

# The POPULAR

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Week Ending  
April 12th,  
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No. 585.  
(New Series).

EVERY  
TUESDAY.



MEET THE BOYS WITH THE FIVE-MILE SMILES TO-DAY!

*Grand Series of Rib-cracking School Yarns Starts Inside!*

MISSING HEIR TO A HUGE FORTUNE!

# The Prisoner of the Lost Valley!

By Ralph Redway.



## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

### The Quest in the Staked Plain!

**T**HE Rio Kid came down the rugged slope into the arroyo, with an antelope slung over his shoulder. The sun, slanting westward to the sierras of New Mexico, burned hot on the arid surface of the Staked Plain. But in the deep arroyo, where a tiny stream trickled among the rocks, it was cool and shady. On a little path of vegetation beside the stream, two horses were feeding; the Kid's grey mustang, and the chestnut cow-pony that belonged to his companion. Near them, on his blankets, lay Slick Singer, the gunman of Pack-saddle; and the gunman's hand went instantly to his rifle at the sound of footsteps. But he relinquished the weapon at the sight of the Stetson hat and goatskin chaps of the Kid.

The Kid tramped up, and tossed down his burden in the grass.

"I've sure brought in some supper," he remarked. "But we ain't starting a fire till sundown; I guess the smoke would put the Injuns wise for ten miles around."

"We been here a week," said the gunman, "and we ain't seen hide nor hair of Injuns, Kid."

The Kid grunted.

"I guess them guys is likely to show up just when they ain't expected," he answered. "We're a hundred miles from a white man hyer, feller; but I guess we ain't one mile from some gang of Apaches or Yaqui."

The Kid sat down on a boulder. The gunman stretched himself on the blankets again, his eyes on the Kid's sombre face. The Kid was silent for a few minutes, and when he spoke at last, it was abruptly.

"Say, we been here a week, like you allowed," he said. "I guess you're mended now, hombre. You can sure sit a cayuse to-morrow."

Singer nodded.

"You got over your wound," said the Kid. "I guess I wasn't going to leave you on your lonesome, so long as you couldn't kick. But you're mended now, and you can ride. I reckon we break

camp at sun-up to-morrow. And we sure ride different trails."

"You ain't honing for my company, Kid?" said the gunman, with a sneer.

"You've said it; I sure ain't," said the Kid. "It beats me to a frazzle what you honed into the Staked Plain for; it ain't no place for a poker sharp and a gun-slinger like you, feller. I guess I wasn't going to let them Nevajos chaw you up, and I couldn't quit so long as you was on your back; but now—I guess we ride different trails to-morrow."

He paused.

"I ain't getting back into Texas," he went on. "There's a bunch of rangers looking for me, and I ain't honing to meet up with them any. But I guess I'll guide you back to the cow country."

## THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW, GALLOPS HEAD-FIRST INTO ANOTHER BREATH- TAKING ADVENTURE THIS WEEK!

if you want, and see you safe. You want to hit for home, feller."

"I ain't hitting for home," said the gunman. "You can quit if you like, Kid; I ain't got no kick coming, if you quit. But I got to find a guy afore I ride out of the Llano Estacado."

The Kid's expression was uneasy.

"I sure asked you to trail with me, Kid," said Singer.

"I ain't trailing with you," growled the Kid. "You ain't the heft of galoot I can trail with, and I don't trust you worth a continental red cent. I guess you got some gun-game on, though I ain't wise to it. You're a bad egg, Slick Singer."

"Mebbe—and you sure are mighty particular for an outlaw that's wanted by half the sheriffs in Texas!" sneered the gunman.

The Kid's brows knitted.

"You don't want to talk that-a-way," he said. "You want to keep a bride on your rag, feller, if you want to keep healthy."

"Don't get mad, Kid," said Singer, amicably. "I reckon if you knowed what I was after in the Staked Plain, you'd help me out."

"That ain't likely," said the Kid. "I don't know what you're after, but I reckon its suthin' low-down. You ain't the critter to run straight on any trail, Slick Singer, and I'm telling you so. And if you don't cotton to that, you pack a gun, and I guess you're mended enough to use it."

The gunman's eyes glittered.

"I've horned into the Staked Plain to find a guy, like I told you way back on the prairie," he said.

"Some guy that you aim to shoot up, I guess," snapped the Kid, "and I ain't the rube to help you get him."

"Dog-gone you, let a galoot speak. It's a kid."

"A kid?" repeated the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande.

"Jest a kid—rising fifteen," said Singer. "You don't reckon I'm aiming to shoot up a boy, I guess."

"Carry me home to die!" said the Kid, in astonishment. "You want me to believe that there's a boy of fifteen loose around in the Staked Plain, and you're aiming to find him and tote him home? Make it an easier one."

"It's the truth."

"Sho!" said the Kid.

"And he's a relation of mine—sort of second cousin," said the gunman. "My cousin, Buck Singer, hit the Staked Plain years ago—he had to get out of Texas for his health. He shot up a man in a rookus back at San Antonio. He was killed in the Staked Plain by a gang of Yaqui; but he had a pard who got away, and that guy,

allowed that the Injuns kept the boy a prisoner. That was five years ago."

The Kid eyed the gunman of Packsaddle. He had wondered a good deal what brought Slick Singer into the desert.

"I sure ain't surprised none, to hear that a relation of yours had to hit the horizon for shooting up a guy," he said. "That sounds the true stuff. And he brought his son with him to this desert."

"He sure did—a kid of ten at that time," said Singer. "His father, one of the biggest ranchers in the San Antonio country, washed him out, and never wanted to hear of him or the boy again. But the old man's dead now; and if Buck Singer was alive, he'd walk into a big ranch at San Antonio, and fifty thousand dollars in the bank. And Buck being wiped out by the Yaqui, his boy Dick will walk into the Singer fortune—if he's found."

"Sho!" repeated the Kid. "That's what I got to find out," went on Singer. "If the boy's dead, like his father, I want to know; and if he's alive, I guess I'm toting him home to San Antonio to step into his fortune. That's how it stands."

The Rio Kid whistled. "And where do you come in?" he demanded. "This kid, Dick Singer, may be your own flesh and blood; but you ain't the guy to horn into a hornet's nest of Redskin jest for that. You better put your cards on the table, feller!"

The gunman grinned. "I guess I can, in if I find the boy," he answered. "He will sure be good to the cousin that found him, and made him a rich man. He will have pockets full of dollars when he's back at San Antonio, and I guess he won't be ungrateful."

"That's a cinch, I reckon," said the Kid, with a nod.

There was a silence. "I sure did not figure it was that-a-way," said the Kid at last slowly. "I guess I don't aim to touch any of the boy's dollars; but I'll sure do my darndest to get him away from the Yaqui, if they've got him. I sure will! And I reckon I'm the man you want for this hyer trail. I've ridden the Staked Plain before, a whole lot of times, and there ain't a lot of it I don't know. There's a camp of Yaqui on Windy Creek—located in a valley, with dry desert round it for miles, and I guess mighty few white men have been there and got away alive. I guess—"

"You've said it, Kid!" exclaimed Slick Singer eagerly. "Buck's party was heading to Windy Creek when they was wiped out five years ago by the Yaqui. Buck had heard that there was gold in the creek—"

"There sure is, if a guy had a chance of washing it out," said the Kid. "But them Yaqui is pizen. And for miles round that valley there's nothing but dry desert and rattlesnakes and tarantulas. I guess they'd be likely to take a boy prisoner, and adopt him into the tribe, because that's an Injun custom; but I reckon any man gettins near that valley is apt to find a front seat in a funeral."

"That cuts no ice with me," said Singer, "and I guess it cuts less with you, Kid."

"Correct!" said the Kid. "Feller, if I'd knowed this was your game, I'd have rode with you when you asked me. You can sure count me in."

The gunman held out his hand. "Snake on it, Kid," he said.

And the Rio Kid, after a second's hesitation, shook on it.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.  
The Yaqui!

SAGE brush and burning sun—sand flies and prickly bush, and a hot wind that was like the breath of a furnace. For days, long, weary days, the Kid and his companion had been struggling in the desert, in an arid, thirsty land, tenanted by no living thing but crawling lizards and deadly tarantulas.

The Kid had ridden the desert before; in the great desert of Arizona, in the thirsty region of Sonora he had ridden; but he had never struck a harder country than this in the heart of the Staked Plain. It was a remote region, far from the settlements that were creeping into the Juano Estacado, abandoned to the serpent and the vulture. Water-holes were few, and hard to find, and never a track of a man or a horse met the eye.

But sometimes, from the dreary sage, a white skull grinned, sometimes dry bones cracked under the hoofs. Men had been that way before, looking for pay-dirt, and they had left their bones in the desert; victims of the wandering gangs of Apaches or Yaqui, or of hunger and thirst.

The Kid had set his hand to the task, and he did not figure on turning back, and the gunman of Packsaddle showed a grim determination that rather sur-

prised the Kid. Without the Kid's aid and guidance, the gunman would never have struggled through the dry desert alive, and the hardships told more on him than on the hardy Kid. But he never flattered, or gave a thought to turning back. And it puzzled the Kid.

He had joined up in cahoots with Slick Singer to find the boy who, if he yet lived, was lost among the Yaqui. That was the kind of thing the Kid was likely to do. But it was not in Slick Singer's line by a whole lot. No doubt he hoped that his relative would be, as he expressed it, "good" to him when he was restored to freedom and fortune. But that seemed to the Kid a slight motive, for the danger and privation, the wearing fatigue, that the poker sharp of Packsaddle was facing undimly. There were easier ways of making money for a galoot like Slick Singer.

Still, there it was. Singer was seeking the boy, and the Kid was helping him. If the man had some secret motive, beyond what he had told the Kid, it remained a mystery.

The Kid was the guide in this journey through the dry desert. He knew the Staked Plain, and he had heard of the camp of the Yaqui at Windy Creek from talk among the Apaches. Of its location he was not certain. All he knew was that it was

(Continued on next page.)

Get ready to cheer the

RIVAL BLUES!

Banter and Facts about the Great Boat Race!



On Saturday next, the 12th, there will be enough breath expended—in shouts and yells of encouragement—on the banks of the Thames, between Putney and Mortlake to blow the giant airship R100 six miles out of her course, if she happens to be about!

At the first Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race which took place at Henley-on-Thames, in 1829, there was a yelling crowd of 20,000. At that time there were no railways south of York shire, so all things considered that was a jolly fine attendance. With aeroplanes, motor buses and cars, motor bikes, push bikes, speed-boats, tube railways, and coolers to help folk foregather at this year's scene of strife there should be sufficient lookers-on to develop the necessary combined lung-power for the feat above-mentioned.

The total cost of the Boat Race is about £2,000. Translate that into penny buns—something short of half a million if you had some thrown in at make-weight, for buying in bulk—and heap them up in the Thames along the course, and there'd be such a stoppage of traffic that—oh, well, finish working it out for yourselves!

They rowed the Centenary Boat Race last year—the eighty-first race—and finished up honours even—"at square." But Oxford wasn't, for the crew of the Dark Blues were all out-knocked to the wide. The Light blues had a walk-over—or rather paddle-over—winning by seven lengths in 19 minutes 24 seconds.

Cambridge won the toss last year, and chose the favourable side of the

river. They say a Scotsman collared the coin almost before it had finished spinning. The same old libel, of course!

A cool hundred quid a minute is the sum which the two Universities have to spend on the Race the average time taken to cover the course being twenty minutes. From Putney to Mortlake is four and a quarter miles, that stretch of river being shaped like a horse-shoe.

The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Boats ought to step in on the 12th, for though the boat weighs only about 240 lbs., the men who pack themselves into it weigh six times as much.

Long and skinny you might dub these craft, for they are each about 62½ feet long by 2 feet in beam with skins ¾ inch thick. It is because the boats are so thin-skinned that the crews dare not wear boots. And they are only ½ inches deep.

The oars weigh 9 lbs. each, and cost £2 7s. 6d. apiece and each time they are dipped into the water—eight in each boat—bang goes £2 or thereabouts, representing each oar-dip's share of the grand total cost of the Race. Each boat costs about £120 a new one being made for each Race.

Don't laugh at the crew if they finish at the post or knocked up—sagging about like sacks of sawdust. Each rower develops an average of 1½ horse-power over the full course. Yes, they're as beefy and brawny as they make 'em.

a fertile valley lost in the midst of the desert, where a tribe of Yaqui had pitched their camp, to keep away from the Indian Reservations. It lay somewhere in a low range of barren-looking hills that rose dimly beyond the plain, and for days the Kid had been seeking sign of it.

Near sundown, the Kid pulled in his horse on a sandy ridge, and shaded his eyes to gaze across the dreary expanse before him. Singer halted by his side. He brushed flies from a sweating face, and cursed.

"I guess we're hitting that Injun camp, feller," said the Kid, after a long survey "I can sure see smoke agin them hills yonder."

"I can see nothing," grunted the gunman.

"I guess you ain't got the eyes to see, hombre," said the Kid good-naturedly. "You savvy more about a deck of cards than the desert. We want to stop right here."

"How come?"

The Kid grinned.

"If we get near them Yaqui in the daylight, feller, I guess our scalps is going to ornament their lodge-poles," he answered. "I guess there's more'n a hundred of them bucks, and I ain't honing for a rookus with a crowd like that. They ain't got to see us around."

"That's so," agreed Singer. "But, I—"

"I guess, after sundown, I'll do some scouting," said the Kid. "Jest now we're camping down."

The gunman nodded, and they dismounted, tethering the horses in a hollow under the ridge. Dried beef and lukewarm water, and not much of it, made their meal, which they ate in silence. Unattended as the desert looked, the Kid had picked the camp with care. The were screened by thick bushes of sage and tall cacti that covered the sandy ridge. And the Kid's caution was rewarded, for, an hour or so later, when the sun was dipping behind the hills, the silence was broken by the sound of hoof-beats.

The Kid started and listened.

"Injuns, I guess, he said.

Singer grasped his rifle.

"You don't want to handle that pop-gun," said the Kid. "They won't see us hyer, unless they ride right into us, which I reckon ain't likely. We got to lie low and watch feller."

He listened.

"There's six hosses in that bunch," he said, after a few moments.

"How d'you know?"

"I got ears," said the Kid. "They're riding along the bottom of the ridge, and they sure won't hit near us. You keep quiet while I get an eye on them."

The Kid crawled away through the sage, to look down the slope of the ridge at the passing horsemen.

With a dull thudding of hoofs on the sandy plain, six riders came into his view. They were passing along the foot of the ridge, heading towards the distant blur on the hills that the Kid's keen eyes had picked up as the smoke of the Indian lodges.

There was a rustle in the sage beside the Kid, and he looked round angrily. Slick Singer had crawled after him, trailing his rifle as he came.

"You durned bonehead!" muttered the Kid. "Couldn't you keep close? If them Injuns spot us, we're dead meat!"

Singer made no answer. Lying in the sage he watched the bunch of riders that came nearer and nearer, along the foot of the slope fifty or sixty feet below.

THE POPULAR.—No. 565.

"Great gophers!" murmured the Kid suddenly.

His eyes were fastened on one of the riders.

Five of them were Yaqui bucks, copper-skinned, with matted black hair stuck with draggled leathers, in tattered blankets and leggings. But the other—

The other was a boy, and at the first glance, he might have been taken for a Redskin. He was dressed in tattered buckskin leggings and deerskin shirt like the rest, and his face was burnt dark by sun and weather. But it was a white man's face the Kid knew.

He pressed Singer's arm.

"Quiet!" he breathed, "and look—that guy trailing behind the bunch—he's white!"

"By the great horned toad!" breathed Singer.

His eyes were fixed on the white boy who rode with the Yaqui.

The bunch were almost directly, below the watchers on the ridge now, passing within sixty feet. Not a glance was turned towards the ridge; the Yaqui evidently had no suspicion that strangers were there. Two of the bucks carried antelopes over their saddles, and they were plainly returning from a hunt, in which the white boy had taken part.

"Say, feller, I guess that'll be the kid we're looking for!" breathed the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande. "We sure are in luck! Say, you figure that you know his looks?"

"It's Dick Singer!"

"You banking on that?"

"He's his father over again—I'd know him a mile off!" muttered the gunman.

"This sure is luck," said the Kid. "We found out that he's alive, and we sure know where to look for him."

He watched the Redskins passing. A slight sound at his side caused him to turn his head towards Singer again.

The gunman had pushed his rifle before him, through the openings of the sage, and was training it on the passing bunch of Yaqui.

He was taking steady aim, and his eye gleamed through the sights.

The Kid set his teeth.

His hand reached out and grasped the barrel of the rifle, pushing it forcibly aside.

"You cussed bonehead," hissed the Kid. "You want to bring the whole tribe down on us."

Singer muttered a curse.

"Let my gun alone, durn you!"

"Not by a jugstul! If you pull that trigger, you pesky gink, I'll sure crack your cabeza with the butt of a Colt!" hissed the Kid savagely. "Let up, you locoed geek!"

The bunch of Redskins, with the boy, were past now. Only their backs were to be seen as they rode on towards an opening in the distant hills.

For some seconds, Slick Singer struggled to release his rifle-barrel from the Kid's grasp. But the Kid's hand was on it like iron, keeping the muzzle deflected away from the bunch of Yaqui.

"Let up!" hissed the gunman. "Let up, durn you!"

"I guess you're loco," snarled the Kid. "Give over, you bonehead! By the great horned toad, I'll crack your cabeza if you don't let go that pop-gun. Slick Singer!"

With his left hand, the Kid drew a Colt from his holster, grasping it by the long barrel. Slick Singer released the rifle, just in time to prevent the boy puncher from making good his threat.

The thudding of hoofs died away to-

wards the distant hills. The bunch of Yaqui disappeared from sight.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### Parted Trails!

THE Kid rose to his feet. The look on his face was deadly, as he faced the gunman of Packsaddle. His eyes glinted at the savage, sullen face.

Slick Singer eyed him evilly.

He could read the Rio Kid's thoughts in his looks; for the Kid, by a flash of understanding was wise to him now. What had puzzled the Kid for days past, had become suddenly clear.

"You pesky polcat!" said the Kid, between his teeth. "I never trusted you—I'd as soon have trusted a rattler. But you sure did string me along—till now! You pize! skunk!"

"What are you getting at?" grunted Singer. "I guess I'd have potted them Yaqui, and got—"

"You'd have roused out the whole tribe with a single shot," said the Kid. "We'd have had to mount and ride for our lives—and I guess that'd have suited you fine, you skunk, if you'd got away with that shot. It was the boy you was pulling a bead on!"

"Aw, forget it," snarled Singer.

"It was that boy, Slick Singer, you was aiming to drill!" hissed the Kid, his eyes gleaming. "You'd got your rifle bearing on him, tair and square, when I stopped you, ou coyote. I guess I'm wise to your game now, Slick Singer. I guess I know why you're trailing in the Staked Plain you skunk. You ain't aiming to save that boy and tote him home to San Antonio to come into his fortune. You're aiming to shoot him up!"

"What would I want to shoot him up for, durn you?" growled the gunman uneasily.

"Who gets that ranch at San Antonio, and the fifty thousand dollars, if Buck Singer's son ain't found and toted home?" demanded the Kid.

The gunman made no answer.

"That's the how of it, I reckon," said the Kid. "You pizen polcat, you are trailing here to get that boy out your way, and you was aiming to make use of me to help you do it. I guess I'm wise to your game now, Slick Singer, and it ain't no use for you to tell me any more lies."

The Kid's hand was on a gun.

The temptation was strong on him to draw, and shoot the ruthless rascal in his tracks. He had been puzzled, but he called himself a gink for not having guessed his companion's true intention before. Now that he understood, all was explained. And his desire was strong to let daylight through the scallywag who had aimed to make him a party to a crime.

"Owa up, you durned snake!" snapped the Kid. "I'll say it ain't no good trying to string me any more!"

The gunman gritted his teeth.

"If you hadn't been the world's prize boob, you'd have got wise to it sooner," he sneered. "You figure that I'm trailing in this cussed desert, for the sake of a boy I ain't seen for five years, and don't care a continental red cent about? I guess it's me for the ranch at San Antonio, and that boy ain't going to stand between me and a fortune. I sure come next on the list, if I find that boy and spill his juice, afore the rangers find him."

"The rangers?" said the Kid.

"Aw, can't you guess that the lawyers at Sau Antone are having the boy hunted for, now he's worth near a quarter million dollars," snarled Singer. "They got Hall and his rangers to hunt for him, and I guess we ain't a long way ahead of the rangers."

"I guess the rangers won't run down them Yaqui in a hurry," said the Kid. "By the great horned toad, I guess I want to blow your pizen brains out over the sage, Slick Singer. It it wasn't for bringing the Injuns down on us with a shot, I guess I'd do it. You pizen scallywag, you've played me for a sucker!"

"Stand in with me," said the gunman. "You know the game now, Kid, and I guess I'll make it worth your while to stand in with me. Getting that boy away from the Yaqui won't be easy, but hanging about the lodges and getting him with a pot-shot, will be jest pie. I'll see that you get a handful of the dollars—"

The gunman broke off with a howl, as a clenched fist was planted full in his face.

He went over backwards as if he had been shot, and the Kid glared down at him as he struck the earth.

Singer's hand went to a gun as he lay.

In an instant, the Kid's Colt was aimed at his savage, furious face.

"Let up on it, you polecat!" said the Kid. "Let up, afore I spill your juice over the sage!"

The gunman, with a curse, relinquished the weapon. He glared up at the Kid with eyes of burning hate.

"Dog-gone you," he muttered thickly. "Dog-gone you, Kid! Git to your cayuse and hit the trail, and leave me alone here, durn you!"

"I'll sure leave you alone here, you durned skunk," said the Kid. "But I ain't hitting the trail none. I ain't quitting till I got that boy away from the Yaqui, Slick Singer, and handed him over to his friends, where you can't get at him. I sure got a powerful mind to shoot you up afore I go, like the pizen skunk you are."

"You got no call to chip in!" snarled the gunman. "What's the boy to you, durn you?"

"You wouldn't understand, in a month of Sundays," said the Kid contemptuously. "I'll say I'm going to get that boy safe away, safe from the Yaqui, and safe from you, Slick Singer. And if you born in on my trail agin, I'll shoot you up like you was a coyote. You want to hit for Packsaddle while you've got a whole skin; if you hang around here, I guess the Yaqui won't be long in getting your scalp. And they're sure welcome to it; that cuts no ice with me. I'm done with you, you gun-slinging polecat."

The Kid walked away to his mustang, mounted, and rode away, taking no further heed of the gunman.

The galloping hoofs of the mustang died away in the darkening plain.

The Kid's face was set and savage as he rode. But it cleared, as he galloped on under the stars. He grinned a little. The gunman of Packsaddle had drawn him into the game, for his own dastardly ends; and the Kid had no idea of getting out of it.

There was little likelihood, he reckoned, of the gunman carrying out his scheme successfully, unaided. If he lingered there, he was more likely than not to fall into the hands of the Redskins; and the Kid was quite indifferent to his fate. Whether he lived or died, mattered nothing to the boy outlaw; but the Kid was not thinking of hitting the trail, now that his connec-

Suddenly the gunman found sinewy arms round his neck, and he was flung to the ground. His revolver exploded harmlessly in the air.



tion with Slick Singer had come to an end. He had seen the prisoner of the Yaqui, and he meant to get that prisoner away, or leave his own bones in the Staked Plain. By treacherously calling in the Kid's aid, the gunman had defeated his own scheme; and the Kid found that thought amusing.

The Kid rode on in the gathering darkness, till he was close on the hills. Then he dismounted and staked out his mustang, and rolled himself in his blanket, to sleep till midnight.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

In the Hands of the Redskins!

"**D**OG-GONE that durned firebug!" growled Slick Singer, between his teeth.

The gunman of Packsaddle stood in the darkness, on the sandy ridge, beside his cow-pony. He was looking through the shadows towards the hills that hid the valley of the Yaqui; a dim blur in the star-shine on the Staked Plain.

Then he mounted his horse and rode down the sandy ridge.

The Rio Kid had long vanished; and where he was, and what he aimed to do, Slick Singer had no idea. He had said that he would rescue the prisoner of the Yaqui. If he got the boy away, the gunman's game was up.

Slick Singer headed for the hills, in the direction of the smoke the Kid had

seen before sundown—the direction taken by the hunting-party of Yaqui whom he had watched.

He reached the hills, under the stars, his eyes watchfully about him in the gloom. He feared to run into some Yaqui scout, and he feared a meeting with the Rio Kid. If the Kid intended to carry out his threat, he could not be far away. But the gunman saw and heard nothing of him; though, if he had known it, he rode within a hundred yards of the spot where the Kid had camped in the sage, and lay sleeping in his blanket by the side of his mustang.

Afar, in the darkness of the hills, a flicker of ruddy light came to the eyes of the gunman. He knew that it must come from a fire in the Indian village; he was getting close now. He halted, and dismounted, and selecting a spot where a tall cactus rose like a gaunt giant against the sky—a spot he would be able to find again—he tethered his horse. On foot, with cautious tread he advanced into the opening of the hills.

The opening between rugged, barren hillsides widened into a valley, where a stream ran, glimmering in the stars. Ample water fertilised the lonely valley, and vegetation grew thick along the stream, rich grass, tangled pecans, and tall cottonwoods. Slick Singer crept on silently, his eyes watchful as a wildcat's.

(Continued on page 28.)

**The Prisoner of the Lost Valley!**

(Continued from page 11.)

In that lost valley in the heart of the desert, he reckoned the Indians would not be likely to keep watch at night; but he was not taking more chances than he could help. He stopped, at last, in a belt of pecans close by the creek, and scanned the scene before him.

There was a bunch of skin tepees, the dwellings of the Yaqui, near the stream. In the distance he could see moving shadows, of a herd of horses—cattle, too, he guessed. The outcast Redskins of the Staked Plain lost no chance of running off cattle from the ranges on the lower prairies. A camp-fire burned in the encampment; and he could discern a number of bucks sitting round it, wrapped in their tattered blankets, smoking. If he had hoped to see anything of the boy, he was disappointed.

He stood in the pecans, watching. The Yaqui evidently had no suspicion of an enemy at hand; they were quite secure in the lost valley, and that security was in his favour. The hour was growing late, and soon they would be sleeping in their lodges. To enter the village in the dark, and seek for the boy, was a desperate expedient; and Singer debated in his mind whether to hang about the encampment, and wait for daylight, in the hope of seeing the one whose life he sought. That, he reckoned, would be a safer plan.

The next instant he heard a rustle in the pecans, and he spun round, grasping a gun. Then sinewy arms were round him, and he was flung to the ground.

Bang!

He fired, and the sudden report of the Colt roared like thunder in the silent valley. There was a shout from the Indian encampment, as the Redskins leaped up, alarmed by the shot.

But the shot had no effect on Singer's assailant, for a grasping hand was on his gun-arm, and it was forced away as he pulled trigger. The bullet whistled away among the pecans. The gunman struggled—silently, furiously, desperately. But he was in the grasp of a powerful Yaqui buck, a sinewy knee was planted on him, pinning him down; and he could not free his gun-arm. A coppery face grinned down at him, with a savage grin. One of the Indian's hands relaxed its hold; and the next moment, the keen edge of a knife was pressed to the gunman's neck.

He ceased to struggle.

He stared up into the grinning, savage, coppery face, expecting instant death.

But the Yaqui did not plunge the knife home.

Loud shouts were ringing from the Indian camp; and the Yaqui yelled back. There was a trampling of moccasined feet, as a score or more of the Yaqui came running to the spot.

With despair in his heart, Slick Singer lay inert, in the grasp of his captor. A crowd of coppery savages gathered round him, staring down at him, jabbering to one another in the Yaqui dialect. Slick Singer understood not a word of that dialect; but he could see that the Yaqui were astonished to find a white man prowling round their camp. Many hands were laid on him, and his weapons were taken away; and thongs of rawhide bound round his arms and his legs. Three or four of the Yaqui lifted him in their brawny arms, and

carried him on to the encampment, the rest jabbering and yelling round him.

He was carried in among the tepees, to the camp-fire. The faces of squaws and paposes looked out of some of the wigwams, to watch him as he passed. Among them, the gunman glimpsed, for a moment, a face he knew—the face of a white boy; a face that was full of mingled terror and compassion; and the look on that face haunted the gunman's thoughts, in spite of his own deadly peril. The boy made a movement as if to approach him, but a Yaqui buck thrust him roughly back into the tepee from which he had emerged, and Singer saw no more of him.

The gunman was flung down by the camp-fire, and for long minutes he lay there, while the Yaqui talked in their own strange dialect, looking at him the while; debating his fate, he had no doubt. Once a tomahawk was lifted, and the gunman closed his eyes in expectation of death; but the blow did not fall. He was lifted again, carried to a wigwam, and tossed into it like a bundle of alfalfa, and left to himself in the darkness.

Bound hand and foot, with the rawhide biting cruelly into his limbs, the gunman lay, helpless, desperate; knowing only too well that that night was to be his last.

And perhaps, in those dreary hours of darkness and despair, something like repentance came into the hard heart of the desperado, as he thought of the pitying look on the face of the boy whose life he had come to the desert to seek.

From that look, and that alone, he derived a gleam of hope, for if there was one in the Indian camp who pitied him, who might seek to help, it was the one whom he would have sacrificed to his greed—the prisoner of the lost valley.

THE END.

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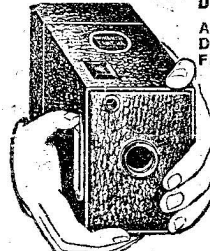


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