

The POPULAR

2¢



Winnifred Brooks

The Grand Contents
of this issue:

SIMPLE COMPETITION—
Valuable Prizes,
2 SCHOOL STORIES,
Extra-long
DETECTIVE THRILLER,
and a Roaring
WESTERN YARN!

6 TOPPING BIKES
AND
20 MODEL MOTOR-BOATS

MUST BE WON!

Complete in
this
Issue!



THE KID'S SACRIFICE!

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Held Up on the Trail!

PUT 'em up!" The sharp command rapped on the ears of the Rio Kid. The man who had stepped from the clump of mesquites had a rifle clamped to his shoulder, his finger on the trigger, his eye gleaming along the barrel. And the muzzle bore full upon the boy puncher of the Bar-One.

The Kid pulled in his horse. For once he was taken by surprise. But he could hardly blame himself for that. Since Black George, the road agent, had been rounded up, no hold-up man had been seen in the Kicking Mule country. And if a hold-up man was around, there seemed no reason why he should get after a puncher riding the trail from Juniper to the Bar-One Ranch.

The Kid pulled in. His eyes glinted; but he obeyed the command, lifting his hands over his Stetson.

"It's your say-so, hombre," he said pleasantly.

"Keep 'em up!" "Anything to oblige," drawled the Kid. "But what you want, feller? You holdin' me up for my hoss, or my guns, or my chaps? I guess it ain't worth your while nohow."

His eyes were keenly on the man who had stepped from the mesquite. There was an old flour-sack drawn over the hold-up man's head, descending to his waist, where it was belted in. Two holes were cut in it for his eyes, another for his mouth. There was no chance of recognising the man—he had taken care of that. Below the open end of the flour-sack a pair of ragged sheepskin chaps and rough riding-boots could be seen. That was all. And the Kid was guessing.

"You can put down one of them paws," said the hold-up man. "If you touch a gun, or try to, it's you for the long range. Put down one paw, and throw down the roll."

"What roll?" asked the Kid. "The roll you're taking from the bank to the Bar-One. Don't chew the

rag! I guess I'd as soon turn you into buzzards' meat as not."

The Kid breathed hard. He had ridden in to the bank at Juniper that day, sent by Colonel Sanderson, the boss of the Bar-One, and was riding back with a roll of six thousand dollars in his saddle-bags. But there was nothing about the Kid to indicate that he was carrying a big roll. And he knew that this guy had not watched him, as he declared, in Juniper. The Kid had ridden in, presented the boss' letter at the bank, and ridden out again in five minutes. And he had ridden fast, wanting to hit the ranch again before sundown. If this guy had been watching him in Juniper,

The Rio Kid loses his job on the Bar-One Ranch!

he could not have got ahead of the Kid on the home-trail. But he was ahead of him, and had evidently been hiding in the mesquites by the trail, waiting for him to pass.

The Kid's eyes glittered. The man in the flour-sack had not picked up the news at Juniper. He had known of the Kid's mission beforehand. That was clear to the Kid.

The man in the sack was a Bar-One man!

Only a Bar-One man could have known that the Kid was sent to Juniper that day, to bring back the dollars Colonel Sanderson needed for a deal in cattle at the Joshua-A the next day.

"By the great horned toad!" muttered the Kid.

The flour-sack hid the hold-up man well. But the Kid figured that he knew who he was.

Frank Sanderson, the colonel's wastrel son, had been present in the ranch-house, when the boss gave the Kid his instructions.

It was the scallywag of the Bar-One.

The Kid was as certain of it as if his eyes could penetrate the thickness of the flour-sack to the face behind it.

"You hear me yaup?" rapped out the hold-up man. "I want that roll you've got from the bank, and pronto. I guess I'm ready to take it from your body, if you don't hand it over."

"You dog-goned skunk—" began the Kid.

But he checked himself.

The boss' son, gambler, wastrel, scallywag, cow-thief, and now hold-up man, was the boss' son. The Kid was ready to take a chance with his gun; but he could not shoot up Frank Sanderson. Had he been anybody but the son of Colonel Sanderson the Kid would have let daylight through him without a second thought. But—

"I'm waiting!" snapped the man in the flour-sack. "I guess I ain't waiting long, feller. Pony up!"

"You hold the cards, hombre," said the Kid. "I guess I ain't arguing with that rifle."

He lowered his right hand.

The eyes from the orifices in the flour-sack watched him like a cat's. But the Kid reckoned he would have had a good chance of pulling a gun and turning the tables on the trail-thief. It was not the levelled rifle that stopped him. It was his certainty that Frank Sanderson's face was hidden behind the flour-sack. They were foes, much as the Kid had wanted to be a friend to the boss' son. And Frank Sanderson had felt the weight of his quirt. But shooting the boss' son was another matter. The Kid felt that he could not stand for that.

His hand slid into the saddle-bag.

The eyes gleamed from the eye-holes eagerly. Frank Sanderson, working on the ranch under his father's eyes, cut off from dissipation and gambling, was desperate—desperate for money, and for a return to his old pursuits. But the Kid, well as he had learned to know the scallywag of the Bar-One, was surprised at this. He reckoned that it was the limit, even for the reckless, unscrupulous waster.

"Pronto!" snarled the voice, from the flour-sack.

The Kid's hand came out with a little leather sack in it. He tossed it into the grass at the feet of the hold-up man.

"You win," he remarked coolly.

"Now, keep your paws up, and ride!" said the hold-up man harshly. "Ride on to the ranch with your hands up. And if you even look back, you'll get a chunk of lead through your cabeza."

"It's your say-so."

With his hands above his Stetson, the Kid rode on.

The eyes from the flour-sack watched him. The rifle followed his movements. The Kid reckoned that it was want of sand that kept the scallywag from shooting him out of the saddle. Frank Sanderson had not come to that; he dared not shed blood. But he would have pulled the trigger had the Kid resisted the robbery. There was no doubt about that.

At a little distance the Kid suddenly spurred the grey mustang, and Side-Kicker leaped into speed. He dropped his hands to his reins, and dashed on at a gallop towards the ranch.

Crack!

A rifle rang behind him, but the lead whistled far from the galloping Kid. The Kid laughed aloud as he dashed on towards the distant ranch.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Kid Delivers the Goods!

COLONEL SANDERSON, smoking a cigar in his rocker on the ranch-house porch in the sunset, glanced at the horseman who came galloping up to the gate, and smiled.

Only the colonel, of all on the Bar-One Ranch, knew that "Two-gun," the puncher, was in reality the Rio Kid, the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande. And knowing it, he had sent him to Juniper to bring back six thousand dollars. The colonel figured that he knew a white man when he saw one; and he had no doubt about the dollars. He smiled as he saw the Rio Kid riding in.

The Kid stopped at the gate to speak to Yuba Dick, the horse-wrangler of the Bar-One. Yuba took his horse from him as he dismounted with one hand, and held out the other.

"You got it?" he asked.

The Kid shook his head.

"Carry me home to die!" exclaimed Yuba indignantly. "You allow you ain't got that tobacco when I asked you special to call at the store for it! You dog-goned bonehead—"

"Aw, can it, feller!" said the Kid. "I sure horned into the store at Juniper and got that plug, but I kinder lost it on the tra' coming back. Don't you get a grouch, Yuba—I'll ride into Kicking Mule for it to-morrow."

And leaving Yuba grunting the Kid walked across to the ranch-house with a jingle of spurs.

Colonel Sanderson gave him a nod as he came up the steps of the porch.

"You got the roll?" he asked.

"What's the matter with Yuba, boy?" The Kid grinned.

"He sur-asked me to bring him a bag of tobacco, and I kinder lost it on the trail. I was held up coming back, sir."

"Held up!" ejaculated the colonel. "Sure! A guy with a foursack over his cabeza was waitin' for me on the trail, and he asked me for the roll, over a rifle."

The colonel's brow set grimly.

"That's a queer tale, Two-gun," he said quietly. "Nobody was wise to it that you was riding to Juniper for dollars—nobody but you and me and Frank."

The Kid's face flushed.

He looked at the boss.

"Say, boss," he said, with a touch of bitterness in his voice, "I told you fair and square that I was the Rio Kid, and you sure know what all Texas says about the Kid. Any guy in the Rio Grande country would have told you you was loco to trust the Rio Kid to fetch six thousand dollars from the bank; any guy could have warned you that the Kid would ride away with it or else horn in with a story of being held up for it on the trail."

The colonel drew a deep breath.

"I ain't doubting you, Two-gun," he said. "But I'll say it's queer, a guy holdin' you up for the dollars when nobody was wise to it. How'd the man know you'd the goods on you?"

The Kid had no reply to make to that—no reply that he cared for the scallywag's father to hear. He stood silent.

It was some moments before he spoke again.

"We got to have this out, sir," he said quietly. "If you don't trust me it's time for me to mount and hit the trail again. I guess any guy in Texas would tell you you was a bonehead to trust the Rio Kid—and it sure did look like asking for trouble. But I reckoned you'd savvy that, outlaw or not, I never was the man to throw you down."

There was a pause.

"I'm trusting you, Kid," said Colonel Sanderson at last. "I'm sure trusting you. Don't say another word—you've lost me six thousand dollars, and I'm taking your word that you was held up for it. That goes!"

"Boss," said the Kid, "I always allowed you was a white man. You figure that you're taking my word, without proof?"

"It's a cinch."

The Kid smiled.

"You sure do me proud, sir," he said, "and here's the six thousand dollars in a roll, jest as I had them from the bank."

Colonel Sanderson started as the Kid laid a little leather sack on the arm of his chair. In silence he opened it and counted the wad of notes within.

Then he stared at the Kid.

"Here's the dollars, all O.K.," he said. "What you mean by allowing that you was held up for them, dog-gone you? Stringing me along to see if I trusted you, or what?"

"Not any," answered the Kid. "I sure was held up, and handed over the goods with a rifle lookin' me in the face. But you want to know, sir, that I had Yuba's bag of tobacco along with that roll in my saddlebag, and when I had to pony up it was Yuba's plug that I throwed over to the hold-up man!"

"Great gophers!" ejaculated the colonel.

"I reckon he tumbled to it after I'd left him," grinned the Kid. "He sure aimed to drop me with a rifle-shot—but I was goin' fast, and beat him to it. And here I am, sir, and there's your dollars!"

The colonel burst into a laugh.

"Say, I'd like to have seen that hold-up man's face when he opened Yuba's bag and saw the tobacco!" he chuckled. "But I reckon I'd have expected you to beat the prairie for that hombre, and give him his ticket for soup once you was away from his rifle."

"I wasn't hunting trouble, sir," said

the Kid. "I reckoned I'd hit the ranch with the dust, while it was safe."

"Mebbe you was right," agreed the Colonel.

He turned over the wad of bills in his hands, with a thoughtful frown on his face.

The Kid backed away to the steps. But Colonel Sanderson called him back.

"Say, Two-gun, you didn't know that hold-up man?" he asked.

"He was sure covered up with a flour-sack, sir, and I never saw nothing but his eyes."

"It's durned queer how he knew you had the dollars."

"It beats me to a frazzle, sir," said the Kid, as honestly as he could.

The colonel's keen eyes seemed to bore into him. Darker and grimmer grew his stern, grizzled face.

And the Kid, reading his expression, knew the thought that was working in the rancher's troubled mind. Beside the rancher and the boy puncher only Frank Sanderson had known that the dollars were coming from the bank at Juniper that afternoon.

Colonel Sanderson raised his head, and his eyes swept the plains—shadowy now with approaching nightfall.

"Frank ain't come in yet," he said, in a low voice.

"No, sir?" said the Kid carelessly.

"He's been out on his pinto most of the afternoon."

"It's a fine day for a ride, sir."

The colonel compressed his lips.

"Two-gun, you ain't wise to that guy in the foursacks? You sure you ain't wise to him?"

The Kid shook his head. He had guessed, but his guess was not proof. The Kid was glad that there was no proof.

"Nope! He sure was well covered up, sir."

The rancher made a gesture of dismissal. The Kid walked away to the bunkhouse, with a thoughtful shade on his brow.

He suspected beyond the shadow of a doubt that the man in the flour-sack had been the scallywag of the Bar-One, and the rancher suspected it—or half-suspected it, too!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Thief in the Night!

THE Rio Kid sat up in the silent bunkhouse, and his sleepless eyes looked through the gloom.

He could not sleep.

In the other bunks tired cow-punchers slept the sound sleep of health; steady breathing came to the ears of the Kid in the darkness. The Kid, as a rule, slept well, though lightly. This night he could not sleep, and at last he stepped quietly from his bunk and dressed himself, taking care to awaken none of his comrades.

Quietly he let himself out of the bunkhouse.

His brow was clouded, his heart was heavy. He glanced back for a second into the dark interior of the bunkhouse, where slept his comrades of the range and the trail—men he had grown to like well, and who had grown to like him. Perhaps some misgiving, some premonition, crossed his mind at that moment—some intuitive hint that he was looking for the last time into the cheery bunkhouse of the Bar-One.

But if some such feeling throbbled for a moment in his heart, no such thought was in his mind. The Kid stepped away quietly towards the ranch-house, under the glimmer of the stars. He had little doubt that he would soon be returning to his bunk; indeed he called

himself a gink for having left it. For what, after all, could be happening at the ranch?

And yet—
It was Frank Sanderson, the scallywag of the Bar-One, who had held him up on the trail for the six thousand dollars. The Kid had tricked him, and brought the dollars safe home. The waster was desperate for money—desperate, indeed, or he would never have ventured on a hold-up on the trail. And the dollars were now in the rancher's safe, in the office in the rancho, and Frank slept in the house. On the morrow the boss was taking the money over to the Joshua-A for a deal in cattle. After that, all would be O.K. But to-night—

The rancher's safe was a simple lock-up affair. Any man could open it with ease. The scallywag, who had failed on the Juniper trail, had only to come down from his room, and the dollars were at his mercy. That he was none too good to rob his father, the Kid knew only too well.

It was in the Kid's mind now, that, in the hours of darkness the dollars would be taken from the rancher's safe. True, in that case Frank Sanderson could not hope to conceal his guilt. He would have to run. But the Kid figured that the waster, fed-up to the back teeth with a life of orderly industry, was ready to run, if he could run with six thousand dollars in his pockets.

All was dark and quiet at the ranch-house.

The Kid breathed a little more freely as he noted it. There was no sign of stirring there.

After all, had he been uneasy about nothing? Was Frank Sanderson sleeping in his room? The dollars safe where the rancher had locked them up?

In the quiet, peaceful night, the Kid felt more at ease than he had felt while tossing and turning restlessly in the bunkhouse. Stars gleamed from the dark sky overhead; a soft breeze rustled the trees. From the shadowy plains came a faint murmuring from the herds.

The Kid started at a sound closer at hand. A horse had stirred, and a bridle faintly jingled. What was a horse there for? Where was it, and why was it there? With black suspicion in his mind again, the Kid crept along in the darkness in the direction of the sound. Under one of the trees close by the house, a horse was tied—saddled and bridled. The gloom did not deceive the Kid's keen eyes. He knew the horse at the first glimpse. It was Frank Sanderson's pinto.

There was a low whinny from the pinto. The Kid soothed it to silence, and stood silent himself, his heart heavy, his brow black.

Frank Sanderson was not sleeping. He had left the rancho secretly, brought his horse round from the stable, saddled and bridled it, and left it tied there ready! Ready for what? The Kid knew only too well. The pinto was ready for flight. And at any minute

the wastrel might come, with his father's money in his pockets, to ride away into the night. The last doubt was gone now.

For a long minute the Kid stood, thinking it out.

In those moments thievish hands were at work. He knew that when morning came, the rancher would know that his son was a thief and a fugitive—if the Kid did not intervene. Unconsciously, the Kid's hand dropped to the walnut butt of a gun.

But it was not gun-play that was wanted. That would not save the boss from the knowledge that would be more bitter to him than death.

The Kid moved at last. He untied

There was no arguing with that steady rifle. The Kid took the leather pouch from his saddle-bag, and flung it on the ground.

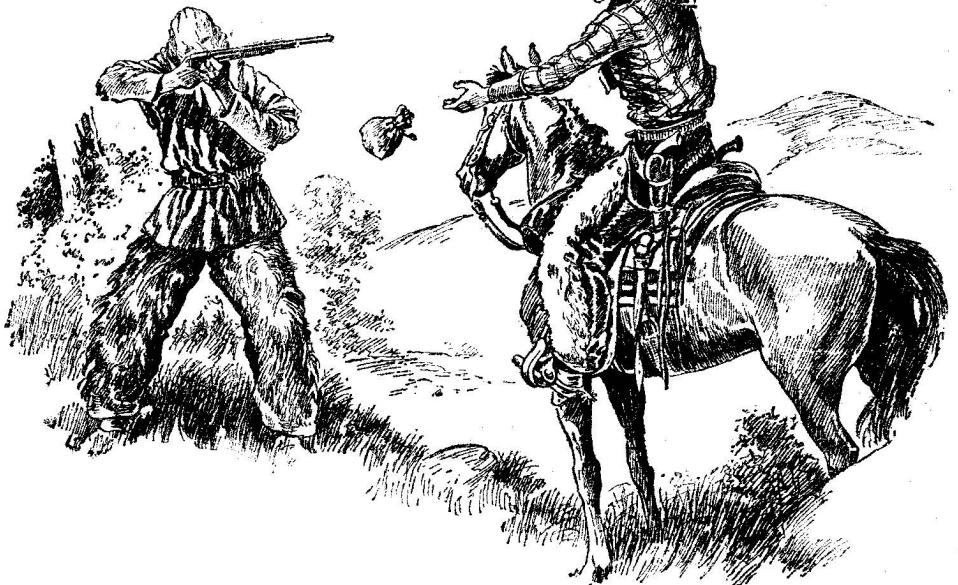
drive a bullet through your pizen carcass!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
The Scallywag's Last Chance!

FRANK SANDERSON panted. His eyes turned on the Kid wildly.

"You!" he breathed. "Me!" said the Kid.

"You dog-goned hound!" The scallywag's voice was a husky whisper of rage and terror. "What do you want? You dare—"



the horse, and led it away quietly to the stables, removed the saddle and bridle, and left it. Then he crept quietly back to the front of the house, to the window of the room where he knew Frank Sanderson must be. The wooden shutter was half-open, there was a glimmer of a candle in the room. Even as the Kid reached the window, the glimmer vanished, and all was dark.

Standing behind the half-open shutter, the Kid waited. In that room—the office of the rancho—was the safe, and he knew that Frank Sanderson had finished his work at the safe now. The extinguishing of the light showed that. He would be coming—

There was a sound at the window.

A dark figure dropped over the low sill to the ground. The Kid heard a panting, suppressed breath. In the glimmer of the star-shine he had a glimpse of a white, set, scared face—the face of the scallywag of the Bar-One.

Frank Sanderson made one stride, and then a faint cry or utter terror dropped from his lips as a hand was laid on his shoulder, and the muzzle of a six-gun was pressed to his side.

"Quiet!" said the Kid softly. "You dog-goned thief, you're cinched! I've got you by the short hairs, you pesky coyote, and if you make a sound, I'll

"Can it!" said the Kid quietly. "I'm wise to your game Frank Sanderson. You figure that I don't know it was you who held me up on the Juniper trail this afternoon?"

"It's a lie—a lie—"

"Aw, can it! If I hadn't knowed it was you, you'd never have got away alive!" said the Kid contemptuously. "You all fired coyote, you slipped up on that game, and now you've cinched the dollars under your father's roof. By the great horned toad, if you wasn't your father's son, I'd plaster that window with your brains!"

"It's a lie—a lie!" breathed the shrinking wastrel, "I—I couldn't sleep! I was—was going out for a—"

"And you went out first, and got your horse ready, and tied him up?" jeered the Kid.

"You—you—"

"I sure found your horse, you durned coyote, and he's back in the stables now."

Sanderson muttered a curse.

"You've got six thousand dollars in your rags," said the Kid. "Your father's money! You durned thief, when you got in cahoots with Jas Cassidy's gang to lift your father's herds. I allowed I'd give you another chance, to make good. And this is what you've made of it! What you reckon you'd

get if I called the colonel down to see you now?"

Frank Sanderson shuddered.

"For mercy's sake!" he breathed.

"I guess I don't rightly know what to do!" muttered the Kid miserably.

"Give me a chance! I—I'll make good!" whispered Frank Sanderson. "I—I swear it!"

The Kid scanned his face in the glimmer of the stars. The terror in it was pitiable. Every nerve in the wretched scallywag's body was quaking at the thought of facing his father. The Kid wondered! It was possible that fear, if nothing else, might keep the rascal straight, after this—there was a hope of it, at least. And the Kid had to give him the chance. He had to, or else let the boss know the truth—the truth that would have bowed him down with shame.

The Kid drew a deep breath.

"Give me the roll!"

The wastrel's trembling hands passed

The Kid stood silent.

The dark look was gone from his face. There was a hope in his heart that the wretched wastrel would be as good as his word, that those moments of terror had given him a lesson he would not forget. After all, there was good in the fellow, if he gave himself a chance. The Kid's mind was easier.

He waited.

All he had to do was to keep the secret. When Frank Sanderson was back in his room, the Kid would enter and replace the roll in the safe, whence the scallywag had taken it. The rancher in the morning, would find that the lock had been meddled with; that could not be helped. But he would find the dollars there, he would never know that his son was a thief.

Five long minutes the Kid waited. Then he climbed lightly in at the window, and in the darkness, groped his way to the old iron safe behind the rancher's desk.

to the open door of the iron safe. From that, it went to the open window, then to the roll of bills in the Kid's hand.

He set the lamp on a table.

"You!" he repeated.

And the revolver was lifted again, bearing full on the Rio Kid.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Sacrifice!

THE Kid stood silent.

His face was pale—growing paler, as he read the amazement the scorn, the bitter anger and contempt, in the face of the man he respected more than any other man in Texas.

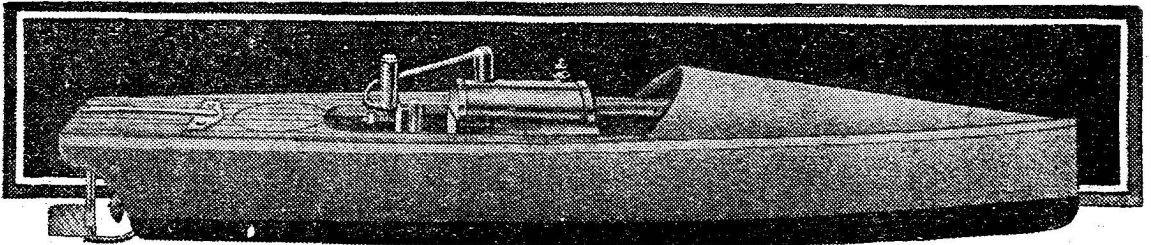
"You!" said Colonel Sanderson, and his voice cut like a whip.

"I—I guess—" stammered the Kid.

"You! I guess I'd never have figured on that! You told me you was the Rio Kid—the firebug that's hunted by half

SPEED BOATS AHOY!

POSSESS A MODEL SPEED BOAT THAT WILL BE THE ENVY OF ALL YOUR PALS!



20 OF THESE MODEL STEAM LAUNCHES ("Peggy" Type) are offered in the simple competition on page 2. The launches are smart and speedy, with plank-lined decks and two-colour hulls. Can be set in any direction, and will steam steadily for twenty-five minutes at one filling.

over the roll of bills. The Kid holstered his gun and examined the roll—he was not to be tricked. Frank Sanderson watched him in quivering silence.

"I guess," said the Kid slowly, "that I got to keep this dark for your father's sake. If you got a rag of decency in you, Frank Sanderson, give this game a miss, after this, and try to run straight—as straight as you can."

"I—I swear—" muttered the wastrel.

"Git back to your room!"

"You—you'll say nothing—nothing?"

"Not a thing. Get back to your room."

The scallywag of the Bar-One leaned on the window shutter, trembling, breathing in gasps.

"I—I'll do as you say!" he muttered, at last. "And—and I swear that after this—after this—I'll sure give it a miss! I'll try—I'll try hard—I'll sure do the best I can. Only—keep it secret—"

"I ain't saying a word!" said the Kid quietly. "Keep to that, Frank Sanderson—keep to that! It's the best game you can play."

The scallywag of the Bar-One drew a deep breath.

"I swear it!" he said.

There was a ring of sincerity in his voice. Without another word, he climbed back into the window, and disappeared in the darkness within.

THE POPULAR.—No. 585.

A sound in the darkness made him start.

He set his lips.

Was the scallywag coming back? Had he been deceived, and was he, after all, to face a desperate man, gun in hand? If it came to that—

A door opened, and the light of a lamp glimmered into the room from the passage.

In the lamplight, a levelled revolver glistened. Behind it was the stern, bearded face of the boss of the Bar-One.

"Hands up!"

The rancher's voice rang sharply.

He advanced into the room, the lamp in his left hand, the revolver in his right, levelled at the startled Kid.

"Carry me home to die!" murmured the Rio Kid, in utter dismay.

He stood motionless.

"You dog-goned thief!" came the rancher's voice. "I reckon I heard you—and even if you're my own son, you go to jail for this—you dog-goned thief and waster! You—"

He broke off, as the light shone on the Kid's startled, dismayed face. For an instant there was silence, while Colonel Sanderson stared blankly at the face of the boy puncher.

"You!" he said thickly.

The revolver sagged in his hand.

His glance went from the Kid's face

to the sheriffs in Texas—and I trusted you all the same. I trusted you!"

"You sure did, sir," muttered the Kid, "and I'm telling you, sir, that you was right—I'm telling you—"

He broke off.

There was nothing he could say, except that the rancher's son was the thief! And that he could not say.

"I trusted you," said the boss of the Bar-One. "I trusted you more than my own son! You came back from Juniper to-day with a tall story about bein' held up on the trail—and I figured—I sure suspected—that it was my own son that had tried for the dollars! I guess now that that was what you wanted me to figure!"

"It was the truth, sir, I told you—"

said the Kid huskily.

"What are you doing here, then?"

The Kid made no reply. His face was pale; it was growing almost haggard. But he did not speak.

"I've slept badly to-night!" said the rancher. "I been thinking about what I suspected of my son—Frank. And when I heard him moving in his room, I reckoned that he was coming down here—to rob me. Yes—I suspected my own son of that! And I came down, thinkin' to find him here—and found—"

you!"

The Kid could have groaned aloud. He could picture the feelings with

which the father, doubtful of his son, had lain wakeful through the long watches of the night. And it was Frank returning to his room that he must have heard—and he had come down—and the Kid could not tell him that he was there to replace the roll the scallywag had taken.

"What you got to say?" said the rancher harshly.

The Kid's lips moved; but he did not speak. The truth trembled on his tongue.

"Nothing?" said the rancher bitterly. "You durned lobo wolf, you got nothing to say! Listen, you skunk! I came down here, after what you let on to-day, thinking to find my son robbing me. If I'd found him, I'd have sent him to gaol, though he was ten times my son; and I guess that when he was there, I'd have blown out my brains, rather than let the Kicking Mule country point to me as a thief's father! That sure was what was in my mind."

The Kid drew a deep, deep breath.

The temptation to speak was gone now. He knew that he could not speak. The boss had been a white man to him; and it was up to the Kid to stand the racket, for the boss' sake.

"And I wronged him," said the rancher, in a trembling voice. "I wronged my boy—it was you, you scallywag, that was the thief! And I'd have trusted you with my life! I knew you was an outlaw, and I trusted you! By thunder, I don't know why I ain't shooting you up where you stand!"

"Shoot, if you want, sir!" said the Kid bitterly.

Colonel Sanderson laid the revolver on his desk.

"I ain't shooting you up," he said. "You sure deserve it a-plenty, but thief and outlaw as you are, you saved my life once from a road agent, and I ain't forgetting that."

His harsh face softened a little.

"I'll allow," he went on, "that you've tried to run straight while you've been on the Bar-One—I'll sure do you that justice. I guess you came here meaning to play a straight game."

"I sure did, sir!" muttered the Kid miserably.

The rancher nodded.

"But you couldn't stand for it, for long," he said. "That's the how of it. I guess I understand. You got tired of punching cows, and you reckoned you'd hit the outlaw trail again, and take a stake with you. I guess I understand. I ain't blaming you a whole lot—I reckon once an outlaw, always an outlaw."

The Kid said nothing.

Colonel Sanderson pointed to the window.

"You came in that way," he said. "You can go out the same way. Your cayuse is in

the corral. Take him and ride. I guess it's my duty to see the Rio Kid handed over—now I know that he never can run straight as an honest man! But you saved my life once—and I'll say that you've tried to ride a straight trail here, though you've slipped up on it at the finish! Put that roll on the table!"

The Kid obeyed.

"Now git!"

The Kid, in silence, walked to the window.

There, he paused, and turned back. Colonel Sanderson watched him with grim eyes. There was something of pain, too, in the rancher's grim face; he had liked the Kid, and trusted him, and this was a blow to the old man. The Kid's face worked.

"Boss," he said, in a low voice, "I'm going—I guess I'll be hitting the trail instanter. I want to ask you, afore I vamoose, to think of me as well as you can; and—don't tell the bunch."

The Kid's voice almost broke. Mesquite Bill, Yuba Dick, and the rest; the men he had ridden with, fed with, chummed with; to leave them thinking him an ingrate and a thief—

"I guess I ain't telling the bunch or anybody else," said the colonel. "Nobody won't ever know that the Rio Kid has been here, or what he did before he left. If you care about that, you can ride with an easy mind. Nobody's going to know this."

The Kid breathed more freely.

"I guess I thank you, sir, for that, and for all your kindness to me while I've been on the Bar-One," he said. "I guess I'll always remember you as the whitest man I ever knew. Good-bye, sir; and I hope you'll never be sorry for having been a good friend to a guy that's got a lonely trail to ride!"

He dropped from the window.

Galloping hoofs awoko echoes on the lonely prairie, far from the Bar-One ranch. The stars were paling into dawn; and Side-Kicker was still galloping, urged on by a rider whose face was pale and set.

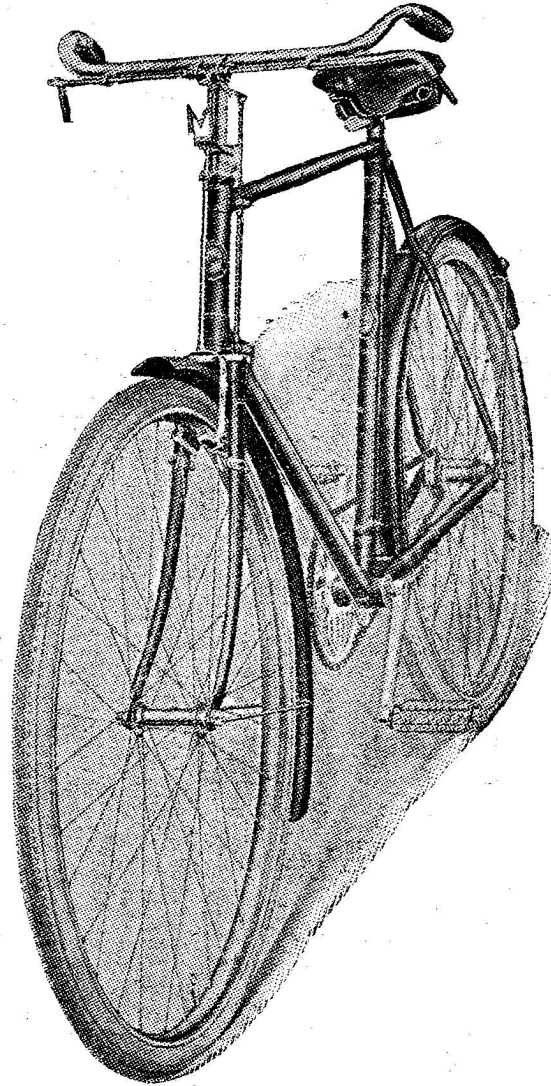
Dawn came up with a rosy flush in the sky. The Rio Kid pulled in his horse at last, on the summit of a grassy knoll, and looked back.

For some minutes the Kid sat in the saddle, looking back towards what had been home to him. Then, with set lips, he wheeled his mustang again, and rode away to the north, every stride of his steed bearing him faster and farther from the ranges of the Bar-One.

THE END.

(The Kid's on the lone trail again. After many happy weeks with the punchers of the Bar-One, Fate has stepped in and turned this young outlaw out into the plains again, amidst peril and uncertainty. But the Kid doesn't grumble, so long as he's got his six-guns and mustang. Meet him on the trail again next week.)

YOU CAN WIN ONE OF THESE BIKES!



Mead bikes are world-renowned and famous for their strength, easy running, and handsome appearance. That's why the POPULAR offers SIX of these topping machines in the "Shadographs" competition on page 2.