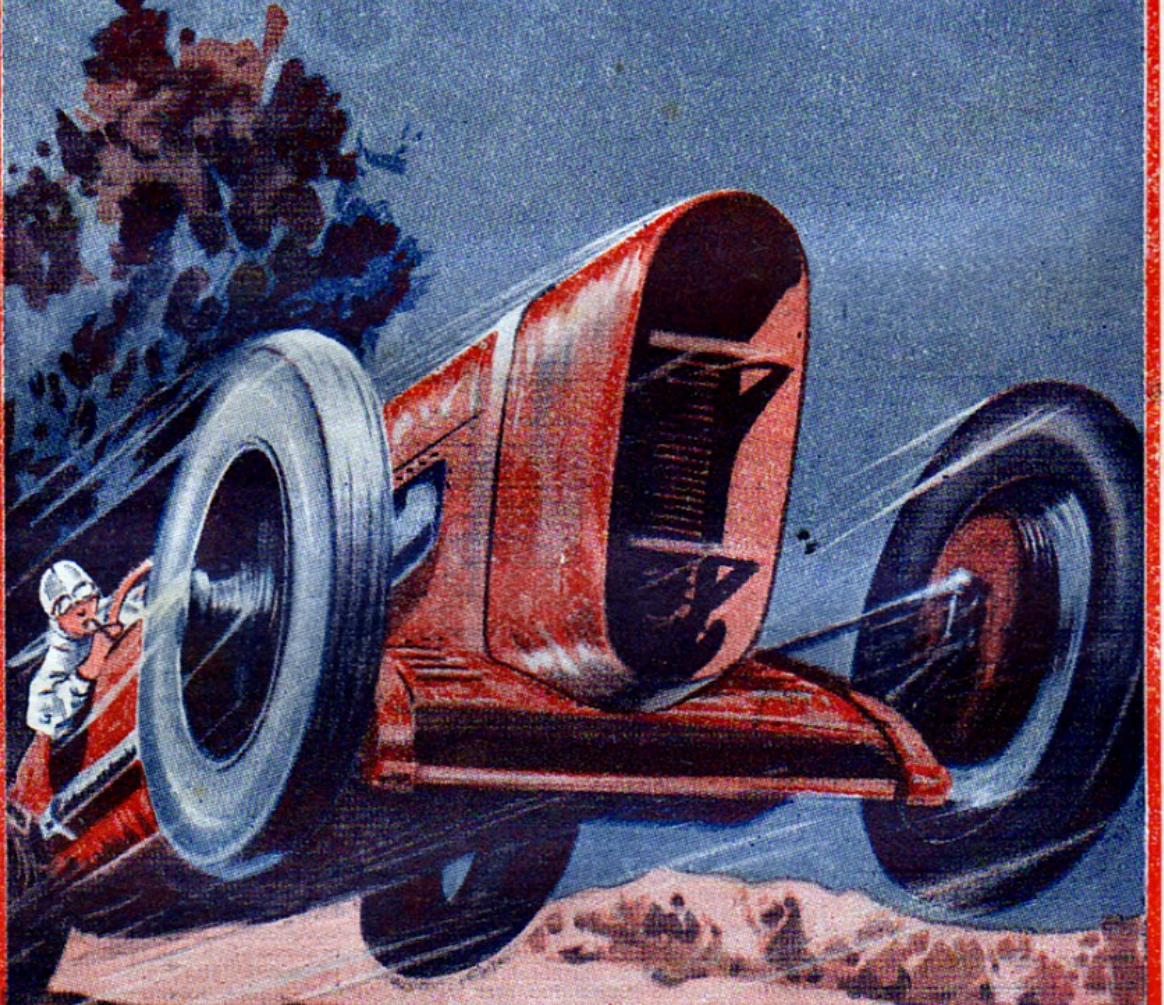


THE SCHOOLDAYS of FRANK RICHARDS, The Famous Author, INSIDE!

The POPULAR

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August 16th,
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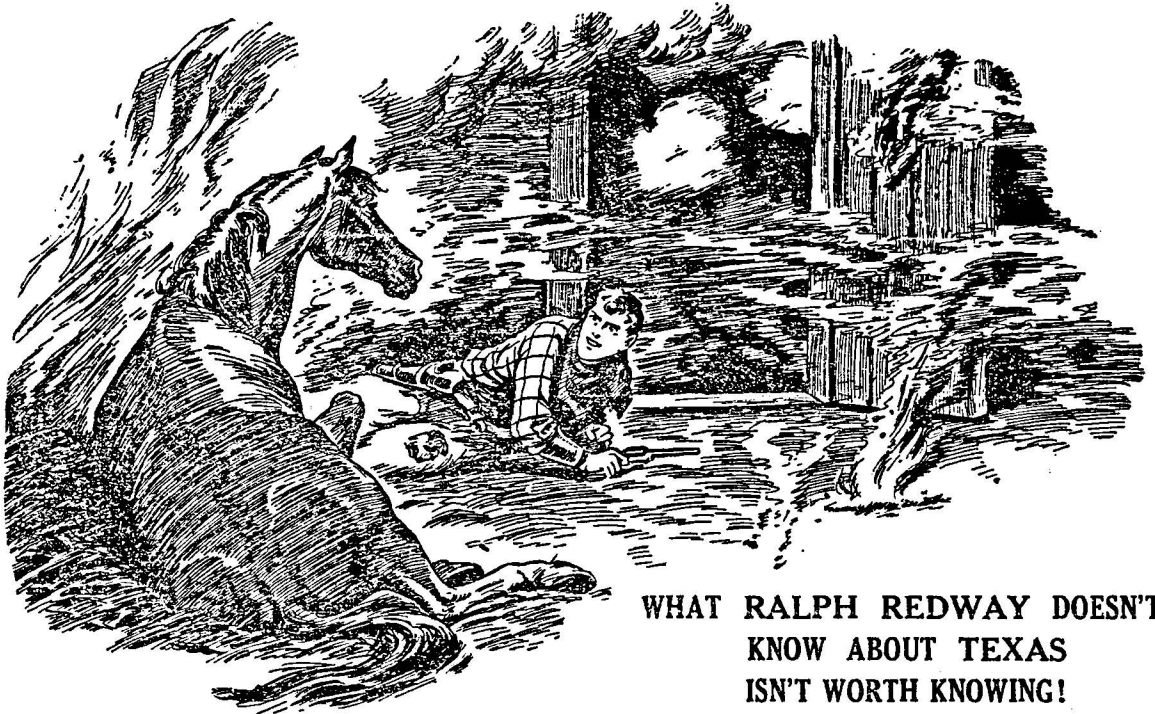
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The SKID KID
SKIDS to
VICTORY!

OUR MOTOR-RACING YARNS ARE THRILLING THE WORLD!

UNDER The KID SHERIFF!



WHAT RALPH REDWAY DOESN'T
KNOW ABOUT TEXAS
ISN'T WORTH KNOWING!

◆◆◆◆◆
Fire!
◆◆◆◆◆

WAKE snakes!" murmured the Rio Kid.

His eyes opened.

The Kid had been fast asleep, and dreaming.

In the mists and shadows of sleep the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande had forgotten that he was no longer an outlaw; that he had been elected sheriff of Sassafras County; and that he was now Sheriff Brown, occupying the sheriff's office in the cow-town of Plug Hat.

The sheriff's job was still new to the Kid; and in his sleep he was dreaming of other days—not very far behind him, when he had ridden the prairie trails with a sheriff's posse on his track.

He dreamed of the day when the sheriff of San Juan had run him down in the Pecos country, and the Kid had fired the dry grass to drive back the posse; and escaped on the back of Side-Kicker amid a sea of flame and smoke.

The dream was strangely real. It seemed to the Kid that he heard the crackle of the flames; that his nostrils were choked by the thick smell of smoke.

He struggled to breathe; and awoke. And he awoke to find that it was not all a dream. There was smoke in the room where he lay; and through the darkness of the night came flickering glimmers of flame.

The Kid started up in his bed.

It was seldom that the Rio Kid was taken by surprise. Whether as an outlaw, riding lonely trails in the chaparral, or as the sheriff of Sassafras, ruling the rough mob of Plug Hat with a gun in his hand, the Kid was wary as

a wolf, watchful as a lynx. But he was surprised now. The fire had started while he was asleep and dreaming, and he awoke in the midst of smoke and crackle and gleaming flame.

"Wake snakes!" ejaculated the Kid. He leaped from the bed.

The sheriff's office in Plug Hat consisted of two rooms; the office in front and the bedroom behind, with a shed attached at the rear, in which the Kid's mustang was stabled.

It was a rough building, but strong and solid; the walls of thick logs that would stop bullets at close range, the roof of stout timber, the windows thickly shuttered and barred, the doors barred and locked.

Former sheriffs in Plug Hat had made their quarters as secure as they could; though that security had not saved them from being shot-up by the

had been king-pin of Plug Hat before the new sheriff was elected; and this was his way of getting rid of his rival.

The Kid threw on his clothes in a few seconds. The room was thick with smoke, whirling and eddying. The dry wood of the walls and roof, splashed with petrol, burned like tinder. But if the bunch had hoped that he might suffocate in his sleep, they were disappointed. The Kid was not the guy to go out so easily as that.

While he dressed with lightning rapidity, the Kid's thoughts moved as rapidly. The bunch would be on the spot, with guns ready to riddle him with lead as he rushed out of the burning house—if he succeeded in getting through the smoke and the flame.

He could picture Cactus Carter, and Red Harris, and Yellow Dick, and Sandy Tutt, skulking in cover of neighboring cabins and shacks,

with guns in their hands and murder in their hearts. But he had to get out of the burning building and chance the lead. And the Kid was thinking less of himself than of his horse.

Side-Kicker was in the shed at the back, equally in danger from flames; and to the Kid, his cayuse's danger was a more pressing matter than his own. Through the crackle of the fire came to his ears a shrill squeal from the now alarmed mustang.

So it was to the back door that the Kid turned, which led direct from the sleeping-room into the shed. This door was not fastened; and the Kid had it open in a twinkling. The shed was surging with smoke; the wooden walls were burning and blazing like the rest of the building. Side-Kicker trampled and squealed wildly.

"Steady, old hoss!" said the Kid,

◆◆◆◆◆
A NEW BROOM SWEEPS CLEAN—
Especially if the Rio Kid Handles It!
◆◆◆◆◆

rough-necks of the cow-town in the long run. "But "shooting-up" the new sheriff was a task from which the most desperate gunman in Plug Hat shrank; the Kid walked the streets of the cow-town as securely as he might have walked in San Antonio or Austin.

The foes who dared not face him in the open had sought him in his fancied security, and with a more terrible weapon than Colt or bowie-knife.

The building was on fire; and the fierceness with which it burned told that gasoline had been sprayed over it before a match was set. Cactus Carter

And the grey mustang calmed down at once at the sound of his master's voice. In a moment his soft muzzle was nuzzling the Kid.

The Kid plunged through the blinding smoke to the shed door. This door was locked, bolted, and barred; and the Kid hurriedly unfastened it.

"Down, old hoss!"

The mustang dropped to the floor, and the Kid, having hurled the door wide open, dropped on his face. He knew what would follow the opening of the door.

Bang, bang!

Two Colts roared from the darkness without, and the bullets whizzed in at the open doorway. Had the Kid been standing he would have been shot as he stood.

Bang, bang, bang, bang!

The six-guns roared and roared. Two men, the Kid reckoned, had been posted behind the building, the others keeping watch in front.

Bullets from the rapid six-guns rained into the open shed, and whizzed over the Kid and his horse as they lay hugging the earthen floor.

With the sound of the shooting came a sound of distant voices—shouting, calling. It was three in the morning, and the night was black, save for the glare of the flames at the sheriff's office. But the town was awakening—doors and windows were opening, and men calling to one another. Help would come; but it would not come in time for the Kid. For the burning roof was already falling in, with showers of sparks and a roar of flame, and the Kid had to hit the open without delay.

Bang, bang, bang! roared the six-guns.

Thick eddy smoke blocked the doorway; the Kid could see nothing; neither could his foes see anything but smoke. But they knew the door was open, and they fired and fired into the doorway.

"Down, Side-Kicker!" the Kid whispered to his horse. "You want to keep doggo, old hoss. Down!"

And the well-trained mustang, taking no heed of roaring flame and showering sparks, remained motionless. And the Kid, crawling on his stomach like a snake, glided out of the open doorway under cover of the heavy mass of smoke, while bullets flew over him into the shed.

Three yards from the doorway the smoke was thin, and the Kid's eye caught the flash of a six-gun as it fired. His gun was in his hand, and he fired at the flash, and there was a yell and a heavy fall. Another yell, of startled fear, followed, and the hurried sound of running footsteps. One enemy had fallen, the other was running; and the Kid leaped to his feet and threw lead after the man who ran.

"Side-Kicker!" he yelled.

With a trample of hoofs the mustang came charging through the smoke at the Kid's call.

In a moment he was with the Kid.

"Good old hoss!" gasped the Kid, and he leaped on the bare back of the grey mustang.

Saddle and bridle the Kid did not need. He dashed away from the burning building, and the clattering hoofs awoke the echoes of the rugged street of Plug Hat.

Burned Out.

POP SHORT, the landlord of the Plug Hat Hotel, stood, half-dressed in his piazza, staring towards the leaping flames that lighted up the plaza in the centre of the town.

A score of men were already out of their cabins, all staring in the same direction. Against the red glare of the fire the figure of a horseman appeared, and the Rio Kid dashed up to the lumber hotel with a clatter of hoofs. He drew rein and jumped down.

"The sheriff!" gasped Pop Short.

"Say, sheriff, I guess they've burned you out!" exclaimed Colorado Bill.

"I guess they have!" said the Kid coolly. "But I reckon there's one of the bunch that will never burn a guy out again. Get a move on, you galoots! You want to get hold of buckets afore the fire spreads, or I guess Plug Hat will go up in smoke!"

"I guess it was Cactus Carter," said Mesquite.

"I guess it was," said the Kid. "But that cuts no ice now. We got to get the fire down."

"You bet!"

The whole cow-town was awake by this time. Every door was thrown open, and a crowd gathered in the plaza. There were several other buildings near the sheriff's office, all of wood, and there was danger of the fire spreading, in which case Plug Hat might have shared the fate of many a western town, burned out to the last shack.

"Look after my cayuse, Mr. Short," said the Kid; "and you guys follow me."

There was no chance of finding the incendiaries. The Kid's escape, and the awakening and turning-out of the whole town, had scared them to cover. The Kid did not expect to find any of them on the spot, except the man he had shot as he escaped. The wretch still lay where he had fallen, on his face; and Colorado Bill found him, and turned him over to look at him. The red-beared face was recognised at once.

"It's Red Harris!" shouted Colorado.

"And he's gone up!" said Mesquite.

"I reckoned he'd got his, whoever he was," said the Kid. "Let him lie, and get spry with them buckets."

"He was one of Cactus' bunch," said Yuma Dan. "I guess Cactus wasn't fur off when this hyer fire started."

"I reckon he's lying low now," said Colorado.

"Get on with it!" snapped the Kid.

There were fifty or sixty men in the plaza now, and under the Kid's direction, they formed a line to the creek, and buckets of water were handed rapidly along and soused on the burning building.

The fire burned obstinately, for petrol had been used freely on the timber. Five or six empty cans were lying about. But the steady drenching of water subdued it at last, though not till the sheriff's residence was nothing more than a black and smouldering ruin. Almost every man in the town lent aid in drowning the fire; but there were several idlers who lounged outside the Red Flare saloon opposite and looked on. They were Cactus Carter, Yellow Dick, and Sandy Tutt, and they were half-dressed, as if they had come suddenly from bed at the alarm, though they had not forgotten to belt on their guns. The Kid, for the present, took

no heed of them. Not till the last spark was out, and only an eddy black smoke rose from the burned-out ruin, did the Kid give attention to anything but the fire.

But when it was all over the sheriff gave his attention to the three loungers across the plaza. Now that the fire was out, darkness had fallen again; but a dozen lanterns were alight, and candles glimmered in the windows of many cabins. The Kid, after a last look at the burned-out building, to make sure that all was safe, walked across to the Red Flare saloon, and Colorado and Mesquite and Yuma Dan, and a crowd of others followed him.

The Kid was not touching a gun; but Cactus and his bunch eyed him warily as he approached.

"Say, you guys wasn't lending a hand with the buckets," said the Kid.

"I guess you're no friend of mine," answered Cactus surlily, "and you'd sure got a-plenty to help."

"Sure," assented the Kid. "I reckon you guys was woke up by the fire and the shooting, and you hadn't time to get your rags on, like the rest of us."

"You've said it," agreed Cactus.

"You wasn't on the spot when the fire started?" asked the Kid pleasantly. "And you didn't hoof it back to your dive, and fix yourselves up like you was just startled out of bed?"

"Nope," said Cactus, drawing a deep breath. "What you getting at, Mister Sheriff Brown? If you reckon I know anything about the fire—"

"You was durned careless, sheriff, to get your shack on fire," said Yellow Dick.

"Some guy was pesky careless," assented the Kid. "He was sure careless enough to spill gasoline all over the outside of my shack and set a light to it. You don't know who it was?"

"How should I know?" asked Yellow Dick.

"Why, you dog-goned lobo-wolf," burst out Colorado, "you figure that we don't know it was your bunch burned out the sheriff? One of you has got shot up, and that one's Red Harris."

"And Red wasn't there without the rest of the bunch," said Mesquite.

Cactus set his lips.

"If Red was there, he was on his own," he answered. "I guess Red had a grudge agin the sheriff. But me, I was fast asleep, and I woke up when I heard the shooting."

"And you don't know who was with Red in this hyer game?" asked the Kid.

"I sure don't."

The Kid smiled.

"If you've got any proof, sheriff—"

said Sandy Tutt. "I ain't got a whole heap," said the Kid, "and I reckon I don't want very much, feller."

"Lynch 'em!" shouted Mesquite. "Hold in your hosses, feller!" said the Kid. "We got law and order in this town now I'm sheriff. There ain't going to be no lynching. You can't hang a guy on suspicion, though I guess the suspicion is pretty strong. Cactus, your best guess is to get on your cayuse and ride out of town before morning."

Cactus gritted his teeth.

"I ain't riding!" he answered. "Suit yourself, feller," said the Kid, and he turned away. "Gents, I reckon you can hit your little bunks agin; but I want all my deputies to be on hand in the morning."

"I guess a rope and a branch would fit them guys!" growled Colorado.

"Aw, forget it!" said the Kid. "Lynch law is stopped in this burg,

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along with promiscuous shooting and faro. This hyer town of Plug Hat is going to be the prize town for law and order so long's I'm sheriff."

"Waal, it's your say-so, sheriff," grunted Colorado. "But—"
"Feller, you talk like a Dutch uncle," said the Kid. "But I've lost my beauty sleep, and I'm hitting a bunk at the hotel till morning."

And the sheriff walked away to the Plug Hat Hotel, and the crowd broke up and dispersed to their cabins. Darkness and slumber descended once more on the cow-town of Plug Hat.

Run Out of Town!

THREE men sat, with grim faces, in the Red Flare saloon, when the morning sun shone down on Plug Hat.

Outside, in the sunny plaza, a crowd was gathering.

Cactus Carter, Yellow Dick, and Sandy Tutt watched them through the open doorway, sullenly and uneasily.

The trio had the Red Flare to themselves. A couple of weeks ago the Red Flare had been the roughest and most frequented joint in Plug Hat. Bootleg liquor had been dispensed freely over the bar by Mexican Dave, the proprietor, and a faro game had been run by Cactus Carter, who was a gambler by profession. The new sheriff had closed the saloon down. Mexican Dave had been run out of town, and the order had gone forth that no faro game should be played. That was a reform that startled a good many of the new sheriff's supporters; but the Kid, as he explained, was not in the sheriff business for his health. So long as he was sheriff he was going to maintain the law, and he maintained it. Plug Hat hardly knew itself these days, with the gaming-tables closed down, promiscuous shootings sternly forbidden, and horse-stealing a thing of the past. Among the rough-necks the discontent was deep, but not even Cactus and his bunch had dared to raise opposition. In the deserted saloon, Cactus and his friends had their quarters, while they waited for better times.

"I guess there's suthin' comin' to us, Cactus!" muttered Yellow Dick, as he stared out at the gathering crowd in the plaza. "I reckon we'd have been better to have hit the trail last night."

Cactus Carter snapped out an oath.

"I guess I ain't hitting the trail," he answered. "What we got to hit the trail for, you boob? There ain't a piece of evidence to frame us up with that fire last night. We was safe in cover afore a guy got on the spot, and I guess the sheriff never saw us."

"Every guy in Plug Hat knows the Red was one of our bunch—"

"That cuts no ice," answered the gambler. "Red had plenty of other friends in town; and I'll tell all Texas they can't fix it on us."

"Mobbe they won't worry about fixing it on us," said Sandy Tutt; "but what's to stop them lynching us without? I'll say they'd lynch us at jest one word from that dog-goned sheriff!"

"He ain't saying the word!" snapped Cactus. "They've got him in to keep law and order in the town, and he sure can't stand for a lynching. He can't do anything without proof, and there ain't a piece of proof. All we got to do is sit tight. I guess I ain't moseying out of Plug Hat. We've failed this time, but we'll get him next time. We got to get him."

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"It's your say-so!" muttered Yellow Dick. "But I can sure see Colorado in that crowd yonder, and he's got a rope over his arm."

"Dog-gone Colorado!" answered Cactus. "I'm telling you the sheriff won't stand for a lynching. And where'd we hit for if we lit out of Plug Hat? There ain't another town in Texas where we could show up without a sheriff or a town marshal roping us in? You're wanted for shooting, Dick; and I guess there's shootings and cattle-lifting agin you, Tutt. Me, I guess it gives me a crick in the neck to think of locating in any town outside Plug Hat. We got to stick."

"You've said it!" assented Sandy Tutt.

"This hyer is our last holt," said Cactus. "I guess if we quit Plug Hat, we got to take to the chaparral. I ain't honing to begin as an outlaw, like that fire-bug, the Rio Kid, that's hunted all over Texas, or like Five-Hundred-Dollar Smith. And I guess that's all we got, if we quit Plug Hat."

"Here comes the sheriff!" muttered Yellow Dick.

"Let him come!" snarled Cactus.

The Rio Kid appeared in the sunny plaza. He walked across to the Red Flare, and following him came Colorado, Mesquite, Yuma Dan, and a dozen other Plug Hat men who were sworn in as sheriff's deputies. And following them came a buzzing and interested crowd. Colorado had a lasso looped over his brawny arm, and Yellow Dick and Sandy Tutt looked long and anxiously at that lasso, wondering uneasily what it was meant for. The Kid stopped in the open doorway.

"You guys to home?" he called out cheerily.

"Yep!" snarled Cactus Carter.

"Step out here!"

"What's wanted?"

"You are!" answered the Kid tersely.

"If it's lynching—" began Tutt.

"Aw, forget it, feller," said the Kid. "Don't I keep on telling you that this here is an orderly town now, and lynchings is off? Step out lively. I ain't burning you out, like you did me last night; but I guess if you don't step out lively, I'll fan you with bullets till you get a move on. Pronto!"

Cactus Carter's hand hovered over a gun.

He was sorely tempted to draw and fire on the handsome figure in Stetson and goatskin chaps, that stood in the sunny doorway.

As if the Kid read his thoughts—as probably he did—a gun appeared in his hand.

"Step out!" he snapped.

And the three gunmen stepped out of the saloon, not venturing to touch a gun. They stepped out into the glare of the bright sun of Texas, into the midst of the buzzing crowd. The Kid's gun remained in his hand. He had not lifted it; but the Plug Hat rough-necks had had some experience of the way "Sheriff Brown" could shoot from the hip, and they did not want to sample his shooting. Cactus Carter eyed the Kid savagely.

"Now what's the rookus?" he demanded.

The Kid pointed along the rugged street to where it joined the prairie trail. The three gunmen followed his pointing finger with their eyes, and then looked at one another, and at the Kid.

"Meanin'?" muttered Cactus.

"You got to beat it," said the Kid.

"This hyer town don't want your company any longer. You allow that there ain't no proof that you burned me out last night, and I guess you've said it. There ain't! If there was, I'd string you up in a row on that cottonwood yonder. But there ain't, and I'm letting you off light. There ain't any proof that I'd care to hang a man on; but, all the same, I don't need telling 'who was in cahoots with Red Harris in firing my shebang. You get me?"

"I guess—"
"I'm cleaning out this town," said the Kid calmly. "If there's a doubt that you tried to make it last sickness for me last night, I'm giving you the benefit of it. But this town is tired of you! Git!"

"I guess you want to go while the going's good!" growled Colorado, and he held the rope significantly.

Cactus Carter ground his teeth.

"And s'posin' we don't beat it?" he hissed.

"I ain't s'posing anything so foolish!" said the Kid. "If you don't beat it, pronto, you're going up in a row on that cottonwood. If I can't prove that you burned me out last night, I guess there's plenty proof that you've shot, and stole horses in this very burg. Killers and hoss-thieves ain't wanted in Plug Hat these days. Quit or hang!"

"You durned dog-goned—" began Cactus, in a voice husky with rage.

"Cut it out!" interrupted the Kid. "I've told you to go, and I ain't waiting. I give you five minutes to get your cayuses. I guess they ain't your cayuses, any more than they're mine, if you come to that. But I ain't raking up old troubles. Get out of Plug Hat, and keep out, and I'm sure done with you. Come back agin, and I'll see you strung up, as sure as there's Greasers in Mexico. Now, you getting?"

Cactus Carter, his face aflame with fury, reached for his gun.

"Better not!" smiled the Kid. The muzzle of the six-gun the Kid held at his side was turned on the gambler. With his revolver half-out, Cactus Carter paused—just in time to save his life.

Slowly, furiously, he relinquished the butt.

"That's hoss-sense," said the Kid approvingly. "I guess if you'd got that gun out of leather, Cactus, it would have been your last stunt on this side of Jordan. Now beat it while you're in one piece."

Cactus cast a fierce glance round at the watching crowd.

"I got friends here," he said. "Ain't any guy standing by me to keep me from being run out of town?"

Only silence answered the gunman's appeal. There were a good many rough-necks in Plug Hat who jibbed at the rule of the new sheriff. But there was none who cared, or dared, to draw a gun against him.

Cactus breathed hard. "You getting, feller?" asked the Kid politely.

"I'm getting!" said Cactus. "But you ain't heard the last of me, dog-gone your hide! I guess—"

"Nuff said!" interrupted the Kid. "You're wasting time—a sheriff's time. Get your cayuse, and beat it."

Five minutes later the three gunmen were mounted, and riding out of the plaza. A crowd followed them down the rugged street that led past the Plug Hat Hotel to the open prairie. On the piazza of the hotel, Pop Short waved a fat hand to the three in farewell. They

rode on, silent, grim, savage, watched by the crowd till they left the town behind, and entered on the prairie trail.

On the trail, Cactus reined in his horse for a moment, and looked back.

He was run out of town—run out of the town where he and his bunch had so long ruled the roost, the town that they had turned into an imitation of the hot place with the lid off. In his rage, the gambler came near to wheeling his horse and spurring back into the cow-town, gun in hand, to stake all on a last desperate attempt to win back all he had lost.

Only for a moment he thought of it, for he knew that if he rode back with his gun in his hand, he would ride to death under the Colt that never missed. With black rage in his brow, savage vengeance in his heart, Cactus Carter rode on with his companions, and the grassy prairie swallowed them from the sight of Plug Hat.

News for the Kid.

THE thud of hoofs, and the jingle of bridle and spurs, in the rugged street of Plug Hat, did not attract the attention of the Rio Kid. The outlaw-sheriff sat in a rocker in the open doorway of the new office that had been built within a few days after the fire, and looked out into the sunshine. But the sound of a passing rider was too frequent to cause the Kid to glance at the horseman who came clattering in the plaza.

There was a cheery expression on the Kid's sunburnt face.

He had made the grade as sheriff of Sassafras County. His sway was undisputed in the cow-town of Plug Hat. On the ranches round about the town, for the county was all cow country, there had been much talk and discussion about the new sheriff, and more than one wild outfit of reckless punchers had threatened to ride into town, shoot up the sheriff, and re-establish the old order. But nothing had come of such threats so far, and the sheriff reckoned that nothing would come of them.

And the Kid, as he sat at ease in his rocker, looking out into the sunny, dusty plaza, was thinking that he had found a comfortable refuge, after so many wild days on an outlaw trail, and figuring that it would be a long time before he quitted his career as Sheriff Brown, of Plug Hat. And he did not look at the passing horseman till the man happened to come into his direct line of vision, and then the Kid gave a start, and the pleasant smile vanished from his face, leaving it grim.

For the man who was riding past the sheriff's office was a Texas Ranger, and the Kid had only too good reason to know a Ranger when he saw one.

The horseman rode past the office. He had come into town at a gallop; but he was now going on at an easy trot, looking about him as he went, as if in search of some particular building.

The Kid drew a long, long breath. Colorado Bill, who was lounging outside the office, moved, and looked in the doorway at the Kid.

"Say, sheriff!" he grinned.

"Shoot!" said the Kid.

"I guess that's a Ranger jest moseyed along."

"You reckon?" said the Kid indifferently.

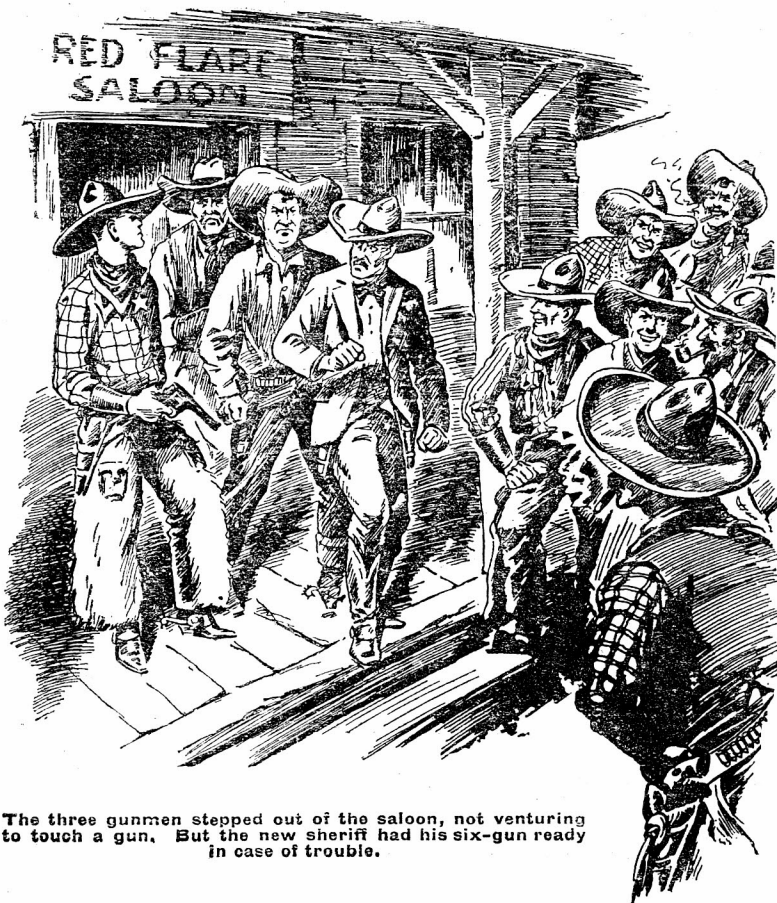
"You bet," said Colorado, "and it sure is a change from old times, sheriff: I guess when Cactus' bunch was ruling the roost hyer, a Ranger couldn't have ridden down the street of Plug Hat without suthin' hittin' him sudden."

"I guess so," assented the Kid.

"This town sure has changed," said Colorado. "There's a heap of rough-necks levanted, since Cactus was run out of town. Pop Short figures that they've gone to join in cahoots with Cactus, and that we shall hear some-

Say, what's bitin' you, sheriff?" added Colorado. The Sheriff of Sassafras county had given a start at the mention of the celebrated Ranger captain. "I've heard of Jim Hall," said the Kid, easily. "I guess I heard of him gunning after some outlaw cuss down in the Mal Pais."

"Yep—that fire-bug they call the Rio Kid," answered Colorado. "Some guys say the Kid's dead—he ain't been heard of for a long time now. I guess Mule-Kick Hall got him at last: they say Hall always gets his man in the long run."



The three gunmen stepped out of the saloon, not venturing to touch a gun. But the new sheriff had his six-gun ready in case of trouble.

thing drop one of these days. Some guys allow Cactus ain't gone far, and that he's hiding in the buttes. What you reckon, sheriff?"

"I reckon it won't be good for Cactus' health to stay around Plug Hat," answered the Kid. "But there sure is a change, now that a Texas Ranger can ride through the burg without being shot on sight. I guess he's heading for the hotel," he added carelessly.

Colorado glanced down the street. "Nope: he's stopped, and turning back," he said.

The Kid shifted his rocker a trifle further into the office. He was unwilling to come under the view of a Texas Ranger if he could help it. He was standing for law and order now: and Sheriff Brown did not want to have to shoot in defence of the Rio Kid.

"I seen that guy afore, down to Blue Grass," said Colorado. "He's Austin Red—one of Mule-Kick Hall's troop.

The Kid smiled.

"That guy's coming back hyer," remarked Colorado. "I guess he's calling to see the sheriff, sir."

"Wake snakes!" murmured the Kid. "He's riding a good critter," said Colorado. "I guess a month ago, Cactus would have sold that critter for him, arter he'd been filled full of lead. Yep: he's sure coming to see you, sheriff. Here he is."

With a jingle of bridle and spur, the horseman drew rein outside the sheriff's office.

The Kid shifted his gun-belt a little, to bring a walnut butt a little nearer to his hand. But he sighed. It would be a cruel trick of fate, to make the sheriff of Sassafras an outlaw once again.

"Say," came the Ranger's drawing

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Under the Kid Sheriff!

(Continued from page 13.)

voice, addressing Colorado. "This hyer is Plug Hat, ain't it, feller?"

"You've said it," answered Colorado.

"I guess it ain't up to its reputation," said Austin Red. "It's as quiet as any cow-town in Texas—durn my boots, if I didn't think I was at home in Austin, when I moseyed in. I've heard you got a noo sheriff in this burg, that ain't been shot up yit like the others."

"I guess we got a noo sheriff, and I allow he's made things hum," answered Colorado, "I'll have you know, sir, that Plug Hat is a sample for all Texas; and if you tie up your cayuse to a post in the morning, you'll sure find him there in the afternoon. Yes, sir."

"You surely surprise me," said the Ranger. "Waal, my captain has heard of this hyer noo sheriff, and he's sent me along to have a pow-wow with him. Is he to home?"

"Just inside the shebang," answered Colorado, "Mr. Sheriff, sir, a Ranger to see you from Mule-Kick Hall."

"Mosey in, feller," called out the Kid.

The Kid was glad, at that moment, that he had lately changed his puncher's outfit for a garb more suitable to his position as sheriff. He had not been willing to make the change; but he reckoned it was needed, and he was glad of it now. Austin Red, so far as he knew, had never seen him personally, though he must be well acquainted with the published descriptions of the Rio Kid; and he hoped that there would be no recognition. The Kid was getting used now, to standing for the law, and he hated the idea of being driven once more to standing against it.

The Ranger swung into the office with a clink of spurs. The Kid rose from the rocker, and nodded to him civilly.

Austin Red stared.

"Say, you the sheriff?" he ejaculated. "You've got it," said the Kid.

"Bub, you're starting early in life," said the Ranger. "Say, you ain't the sheriff's little boy, stringin' me along?"

The Kid laughed. His boyish look struck the burly Ranger; but the Kid did not mind that, so long as nothing else struck the keen, surprised eyes of the man from Austin.

"That there's the sheriff, Austin Red," said Colorado, from the doorway, "and I allow he lays over any other sheriff in Texas."

Austin Red scanned the sheriff curiously. His glance lingered long on the handsome, sunburnt face. The Kid read in his eyes that he was wondering where he had seen some similar face before; and the Kid knew, if Red did not, that it was in the published pictures of the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande that the Ranger had seen such a face. But the Kid counted a good deal on the position of sheriff to cover him, and he did not count in vain. There was only a momentary wonder, and nothing like suspicion, in the man from Austin's looks.

"You got business with me?" asked the Kid tranquilly. "Shoot, feller! I guess I got to be in the saddle soon."

"Yep! If you're sheriff of Sassafras, I got a message for you from my captain," answered the Ranger.

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"Spill it!"

"I guess you've heard of that fire-bug, the Rio Kid?"

"Who ain't, in Texas?" answered the sheriff of Plug Hat.

"Sure!" assented the man from Austin. "Waal, Mule-Kick is after that guy like grim death after a nigger. I guess he's hunted him all through Texas; but that guy surely does know how to hide himself at the bottom of a hole, and pull the pesky hole in after him. But Mule-Kick allows that he might have made a break this-a-way, seeing that Plug Hat was the very town where any gunman, or cow-thief, might reckon he was in clover."

The Kid nodded with a smile. Mule-Kick Hall had been right in his surmise; for it was precisely to keep out of way of the Texas Rangers that the Kid had first ridden into Plug Hat.

"Mule-Kick is combing the Blue Grass country for him now," went on the Ranger, "and, hearing there was a noo sheriff in this burg that was standing for the law, he sent me along with a message, Mr. Brown. I guess

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he wants you to keep your eyes open for that fire-bug, the Rio Kid, and send word along to us, pronto, if he shows up hyer."

"I guess no outlaw or fire-bug would figure that Plug Hat was healthy for him, since I've been sheriff," said the Kid, shaking his head. "Things is changed hyer since Cactus Carter and his bunch was running the town."

"That's so," said Colorado. "I guess the Rio Kid might have horned in in Cactus' time, and that bunch would have given him the glad hand, from what I've heard tell of the cuss. But Plug Hat ain't no place for him now."

"All the same, I guess we're going to keep our eyes peeled, if Mule-Kick Hall thinks the fire-bug might mosey along this-a-way," said the Kid gravely. "I guess that outlaw's worse medicine than Cactus Carter or Two-gun Stone. I shall sure watch out for him."

"Word to us at Blue Grass if he shows up," said the Ranger.

"You hanging on long at Blue Grass?" asked the Kid carelessly.

"Yea; until we've combed it for the

Kid. There's sure news that he rode through Blue Grass a few weeks ago on that grey mustang of his'n."

"Where you hitting after you leave Blue Grass?"

"Search me," answered the Ranger. "Anywhere where there's news of the Rio Kid. But I reckon Mule-Kick is likely to mosey into this town, and look over the pesky population, and make sure that the Kid ain't here under some new name. He's surely got as many names as any guy in Texas. Waal, so-long, sheriff! I guess I'm hitting the back trail."

"So-long, feller! And mention to Captain Hall that it will do me proud to have him visit this burg," said the Kid. "And if I ain't to home when he moseys in, my deputies will help him all they can."

"Sure!"

The Ranger strode out to his horse, remounted, and rode away with a jingle and a clatter.

The Rio Kid stood in the sunny street, looking after him.

There was a thoughtful cloud on his brow.

If the Rangers came to Plug Hat—if they found the Kid there, acting as sheriff—Mule-Kick Hall knew the Kid's face as well as he knew the back of his own hand. The new sheriff breathed hard.

"Say, sheriff!"

The Kid started. He had forgotten that Colorado was there. He glanced at his burly deputy. Austin Red, in the distance, disappeared in a cloud of dust.

"Say, I guess I know what you're thinking, sheriff!" grinned Colorado.

The Kid started.

"You reckon?" he said.

"Sure! There's a thousand dollars on the Rio Kid for the guy that can earn it," said Colorado Bill. "And if he rode through Blue Grass, as that guy allows, I guess it's on the cards that he hit this country, Plug Hat was just the burg he would make for—afore your time, sheriff. Say, what's the matter with having the posse out, and combing Sassafras for that fire-bug? I guess if that thousand dollars is going to be raked in, it might as well come this way as any other, sheriff."

The Kid looked at him curiously.

"Feller," he said, "you surely do get the big idea when you set your think-box going. I sure picked you out to be chief of my deputies, because I allowed you had heap hoss-sense, Colorado. Feller, you call up six men at dawn, and take three days to ride every trail in the county, and if you find that fire-bug, the Rio Kid, you cinch the reward. And I allow I ain't claiming a Continental red cent in it."

"You've said it, sheriff," said Colorado joyfully. "You riding with us?"

"Sure!" said the Kid. "Ain't it my business, as sheriff of this hyer country, to rope in that fire-bug if he's around? I sure ride with you to-morrow. And if the Rio Kid is in Sassafras County, I guess we'll see the colour of his hair."

The Kid's face was dark and thoughtful when Colorado left him. With Mule-Kick Hall and the Rangers so near, and likely to ride that way, prudence counselled the boy outlaw to mount the grey mustang, and hit the trail for parts unknown. But he shook his head. He was sheriff of Sassafras now, and he was staying sheriff.

THE END.

(More thrills for the Kid sheriff next week in "THE BAR-2 BUNCH," a powerful yarn of Texas.)