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YOU'LL GET ALL THE THRILLS YOU WANT ON—

The PERIL TRAIL!

By
Ralph Redway.

It takes more than a bunch of wandering Indians to get the better of the Rio Kid, Boy Outlaw!



THE FIRST CHAPTER. The Drop!

DON'T touch a gun!" It was a cool, drawing voice, almost friendly in its tones. But the Rio Kid knew that it meant business; and his hand, which had moved instinctively towards the walnut butt of a Colt, stopped. The faint rustle behind him had warned him that there was some galoot in the mesquite; but the warning voice immediately followed the rustle. And the Kid, without turning his head, knew that there was a gun looking at him.

"You get me?" went on the drawl.

"Sure!" assented the Kid, still without turning his head; and he went on coolly chewing beans and bacon.

The Kid was sitting on a log, on the edge of a patch of timber. Before him stretched the brown prairie, rolling away, ridge after ridge, towards the bluffs of the Staked Plain. On that boundless expanse, as far as the eye could reach, there was no living thing to be seen, save the Kid's mustang, grazing at a little distance. Behind him was the timber, a clump of cottonwoods and tangled pecans and mesquite.

The Kid had figured that he was alone there—he would have bet a Texas dollar to a Mexican cent that there was no human being within thirty miles of him. But the rustle in the mesquite, and the drawing voice, told a different tale.

The Kid was caught napping, there was no doubt about that. If the man in the mesquite was an enemy the Kid was at his mercy.

But the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande had been through too many dangers to raise his hair over one more. He knew that there was a gun looking

at the back of his head, within a few feet; and he went on munching his midday meal with undiminished appetite.

He heard a laugh behind him.

"You sure are a cool cuss, Kid!"

"What you calling me?" asked the Kid.

"I guess you're the Rio Kid!—I guess I knew who you was the minute I spotted that cayuse. I've sure seen him before."

"There's more'n one grey mustang in Texas, hombre," answered the Kid.

"Say, ain't you stepping out to show yourself? It sure gets my goat to hear you talking to the back of my cabeza."

"Put your hands up first, Kid!"

"How'm I to eat with my hands up, feller?"

"I guess I ain't waiting!" There was a note of menace in the voice behind the Kid.

"Anything to oblige, old-timer!" said the Kid; and he lifted his hands over his Stetson.

There was another rustle, and a foot-step, and the man came out of the mesquite, and stepped round the Kid. The boy outlaw, sitting on the log with his hands up, looked at him curiously. A hard face, with keen, watchful eyes, looked back at him—eyes as cold as ice, the eyes of a gunman.

A look of recognition dawned on the Kid's face.

"I guess I've seen you, hombre," he remarked. "I reckon I seen you shooting up the town at Packsaddle once on a time. You're Slick Singer, the gunman!"

The cold, hard eyes searched the Kid's face.

"I guess I wasn't mistaken," said the gunman. "I knowed that cayuse of yours when I saw him from the timber.

And, now I get a look at you, I know you, Kid! Keep 'em up!"

"What's the big idea?" yawned the Kid. "You aiming to handle the thousand dollars they're offering for me at Frio?"

"I guess it would be easy money if I was!" grinned Singer.

"Mebbe," said the Kid, "and mebbe not! It's a long step from the Staked Plain to Frio, feller. You sure got the drop on me now, and I ain't arguing none with a six-gun. Your call, pardner."

"Keep 'em up!" repeated the gunman. "I guess I know how quick you are on the draw, Kid; but if you touch a gun it's the last thing you'll do this side of the big divide."

"You've said it!" agreed the Kid. Keeping his six-gun aimed at the Kid's face, Singer stepped towards him, and drew the two long-barrelled, walnut-butted Colts from the Kid's holsters.

He tossed them into the grass a few yards away.

The Kid smiled.

"Feelin' safer now, feller?" he asked amicably.

"A whole lot!" assented Slick Singer. "You're too mighty sudden on the shoot to please me, Kid. I guess we can talk turkey without your guns handy. You can get on with your feed."

The Kid dropped his hands, and resumed eating beans and bacon. Slick Singer sat on a fallen trunk, a couple of yards from the Kid, and lowered the six-gun to his knee. But the muzzle was still trained on the disarmed Kid.

"You don't want to worry none, Kid," he said. "I ain't aiming to rope you on your cayuse and tote you into town. I ain't aiming to shoot you up. I guess I've taken away your hardware because you're too mighty sudden with a gun. Say, what you doin' in this country?"

"Jest taking a pascare around," answered the Kid. "There's places in Texas where I ain't popular, feller. There's some sheriffs mighty anxious to see me, but I ain't honing to see them a whole lot."

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Singer grinned.

"I guess you ain't been heard of for a long time, Kid. You've been lying doggo?"

"Jest that!" agreed the Kid.

His face clouded for a moment as his thoughts went back to happy days on the Bar-One. But the Bar-One and the Bar-One bunch were far from the Rio Kid now. It had been a happy interlude, that was all; and once more the boy outlaw was riding a lonely trail.

"And what you doing here?" he asked in his turn. "You ain't a galoot for prairie trails. But you look like you been hitting the trail hard."

His eyes ran curiously over the gunman. Singer was in riding clothes, well-out; but they were torn and dusty from a long trail. The Kid grinned. "You been handling a gun too free over a poker game and had to hit the horizon sudden?" he asked.

"Not any!" answered the gunman. "I guess I'm on a trail, but I ain't had to run, Kid." He made a gesture towards the high bluffs of the Staked Plain in the distance. "That's my trail—but I ain't running. And I guess you're trailing with me, Kid."

"Sho!" said the Kid in surprise. "I guess you're the guy to help me out," said Singer. "Like you said, I ain't a galoot for prairie trails. If it was a game of poker or euchre, I guess I could lay over any guy in Texas. But trailing in the Staked Plain is sure another game."

"It sure is," assented the Kid. "But if you ain't running from a looped rope what you want in the Staked Plain?"

"Looking for a guy!" said the gunman laconically.

"And you want me to help?"

Singer nodded. "I guess the minute I knowed it was you, sitting here chawing beans, I got the big idea," he said. "You're jest the guy I want to help, Kid—and I reckon you ain't refusing." He made a motion with the six-gun and grinned. "We're going to work in cahoots, Kid. You're the man I want."

"You dog-goned gun-slinger!" said the Kid. "If you're looking for a guy to shoot him up, you ain't getting any help from me!"

"I ain't said that I was goin' to shoot up any guy—I said I was looking for one!" said Singer. "Keep cool, hombre. I guess we're going to talk turkey."

"I guess I ain't talking turkey to a galoot with a gun in his grip! If you got a proposition to put up, put your hardware away!"

"Look here, Kid—" "Aw, can it!" said the Kid. "You ain't the kinder galoot I can work in cahoots with, Slick Singer. You're a bad egg, I guess—and I ain't got no use for you! Forget it!"

The gunman's eyes glistened. "You don't want to hear what I got to spill?" he asked.

"I sure don't."

"I guess a thousand dollars would come in useful, if I walked you into town for the reward!" said the gunman. "You want to talk civil, Kid—I've got you where I want you."

He made a motion with the six-gun again. Under the tin plate on his knees, the Kid's hand had slipped into the pocket of his chaps.

"Don't lift that gun, hombre!" said the Kid quietly. "I got you covered from my pocket, and I've had you covered whole minutes while you was slinging you chin. If you lift that gun

off'n your knee, Slick Slinger, I guess—"

The gunman, with a startled curse, swung up the gun. At the same instant, there came a crack from the hidden derringer in the pocket of the Kid's chaparejos, and Slick Slinger, with a shriek, rolled backwards over the trunk where he sat, and pitched heavily into the grass.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Upper Hand!

SLICK SINGER sat up dizzily, and passed his hand across his head. His fingers came away wet and red. His dazed eyes turned on a calm figure seated on a log near at hand, and met the smiling glance of the Rio Kid. For a long minute, the gunman stared at him in dazed silence, while his wits slowly came back to him. The Kid was clearing the tin plate of beans, finishing his interrupted meal. Slick Singer's hand went to his belt, but there was nothing there for him to draw. His gun and his knife lay in the grass at the Kid's feet, and the Kid's own guns were in the boy-outlaw's holsters again. The tables had been turned—the Kid was armed, and the gunman from Packsaddle was unarmed—and he was at the mercy of the outlaw puncher whom he had threatened. The bitter rage and chagrin in his face made the Kid smile.

"You feel like a mule had kicked your cabeza?" asked the Kid, as the gunman passed his hand over his head again and groaned. "You want to feel pleased that I didn't drive that pill right through it, instead of clipping off'n a lock of your hair and plugging a hole through your Stetson. I guess you got off cheap after crowding me like you was doing, Slick."

"You—you creased me, you dog-goned cow-wrangler," snarled Singer.

The Kid nodded.

"Yep; just like you was an ornery steer that wouldn't come to the rope," he assented cheerfully. "Next time you crowd me, and take off my hardware, Slick, you want to remember that I pack a leetle gun in my chaps, and that I can shoot from the pocket, jest as easy as you can draw a bead with a six-gun in the open. Dog-gone you, ain't you never heard that the Rio Kid is no slouch on the shoot, Slick?"

Slick Singer sat where he was, passing his hand again and again over his head. There was a bitter ache in his head, but he knew now that the damage was slight.

"You ain't hurt a heap, feller," said the Kid good-humouredly. "You got off cheap. A guy flourishin' a six-gun around me, don't always get off with a scrape on his scalp. No, sir! I guess you was lucky, not to get fixed for a front seat in a funeral."

The gunman gritted his teeth.

"I reckon I was a bonehead not to let daylight through you when I had the drop!" he snarled.

"Aw, what would that buy you?" said the Kid. "I could let daylight through you now, if I wanted, and I ain't making a hole through your carcass. What's your grouch agin me? If I'm an outlaw, you're a gunman—and I guess Texas would be better off to lose you than to lose me, Slick. You're a darned lobo-wolf and it sure will do you good to get your teeth drawn a few."

The Kid finished his beans. He rose from the log and yawned. The cold, glinting eyes of the gunman watched him.

"I reckon you've got a cayuse in the

timber here somewheres," the Kid remarked.

"Yep!" grunted Singer.

"I ain't hurrying you none, seeing you've got a pain in your roof," grinned the Kid, "but you're going to mount and hit the trail soon, Slick. I want to see the last of you. Where's your cayuse?"

"Jest back in the timber on a trail-roppe," said the gunman sullenly. "You ain't come down to stealin' a hoss, Kid?"

The Kid laughed.

"Not any! I guess I'll get him for you, while you nurse your cabeza! I sure want to see the last of you."

The Kid picked up the revolver and knife he had taken from the gunman, and slipped them into a pocket. He had already run the rule over the hard-eyed man from Packsaddle, while he lay senseless, to search for hidden weapons. He turned towards the timber.

"Say, you don't want to trouble," muttered Singer. He staggered to his feet, his face white, and streaked with the blood that ran down under his hair, "I guess I can get that hoss."

"I want to smile!" chuckled the Kid. "I guess you could get the hoss, Slick, likewise the rifle that I reckon you'd be carrying on the saddle. But you ain't taking no pot-shots at me with a rifle, hombre. I reckoned I'd have to wipe you out next time, and I ain't honing to spill your juice. You stick where you are till you see me again."

And the Kid went into the timber, the gunman scowling blackly after him as he went.

He came back in a few minutes, leading a dark chestnut cow-pony by a length of trail-rope. As the Kid had surmised, there was a rifle packed in the leather scabbard strapped to the saddle.

Slick Singer was seated on the log now, still rubbing his aching head. The Kid gave him a smile.

"Here's your cayuse, feller! You feel like hitting the trail?"

"Nopel!" growled Singer. "I was camped for noon in this timber when you horned in, and I guess I ain't in a hurry to move."

"Jest as you like," assented the Kid. "But if you stay on, Slick, I'm sure taking your guns along with me. I ain't honing to get a ball in the back of my head when I ride."

The gunman scowled.

"I'll ride as soon as you like," he grunted. "Anyhow, I guess I want to hit the Staked Plain before sundown."

"Git on your cayuse, then," said the Kid.

Singer mounted the cow-pony. The Kid coolly returned the revolver and the knife to the gunman's belt. But a long-barrelled Colt was in his own hand now, and the gunman did not need telling that if he touched a weapon, it would be his last act on this earth. He was scowling blackly, but there was an amused smile on the face of the Kid.

"You want to hit the trail without looking back, feller," said the Kid. "I'd hate to take a man's guns away in this section, but if you aim to use a gun on this baby, you want to be slick about it, I'll sure get you. Now you want to travel."

"You ain't hearing that proposition I was goin' to put up to you?" muttered the gunman.

"It don't interest me a lot."

The gunman gritted his teeth. He gave the Kid a long, black, vengeful look, and then touched his horse with the spur, and rode away into the prairie,

He rode at a gallop in the direction of the high, steep bluffs that marked the edge of the Staked Plain.

The Kid stood and looked after him, the gun still in his hand.

If Slick Singer, at a distance, had turned to try his luck again, with revolver or rifle, the Kid was ready for him. But the gunman from Packsaddle had had enough of the Rio Kid's shooting.

He rode on without even turning his head, hitting in a direct line for the distant bluffs.

In a few minutes the horseman was small in the distance, and at length he

mustang loped on into the trackless waste, under the slanting rays of the sun sinking towards the sierras of New Mexico.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
The Navajos!

"I NJUNS!" grunted the Kid. He stood by the water-hole, where his mustang was drinking, and listened to the gunfire that came to his ears from the distance. Shot after shot echoed on the wind, and, with the shooting came a shrill, ringing yell, only too well known to the Kid's ears.

Shot after shot, rolling from the distance, and again a yell on the wind. The water-hole was near the mouth of a deep, wide barranca that rived the plain, piled with rugged rocks on either side. And it was from the winding barranca that the sounds of warfare came. The thought crossed the Kid's mind that his old pardner, Chief Many Ponies, and his mob of ragged outcasts, might be mixed up in the trouble that was going on along the barranca. But as he listened to the yelling he was relieved. It was not an Apache yell that he heard.

"Navajo!" said the Kid, speaking to the grey mustang, as was his habit. "Some gang of thief Navajos, old hoss, and I guess we ain't hornin' into the trouble—you and me. I guess we're hitting the back trail away from that pesky barranca, old hoss, and leaving them to it."

Side-Kicker lifted his head from the water.

The Kid had filled his can, and slung it to his saddle. It was in his mind to mount and ride, and keep clear of



The Kid went on eating his food, knowing full well that a revolver was being pointed at his back. "Don't touch a gun!" came a quiet voice from the trees.

was lost to view in the waving grass, against the bluffs that barred the skyline.

The Kid returned his gun to the holster.

With a thoughtful shade on his brow the boy outlaw packed his camp fixings and walked over to the grey mustang. He mounted Side-Kicker and rode away from the timber, at an easy pace. His own destination was the high table-land of the Staked Plain; but he followed a direction that would hit the line of bluffs, at a considerable distance farther west than the spot for which Slick Singer had headed. The Kid did not want to fall in with the gunman again.

By a dry gully that split the side of the table-land, where in the rainy season a torrent roared down to the lower plains, the Kid rode up to the higher level, loose stones clinking from the mustang's hoofs as he clambered.

He came out on the summit of the great mesa at last, and pulled in his mustang to look around him.

Flat and arid, broken here and there by arroyo and barranca, the surface of the Llano Estacado stretched before him, and in the clear air the Kid could see a great distance. But he could see no sign of Slick Singer, and he reckoned that he was done with the gunman of Packsaddle.

"Beat it, old hoss," said the Kid, shaking out his reins, and the grey

It was the Kid's third day in the lonely wastes of the Staked Plain. For three days the Kid had not seen a soul, or the trail of horse or man.

But the solitude pleased the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande. It was to seek solitude that he had left the lower plains, and turned his back on the cow country. Since he had left the Bar-One Ranch the Kid had been at a loose end, careless whither he rode. In the Kicking Mule country he had been free, for a time, from the pursuit that constantly dogged his steps; but Fate had driven him forth once more from that happy refuge. The Kid reckoned on lying doggo for a time in the solitudes of the Staked Plain, where no sheriff or town marshal was likely to ride. And he reckoned, too, that by chance he might fall in with his old acquaintance, Chief Many Ponies, the derelict Apache.

But the sound of gunfire, and the yell of a Redskin did not please the Kid's ears. He would have liked to meet up again with Chief Many Ponies, but he did not want to fall in with any of the wandering gangs of Apaches and Navajos, outcasts from the reservations, who haunted the inaccessible recesses of the Staked Plain. Thieves, every man of them, ragged and savage and merciless, they would have shot him down for his horse and his guns without scruple. And the Kid was not looking for such unprofitable trouble.

the trouble. A rookus between two gangs of outcast Redskins was no business of his, and he had no desire to get mixed up in it. But he paused and listened. The yell that came to his ears was a Navajo yell; he knew that. But if the Navajos were in conflict with some rival gang of Apache or Yaqui, the Kid reckoned that the other side would be yelling, too. But from the other side there came no sound.

"Old hoss," grunted the Kid, "them Reds is aiming to cinch a white man. That's the how of it."

To ride away and leave a white man fighting for his life among a gang of outcast Redskins was not the Kid's way. The call of the race was too strong for that.

The Kid grunted discontentedly while he was taking the rifle from the leather case at his saddle, and examining it. He had ridden into the desert to lie doggo, but it seemed to be his fate to hit trouble wherever he rode. But though he frowned he did not hesitate. Leaving Side-Kicker by the water-hole, the Kid trod on foot into the barranca, his rifle under his arm, silent, cautious, prepared to ascertain what was going on before he chipped in; but prepared to chip in if his help was wanted by some white man cornered by the Redskins.

Shot after shot was ringing, and he could hear the spattering of lead on the rocks of the barranca. The great rift in the plain wound before him, and he could not see more than a dozen yards ahead at any moment. A louder yell from the Redskins showed that he was drawing near to the scene of the trouble. On either side of the Kid the steep walls of rock and sun-baked earth and sand rose to a height of sixty or

seventy feet, and the ground was strewn with massive, rugged boulders. There was ample cover for the Kid as he advanced, and he took advantage of it. Silent as a creeping Indian he reached a bend in the winding rift, and looked beyond it, and came in sight of the "trouble."

Five Redskins in ragged leggings and blankets, with dragged feathers in their tousled, matted hair, were within thirty feet of him. The black and white on their blankets would have told the Kid that they were Navajos, if he had not known it already. And a dirtier, raggeder crew of outcasts the Kid had never seen—evidently a gang that had long been wandering in the desert since they had broken out of some reservation in New Mexico. They were crouching in cover of rocks and ridges, their rifles and their fierce, black eyes turned upon a rocky ledge high up the side of the barranca, where the Kid guessed at once their intended victim had taken refuge. As the Kid looked on there came a shot from the ledge, spattering down among the rocks where the Redskins crouched.

It was answered by a burst of fire from the Navajos, and a savage yell. Lead spattered over the face of the rocks round the ledge.

But the ledge was twenty feet above the ground, and the man there was crouching low, and he was not easy to reach with a bullet from below. And his enemies could not clamber up to him without exposing themselves to his fire.

The Kid, looking on and coolly sizing up the situation, reckoned that the white man could hold that position as long as he liked, unless he was struck by a chance shot ricocheting from the rocky wall above the ledge. But he could not have got away—that was another matter. The gang below had only to wait.

At a little distance from the Redskins, among the rocks, the Kid detected a bunch of tethered shaggy ponies; and he started a little as he saw a handsome chestnut cow-pony tied up with the shaggy, ragged horses of the Redskins. He knew Slick Singer's cayuse at a glance.

"By the great horned toad," muttered the Kid, "it's sure that pesky gunman from Packsaddle that's horned into that wasp's-nest!"

There was no doubt of it. The man crouching on the rocky ledge high up the side of the barranca was the gunman whom the Kid had met on the plains three days before. He was fated, after all, to meet up with Slick Singer again.

The Kid figured that Singer had been camping in the barranca, and that the gang of thief-Navajos had come on him suddenly; he had gained the ledge, and was holding them off. But they had got his camp and his horse, and now they wanted his scalp.

The Kid made no sound, and the Redskins did not glance round in his direction. Few white men rode the lonely ways of the Llano Estacado, and the Redskins did not imagine that another paleface was on hand.

Another shot came from the ledge, spattering harmlessly among the rocks; and another burst of fire from the Navajos answered it.

There was a sharp cry from the ledge, and for a moment a Stetson hat rose into view; the man had been touched by a ball glancing on the rocky wall behind him.

One of the Redskins, prompt to take advantage of the chance, fired again, THE POPULAR.—No. 534.

and there was another cry. The Stetson hat disappeared, and over the edge of the rocky ledge a rifle came clattering down.

A yell of savage delight broke from the five savages. The white man above was wounded, and he had dropped his rifle as he was struck, and that was enough for the copper-skinned outcasts.

Yelling like demons, they broke cover and raced for the steep side of the barranca, to clamber up to the ledge.

The Kid's rifle leaped to his shoulder. In a minute or less, now that there was no fire from above, the Navajos would have reached the ledge, and Slick Singer would have been a dead man. The Kid was not standing for that.

Crack, crack! rang his rifle, and two of the clambering Navajos screamed and rolled down the rocks.

The other three stopped their rush, glaring round with wild rolling eyes, startled and unnerved by the sudden attack in the rear.

Crack, crack came ringing from the Kid's rifle.

He was not shooting to kill. A marksman like the Kid could have potted the Redskins like so many prairie rabbits as they stood exposed to his fire, but the Kid hated to wipe out even a thief-Redskin if he could help it. But every bullet struck an arm or a leg, and almost in as many seconds four of the gang were rolling down the rocks, shrieking; and the fifth yelling with terror, made a frantic rush for the spot where the horses were tied, dragged a pony loose, and threw himself across it and rode madly up the barranca to escape.

The Kid, grinning, pitched lead after him, shooting the dragged feathers from his head-dress till the Navajo vanished with a thunder of hoofs and wild yells of fear.

"Aw, beat it, you dog-goned coyotes!" roared the Kid, as he reloaded his rifle. "Say, you want to beat it pronto, or you're sure for the happy hunting grounds! Beat it, you pesky gophers!"

But the four wounded Navajos did not need telling to beat it. They scrambled and staggered to their horses, dragged themselves on the shaggy backs, and rode the way their comrade had gone, the Kid, laughing, shooting away their feathers till they vanished. The thunder of hoofs and the terrified yells of the outcast Redskins died away up the barranca.

The Kid stepped out from the rocks and looked up at the ledge.

"Say feller," he called out, "I guess you're all O.K. now! Show yourself, hombre, if you ain't got your ticket for soup!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Friend in Need!

HERE came no reply to the Rio Kid's call.

He waited, but only the echo of his shout answered him from the rocky walls of the barranca.

From the man lying on the ledge came no sound or sign.

The Kid whistled.

"By the great horned toad, that gun-slinger galoot sure has got his!" he murmured.

And the Kid clambered actively up the rocky ascent to the ledge twenty feet above. He reached it swiftly.

Slick Singer, the gunman, lay stretched there motionless. There was a revolver in his hand, which he had drawn after his rifle dropped, but the effort had been his last. He lay senseless on the rock.

"Aw, great snakes!" grunted the Kid,

He dropped on his knees on the narrow ledge. With swift fingers he examined the gunman's wound. The bullet had passed through his shoulder, and there was a thick effusion of blood. Without help Slick Singer would have perished from loss of blood where he lay, but there was help for him now.

The Kid's wild life had taught him a rough surgery; Singer was not the first "winged" galoot that the boy puncher had tended. He staunch the wound, bound it with strips from the gunman's flannel shirt, and then, lifting the heavy, inert body, carried Singer down the rocks to the floor of the barranca.

A long, shrill whistle from the Kid brought Side-Kicker trotting along the barranca. From his slicker pack the Kid took bandages; with water from his can he washed the wound, and then bandaged it more scientifically.

All the time the gunman lay unconscious, his hard face colourless, his hard eyes closed.

His work done—all that he could do—the Kid stood up and regarded Slick Singer, with a perplexed and frowning brow.

He had refused to ride in company with the gun-slinger of Packsaddle, but he had the man on his hands now. The wound was bad enough, but Singer only required care to recover from it. But there was no one to give him care but the Rio Kid; to leave him was to leave him to his death.

"Aw, it sure does get my goat!" growled the Kid. "You durned, dog-goned bonehead, you, why can't you mind your own pesky business and keep from hornin' into another guy's troubles? That pesky gun-slinger's life ain't worth a Continental red cent, and I reckon there's more'n one guy in Texas would be mighty pleased to hear that he'd gone over the range. And now you got him to tend, you ornery gunk, you!"

But, though the Kid grumbled at himself, it made no difference to his intentions. He could not leave the gunman to his fate.

Slick singer's eyes opened at last. He stared round him wildly, and his hand tumbled feebly at his belt.

The Kid grinned.

"Say, feller, you ain't wanting a gun," he said. "This here baby ain't a Redskin. Don't you know me, you geek?"

Singer blinked at him dizzily. "The Kid!" he muttered.

"Jest that guy!" said the Kid cheerily. "And mighty lucky for you I was ridin' this way, hombre!"

The gunman's dizzy glance wandered round him.

"They're gone," said the Kid. "I guess they lit out like they was sent for—and they sure took suthin' along to remember me by. Them Reds is powerful sorry for themselves by this time!"

"They—they caught me by surprise," muttered the gunman. "They came on me camping—durn their copper hides—and I had jest time to grab a rifle and get on the ledge. I reckoned I was a gone coon."

"And you was if I hadn't horned in," said the Kid. "Didn't I tell you you was no use for ridin' trails in the Staked Plain, you bonehead? You're a big chief, Slick, in a rookus in a poker joint in a cow town with a six-gun on your hand, but you ain't the goods for Injun fighting in the desert. You want to hit it for home as soon as you can ride."

The gunman shook his head feebly. "Aw, I'll say you're a durned ornery
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THE RIDDLE OF THE BAMBOO RODS!

(Continued from page 27.)

Taro's broad, pock-marked face turned to Drake, and he shook his head. "They no wake up for three, four week yet," he said. "That why my master, the baron, send me off quick. When they wake up they eat way through the end of bamboo and fly off."

Locke beckoned to Drake and Begg to draw nearer to the desk; then Taro, having told his tale, leaned back in the armchair with a phlegmatic, blank expression on his face.

"I am assured that this chap is telling me the absolute truth," the Baker Street detective said. "And the senator's half-lying story to me rather bears it out. He did mention about the West Indies and Jamaica, and that was enough to carry his bluff through if anyone recognised him."

"I also thought from the outset that he was much more eager to get in touch with Taro than to avenge the death of his partner, although he made a great display of grief."

"In fact, I was rather sorry, Drake, you gave it away that you knew where Taro was living; but, as it happened, it worked out all right, for I went to the trouble to telephone a message to Begg here, asking him to get down to the Warmborough Hotel at once."

"He had to find out Taro's room and wait there. I suspected from the outset that it was the Jap who had taken that single piece of bamboo-cane, and as soon as I had clapped eyes on the senator I felt absolutely certain that he was the man who had a tussle with Begg in that car. He was bearing evidences of the conflict, and his description was near enough to that which you gave me."

Listening to Ferrers Locke's quiet explanation, the matter seemed simple enough now, but Humble Begg spoke in his dry, quiet way.

"I don't suppose many men would have reason to doubt your story, my dear Locke," he said. "In any case, I am very glad that you have cleared up this affair, so far as the hostel is concerned."

They spoke together for a few moments longer, then Humble Begg arose to his feet.

"What do you intend to do now, Locke?" he asked.

"Deliver this stick of bamboo into the rightful hands," said the detective quietly. "Senator Raphaelo certainly has given cause for punishment at my hands; but"—and here Locke's eyes twinkled—"the man has failed in his object. We hold the queen wasp, the breeder. When this is taken over to the plantation, and set free, what will happen? Lincoln's place will be freed from the pest, and he will then be able to set to work to rebuild that which he has lost. Raphaelo has lost his partner, and he has so implicated himself with things over here that I doubt whether he will show up on his island. At all events, we can be assured now, with Lincoln coming to collect this bamboo rod, and sufficient protection, Raphaelo's game is lost."

And so it proved.

The next day the valuable bamboo rod was handed over to Lincoln, who turned up, after a delay on the ship. When he had heard of Ferrers Locke's work in the case there was no doubt about his gratification. He owed his all to the famous detective, and he was not slow in saying so. What became of Senator Raphaelo no one ever knew. He vanished, as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up, which was just as well for that unpleasant gentleman. And so ended another great triumph for Ferrers Locke, detective.

THE END.

(Another detective-thriller next week, chums — "THE THIEF!" Starring Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake in dramatic adventures and sinister mysteries.)

THE PERIL TRAIL!

(Continued from page 6.)

"gink!" exclaimed the Kid impatiently. "What you want gunning around in the desert?"

"I told you—I'm looking for a guy I—"

"You won't find nothing in the Staked Plain, except turkey buzzards—and you'll sure give them their next meal if you don't watch out!" growled the Kid. "Say, you figure you can sit on a cayuse? I guess them Reds lit out in a hurry, and you sure couldn't see their heels for dust. But they're likely to have friends around; and we don't want to wait here till they come back with the whole pesky family to raise our scalps. I guess we got to hit the trail pronto, or else hit Jordan!"

He fetched the chestnut cow-pony to the spot and lifted the wounded gunman to the saddle. Slick Singer swayed there; his eyes half-closed.

"You got to hang on!" said the Kid.

"I guess I can hang on," muttered Singer.

The Kid mounted Side-Kicker, and took the reins of the chestnut. He rode down the barranca, leading the gunman's horse,

"He rode out of the barranca to the sandy plain above, and struck across the plain at a rapid trot. By his side the gunman rode, clinging to the saddle, a helpless burden on the Kid's hands. And the Kid wondered discontentedly what was going to be the end of that wild adventure in the desert of the Staked Plain.

THE END.

"THE PRISONER OF THE LOST VALLEY!" is the title of next week's roaring Western yarn, featuring the Rio Kid, Boy Outlaw!



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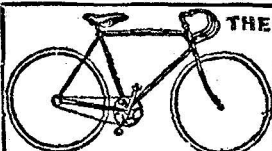
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