his numbed fingers, though he had ceased to howl.

"Say, you don't want to get mad, feller," said the Kid amicably. "You ain't hurt any. And I guess on your looks you're a good little man, and I'd sure hate to plug you for keeps. Where's that dago?"

Shorty looked at him. "I guess he's somewhere's around," he answered slowly.

"Rouse him out," said the Kid. "Tell him to hop into the shebang just as quick as he knows how, before something happens to him."

Shorty slouched away, and the Kid stepped back into the ranch-house. It was not Shorty's intention to look for the Mexican cook and chore-man; he intended to clear away, and leave the new boss to find Diego for himself, if he wanted him. But, somehow, Shorty changed that intention, the numb ache in his fingers perhaps helping him to do so. At all events, ten minutes later, a swarthy-skinned Mexican presented himself in the ranch-house.

The Kid gave him an amiable nod. "You Diego?" he asked.

"Si."

The man's stare was insolent, his

answer more so. The Rio Kid's jaw set a little. The whole bunch, from the foreman down to the chore-man, objected to the new boss; but the Kid was there to educate them.

"I guess 'si,' in your lingo, means yos," the Kid remarked thoughtfully. "Ain't there another word to follow?"

The Mexican shrugged his shoulders. He was a large, fat man, and almost towered over the slim Kid.

"I guess," went on the Kid amiably, "that you can talk your own lingo to me, if you want, Diego, seeing that I've ridden trails in Mexico, and know the talk like a book. But when you answer me, feller, you say, 'Si, senor,' if you talk in your lingo. You get me?"

"I serve Barney Baker," said the Mexican. "I take orders from the Senor Baker."

"I guess the Senor Baker won't be giving a whole lot of orders on this ranch any more," smiled the Kid. "I guess the Senor Baker's going to be fired, jest as soon as he'll be able to hit the trail. Looks as if he's been camping in this shebang instead of the bunk-house; but that's played out now. You catch on, Diego? I'm your boss now, and I ain't pleased with you, none. You got to hand out a dinner—a good one, mind, if you've any fancy for keeping your carcass in one piece—and then you got to clean up this shebang like she was a new pin. Me, I never stand for a dirty shack. No, sir! You get me?"

The Mexican grinned.

"Now, jump to it," said the Kid. Diego did not stir, but his mocking grin intensified.

"You ain't obeying orders?" asked the Kid gently.

"Yours, no!" said Diego. "Carambo! Before it is night you will be shot to pieces by the bunch! I give only a snap of the fingers for you, hombre!"

And Diego snapped his swarthy fingers at the Rio Kid.

The next moment the Kid had picked up his quirt and was grasping the Mexi-

can. Big man as he was, the Greaser crumpled up in that steely grip, and he went with a crash to the floor.

Across his back, as he sprawled, came the thong of the quirt, with a crash.

There was a fierce yell from the Mexican, and he bounded to his feet, a knife gleaming in his dusky hand.

"Aw, shucks!" said the Kid.

The heavy metal butt of the quirt struck the dusky hand, and the knife went to the floor. It struck Diego's dusky, greasy head the next instant, and the Mexican sprawled once more. The Kid picked up the knife, and snapped the blade off under his heel. Then he lifted the quirt, his eyes gleaming down at the sprawling, cowering man.

"I guess," said the Kid, "that you ain't learned manners, none, while you was being bossed by Barney Baker in this hyer shebang. I kinder got a bunch that I'm the galoot to teach you, Diego."

And the quirt descended with heavy lashes. Diego squirmed and yelled and howled. He leaped up and rushed for the door, with the leather still falling; but the Kid spun the thong of the whip, and it twined round Diego's leg, and he stumbled and crashed down. And the quirt rose and fell.

"Senor, senor; pity!" yelled Diego. "Pardon—a thousand pardons! Por todos los santos! A thousand pardons!"

"You figure that you've had all you want, feller?" asked the Kid amiably.

"Si, senor, si!" spluttered Diego. Oh, si, si, si!"

"I guess you ain't no hog, Diego; you sure know when you've had enough," said the Kid. "You got it into your greasy cabeza that this hyer infant is boss of this shebang?"

"Si, senor!" moaned Diego. "Oh, si, si, si!"

"That goes," said the Kid cheerfully. "You ever kick up a rookus again, feller, and the quirt's ready for you. You want to remember she's always

handy. Now you want to hand out that grub, Diego; and hand it out smart and smiling, afore you get down to cleaning up this shack."

The Rio Kid sat down to his meal with a cheery face. The Mexican chore-man served him with eager attention, jumping at a word. Whatever might be the Kid's fortune with the Lazy O bunch, at all events he had no more insolence to expect from the ranch-house cook. It was a good meal, and the Kid did it justice; and when he had finished Diego was at work with mops and water-pail. The Kid watched him for a few minutes, with an approving eye. He guessed that Diego was ready to feed out of his hand, and he was right.

Leaving the chore-man occupied in unaccustomed industry, the Kid walked out of the ranch-house. He strolled across towards the corral. That afternoon the Kid aimed to ride over his new domain and survey the ranch and its vast ranges. He gave a cheery nod to

Long Bill, the horse-wrangler, who was lounging by the corral gate. The wrangler looked at him with a curious mixture of respect and hostility.

"Saddle up the pinto for me, feller," said the Kid pleasantly.

"I guess you can saddle your own cayuse, Mister Fairfax!" grunted Long Bill.

"Sure!" assented the Kid. "I can, and do, when I ain't got a lantern-jawed, polecat-faced, ornery, bone-headed wrangler to do as he's told. Jest at present, I've sure got one, and I'm going to see him saddle up that pinto, or else I'm going to boot him right off this ranch. Don't touch that gun, you dog-goned gink. I've got you covered from my pocket, and you wouldn't live long enough to draw!"

The Lazy O wrangler breathed hard and deep. For a long second he stared in the face of Mister Fairfax, and then quietly he stepped into the corral and roped the pinto. Quietly he saddled up

the Kid's horse, and Mister Fairfax nodded his thanks and mounted.

"I guess," remarked the Kid, "that it was Barney Baker who was going to show me over my property, but he sure won't be backing a bronc for a long time to come. I want a man who knows the ranch from A to izzard. I got to see the goods before I pay on them. Where's Panhandle Pete?"

"In the bunkhouse with Barney."

"Send him hyer."

Long Bill hesitated a moment, and then, as if under some impulsion stronger than his own will, strode away to the bunkhouse. In a few minutes Panhandle Pete appeared, scowling blackly at the new boss, and obviously itching to reach for a gun. The Kid gave him a pleasant nod.

"I've heard that you was Barney's right-hand man on this ranch," he remarked. "You're the galoot to show

*(Continued on page 22.)*

# The GREAT PYRAMIDS



There is no known monument in the world so vast and aged, and with such a romantic history as the Pyramids of Egypt.

**W**ONDERFULLY ugly, but terribly awe-inspiring. That's the tally you have to tie on to the great Sphinx which almost rubs shoulders with the colossal Pyramids of ancient Egypt. There is no known monument in the whole world so aged or so vast as the Pyramids. They were built somewhere about 4,000 years before Christ, and the largest of them is the biggest building in the world. Originally it was 480 feet high. The Pyramids are, as you know, hollow, so they really are buildings. The Sphinx is not a building, because it is solid—carved out of one stupendously enormous block of solid rock, except the fore-paws, which are made of gigantic stone blocks. The Sphinx of Gizeh is the largest and oldest single sculptured figure in the whole world—187 feet long. There it sits, its base continually being covered over by hurricane-swept sand from the desert on whose edge it is; 5,000 years old, the great lion's body with a man's head, known to the Arabs as The Father of Terror!

### A Mighty Target!

That enormous hewn face has looked out over the Egyptian desert, inscrutable and menacing, all those centuries, with a temple built between the out-thrust paws, the only signs of the passage of that vast time being traces of weather-wear and chips which show where once upon a time Mohammedan soldiers used the mighty Sphinx as an easy target.

This battered monster, half-beast, half-human, was erected by the ancient Egyptians as an emblem of majesty and dignity. It is an awful and impressive monument, a fitting companion for the Great Pyramid close by which was built as a tomb for Cheops, one of the greatest of the Pharaohs.

It took 100,000 men something like thirty years to put it up, and how it was constructed can only be guessed at. For nowhere in the vicinity are blocks of stone to be found—only endless miles of storm-stirred, blinding sand, baked by the fierce sun.

### Inside the Pyramids!

When the first blocks of stone—wherever they came from—were settled in place, it is thought that a huge sloping roadway of sand was made to the stones' summit. Up that slope slaves in their thousands were compelled to drag the next lot of stones. When they were in place, the sloping bank of sand was carried to their top, and so until the last stone was in place.

Miles long that artificial roadway must have been before the royal tomb was completed. They greased it to make the passage of the stones a little easier, and other slaves followed behind the great blocks driving in wedges to help the masses up.

The great Pyramid of Gizeh is perfect in form, symmetrical which ever way you view it. Its sloping sides each measure about 755 feet, and from

pointed tip to base it is 475 feet. As was customary with the many pyramids which are to be found in different spots, there is a burial chamber beneath it—far underground. But in the Great Pyramid this chamber is in an unfinished state, the real burial chamber being in the mass of masonry itself.

Of course, its interior has been explored, long ago. Which perhaps accounts for the fact that it is now empty. There is a passageway into it, from the Pyramid's north side, up which you can walk until you come to what is now known as the Grand Gallery. From that, there is a turning which leads to a chamber known as the Queen's. But if you go on climbing instead of turning aside from the Grand Gallery, you come to a great empty chamber and then to the King's chamber.

There you find a tremendous sarcophagus, made from one solid block of granite—and empty. That chamber is ventilated by channels which lead to the open air, and we can only surmise that the body of the ancient Pharaoh whose last resting place it was designed to be was stolen by robbers.

### Mysterious Names!

At one time there was an outer casing of stone to protect the actual blocks which made this Pyramid. But they have gone, and no man knows the story of their going. It is thought all those outer stones were stripped off and taken away to build the city of Cairo.

The word "pyramid" exactly fits these monstrous burial chambers, and so needs no explaining. But "sphinx" does not explain itself. The word was tacked on to the half-beast, half-human effigy by the Greeks when they came to Egypt. It is a Greek word, meaning "The Throtter."

They used the word to describe a terrible creature which had a woman's head, the body of a lioness, and wings. Legend says she lived in Africa in the beginning, then the gods sent her to Greece, where the mythical monster lived on a rock asking all who passed by a riddle: "What walks on four legs in the morning, on two at noon, on three in the evening?"

All who could not answer she strangled. The answer was "a man," who crawls on hands and knees as a baby, upright in the prime of life, with the help of a stick when old age enfeebles him!

"El Hajar, the Arab slave raider!" he cried.

But before he could utter another word the villain fired again, and, snatching at the diamond, which dropped to the quilt, dashed for the window.

"After him! After him!" shrieked Joe. "He has got the paper, too!"

There was a splintering of rotten woodwork as the Arab leapt as actively as a cat for the balcony, dropped lightly on to it, and, vaulting over, thudded to the mud floor of the courtyard.

Dick looked down, and saw him vanish in the darkness of a doorway.

When he re-entered the room Joe was holding up his hand.

"Be quiet. The poor fellow is dead!" he said in a husky whisper. "It's a pity El Hajar got away with the paper."

"But he didn't!" said Pie. "Dischile was too quick for him. Pieface, the king's son, hab got der secret ob King Nadur's diamonds!"

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### A New Expedition is Planned!

**P**AUL BARTON had not died as a result of either of El Hajar's cowardly pistol-shots.

Both had missed him by a fraction of an inch, but the shock had proved too much, and in the tense excitement his tired spirit had fled.

This was fortunate for Joe and the boys, as the pistol reports—of frequent occurrence in that part of the town—had apparently attracted no attention, and the fact of the deceased missionary having passed away from natural causes avoided the need for a public inquiry.

"Which would have been the very wust thing possible for the likes o' we," explained Joe, when the funeral was over and the last remains of the gallant gentleman who had risked his life a thousand times to bring back his precious secret to civilization were laid to rest in the little European cemetery outside the town. "As it is, no one except us four and that villain Hajar knows anything about King Nadur's diamonds. Now, young fellow-me-lads, what's the best thing to be done? The ship clears the canal to-morrow. Are we to go home with her or not?"

"Of course not," exclaimed Frank, who had secretly discussed the matter with the other two. "Those diamonds must be found and secured for Great Britain. Pie's father must be discovered, and restored to his kingdom from which El Hajar took him; and if ever the chance comes our way the Arab must be caught and brought to justice."

They were sitting on the balcony of the Hotel Continental, looking towards the lighthouse.

The strange occurrence at the Hotel Splendide had opened up a new and entrancing vista, a call into the very heart of the Dark Continent. And there was every reason why they should obey it—none why should not.

More than a year in the South Seas had not daunted their restless enthusiasm.

"Of course, Pie's as keen as mustard," interjected Dick. "Naturally enough, he wants to see his dad again, but he swears he won't go, Joe, unless you let the bunjik come, too."

"The bunjik!" Joe scratched his head. "Waal, that's not too bad an idea. I've heard a hefferlunt can be very useful in an African forest, roosting up trees and drinking up rivers, and if

ever perwisions giv out we should be able to kill him, and fry the tasty bits for hefferlunt steak."

"I kill you, ole jack-boot face, if ever you touch dat dere bunjik," muttered the black youth fiercely. "You relember what dat liklum feller can do for us, and you jest lettum come!" Joe pretended to submit with very ill grace.

"All right, grate-polish, we'll take him. Then it's decided, we shift on for Cairo in the morning."

"Why Cairo, Joe?" Frank asked.

The sailor pointed to the west.

"Because that's the only place this side of Europe we can fix up proper equipment. You see, we shall need camels and guides, and all the paraphernalias for a long trek across the Sahara."

"But why go that way? Why not cut down the Nile Basin, and strike into Central Africa from the north!"

"Because we should only succeed in losing our sweet selves. Africy is so immense—hundreds of times bigger than England—and away from the big towns we should find no one to guide us."

"You see, the difficulty is we can't go touting and asking all the ju-ju men we meet to tell us the way to the City at the Sun God, because they'd promptly smell a rat, and do us down for the papers. No, my young two-year-old, the only safe way is to go by the way the rev. gent came."

"And that is?"

"First of all, across the desert to Morocco. See, here's his map. His route cuts right across the Atlas mountains, turns south into Nigeria, touches the Cameroons, then east to the Congo, and so on until it breaks off in the land of the fuzzy-zuzzies. Once among them rapscallions—what is relatives of young Pie there—we strike north again, and after a journey of several hundreds of miles, come to a place marked with a cross."

"And that is where we shall find the diamonds."

"No, it ain't," said Joe. "Mr. Barton said we should find the rock-inscription first of all, and when we've deciphered that, we should locate the City of the Sun God."

"But supposing we either can't decipher it, or don't find Pie's dad—what then?"

"Then, my little tiny dears, we've just had several thousand miles of tramp for nowt; so it's up to you to decide what you're going to do."

"We've decided," said Frank Polruan crisply, glancing towards his chum, who nodded agreement.

"And you, blackmoor?" Joe asked.

"Where you three go dis chile goes—with bunjik," replied Pie simply.

"Right!" said Joe. "That settles it. Well, my ebony-faced friend," he added, as a Nubian boy, dressed in a red uniform plentifully edged with thick bands of gold lace, came towards them, "what do you want?"

"Please, mos' honnerabel sar, a letter for you," said the little fellow, holding out a brass Moorish tray.

"For me?" inquired Joe, bending over the envelope. "It's got no moniker on. I mean, it's not addressed to me."

"The sheikh, him said it was for the big white man," persisted the dwarf.

"What sheikh?" questioned the sailor suspiciously.

"Great much big Arab man, in white djellab with blue moon on, so." And bending down, he traced with his

finger a crude design of a crescent on the dust of the balcony steps.

"Right!" said Joe. "Then I'll read it!"

He tore off the covering, and a thin slip of yellow, native-made paper fluttered in the breeze. And on it, in curious Arabesque characters, were these words:

"Take warning, O enemies of Islam! By the beard of the Prophet I swear that if you attempt to reach the sacred City of the Sun God, I, even I, and my followers will take vengeance on you. And this is my oath as the eldest born of my father and by the Prophet and the Koran. Take heed, therefore, while there is yet time.

"(Signed) EL HAJAR."

"Right!" snapped Joe, rising suddenly and tearing the message into tiny scraps, which he flung upon the ground and set his foot upon. "There is my answer to El Hajar. We'll find King Nadur's diamonds, or perish in the attempt!"

THE END.

*(The four adventurers realise that they are in for a hot time in taking up this quest into Africa. But they don't mind—they love a stirring adventure. See next week's long story: "THE DESERT RAIDERS!")*

## "The LAZY O BUNCH!"

(Continued from page 18.)

me round my property, Pete. Git your cayuse from the corral."

Panhandle Pete went without a word into the corral for his horse. Long Bill came back towards the Kid.

"Say, Mister Fairfax—!" he began.

"Shoot!" said the Kid.

"I guess you're wise to it that the Lazy O bunch don't want a new boss around here," said the wrangler slowly. "Barney's all shot up, but I guess the bunch are looking to him for orders. But—"

"Spill it!" smiled the Kid.

"You don't want to ride the range with Panhandle Pete," said the wrangler abruptly. "This bunch is rough, and don't give a continental red cent for a new boss, and I'm telling you so. But there ain't more'n two-three guys in the bunch would stand for shooting a man in the back. I guess you ain't wanted on the Lazy O, Mister Fairfax, but I'm telling you that you don't want to ride the range with Panhandle Pete."

"I reckoned you was a square man," assented the Kid. "You'll sure like your new boss when you get to know him. You only want to get it into your cabela that Barney Baker's jig is up, and that there's a now man here to run this ranch. Then you'll be O.K."

A few minutes later the Kid rode out on the plain with Panhandle Pete. The horse-wrangler and several punchers stood watching him go. Long Bill drew a deep breath.

"I've put him wise," said Long Bill. "But I guess he didn't need it any. He knows Pete's game better'n Pete does. Both them guys won't come back to this shebang alive, but I reckon it won't be Mister Fairfax who stops out for the buzzards." The Lazy O wrangler paused. "Boys, we've got a new boss who ain't no slouch. If there's a guy in Texas who can run this ranch and handle this bunch, it's that guy, I'll tell the world!"

THE END.

*(Another roaring Western yarn next week, chums!)*