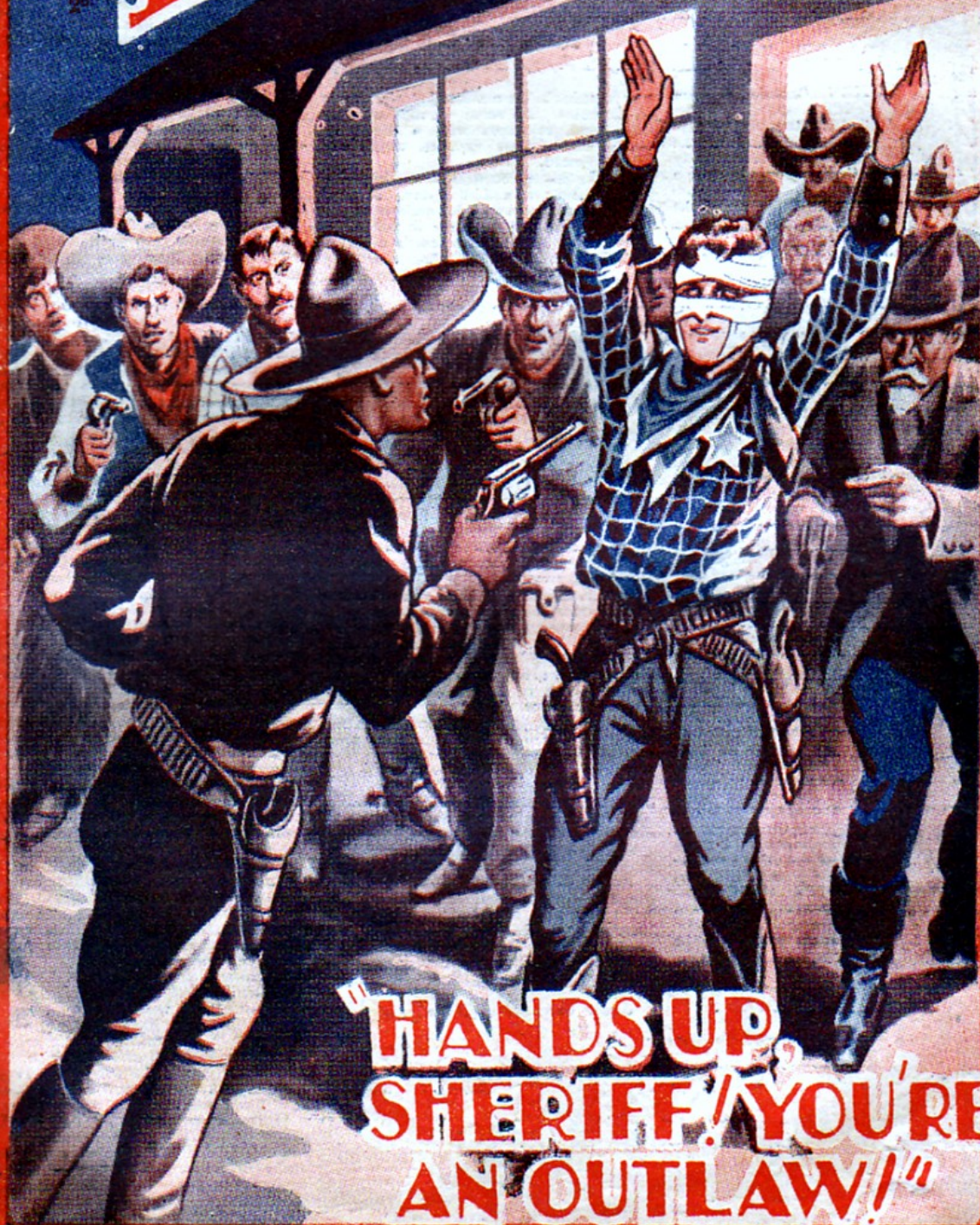


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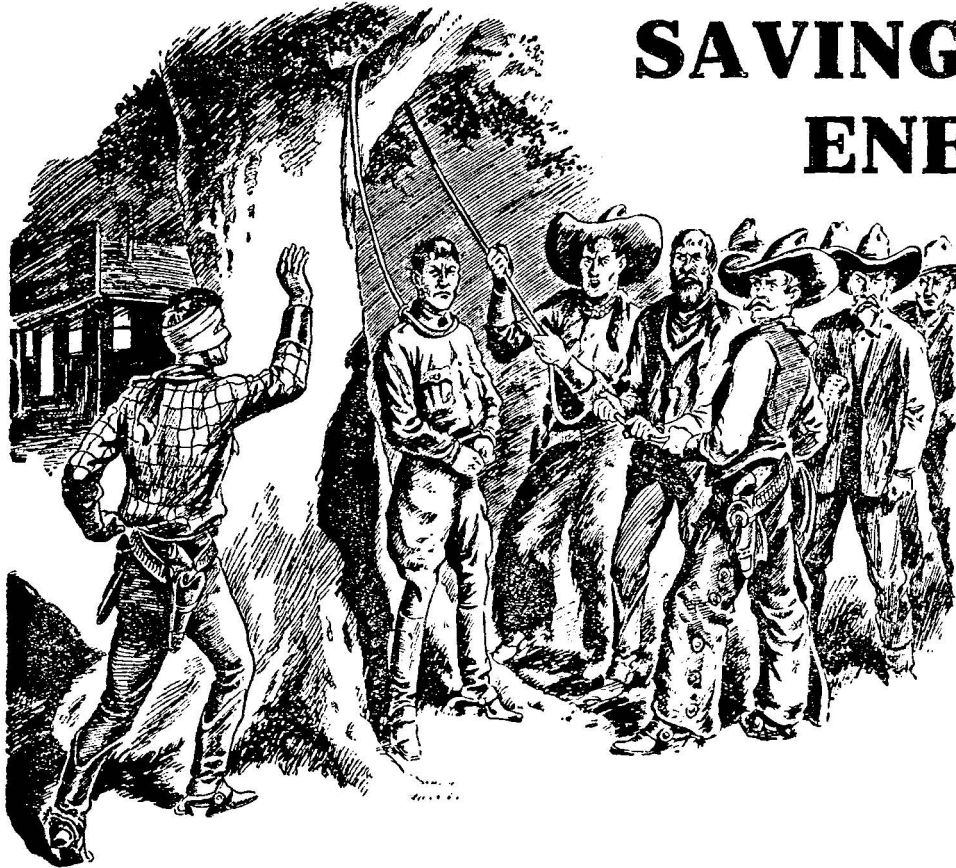
"HANDS UP,
SHERIFF! YOU'RE
AN OUTLAW!"

6 COMPLETE YARNS AND COMIC SECTION INSIDE FOR YOU!

Our Western Thriller!

SAVING HIS ENEMY!

By
Ralph
Redway.



Accused!

HANDS up, the Rio Kid!" The words came grating between Jim Hall's teeth. The muzzle of his Colt was almost jammed in the face of "Texas Brown," sheriff of Plug Hat. The Ranger's eyes glinted like steel over the levelled revolver.

The Kid stood quite still. He did not raise his hands at the Ranger's order. But he did not reach for a gun. The slightest move in that direction would have drawn the Ranger's fire, and a ball crashing through the brain would have ended the wild career of the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande—and the career of the new sheriff of Plug Hat. Jim Hall, captain of the Texas Rangers, knew him now—knew that the bandages on the face of the sheriff hid the features of the Rio Kid. He had doubted; but now knew. And Jim Hall's finger was on the trigger, ready to speed the death-shot if the Kid resisted. By long and weary trails the Ranger had hunted the boy outlaw; and now they stood face to face, and the Ranger had the upper hand.

The Kid did not speak. But from the crowd round them, in the plaza, came a roar of astonishment, incredulity, and anger. Mule-Kick Hall, of the Texas Rangers, was known

there—known, and respected, and feared. Plenty of men in Plug Hat would willingly have helped him in trailing down the outlaw whose name was on every tongue in Texas. But they were not likely to believe that Texas Brown, the sheriff, was the famous "fire-bug" whose wild adventures were the favourite theme in every cow camp and every bunk-house in the Lone Star State.

"The Rio Kid!" repeated Colorado Bill. "Say, Jim Hall, you're loco—plumb loco! Our sheriff the Rio Kid!" "The Rio Kid!" repeated Hall. "Hands up, Kid! I ain't waiting. You're my mutton, and I've got you dead to rights at last. Put up your paws, or it's you for the long jump!"

his hand now, and several other of the sheriff's deputies. Every eye was on the Ranger, and every eye was hostile.

"You want to be careful with that gun, Hall!" said Colorado grimly. "I got you covered."

"Me, too!" grinned Mesquite. "And if you pull trigger on our sheriff, Jim Hall, you won't live long enough to write home about it."

Hall breathed hard. His Rangers were far from Plug Hat. He was alone in a town that was in Texas Brown's pocket. He realised that if he fired on the Rio Kid he would fall the next moment, riddled with bullets. But the grim-faced Ranger did not falter.

With a steady hand he kept the Kid covered. And the Kid stood with his hands up—smiling.

"Listen to me, you Plug Hat guys!" said Hall.

"I've been after that fire-bug for a dog's age, and now I've got him. I'm telling you that the man you call Texas Brown, the man you've elected sheriff of Sassafrass county is the Rio Kid!"

"Aw, forget it!" scoffed Colorado. "You're jest loco—plumb loco!"

"Take those bandages off his face!" said Hall. "He allows that he's got them bandages on because of a cactus scratch. I'm telling you he's got them bandages on because he knows I'd know him at sight if I saw his face."

"Oh, guff!" jeered Mesquite. "I'll bring a dozen guys along to

Boy Sheriff Puts Noose Round His Own Neck!

Slowly the Kid put up his hands. But his eyes, over the bandages that smothered his handsome face, were smiling. The Kid's nerve was of iron; and it did not shake now. He was face to face with the man who had so long hunted him—under cover of his Colt. But the Kid did not figure that the game was up. Outlaw or no outlaw, the Kid was sheriff of Plug Hat, and in the cow-town all were his friends and supporters. And the Ranger was alone. The Kid was very far from figuring that he had reached the end of his trail. "Say, feller!" drawled the Kid, and his voice had a mocking note. "Say, is this sunstroke?" He laughed. "Or

Plug Hat to identify him, once he's safe with the irons on," said Hall.

"You figure you're putting the irons on our sheriff!" roared Colorado. "Forget it, you locoed gink!" "You know me," said Hall. "Jim Hall, of the Texas Rangers! I call on you men to help me secure that outlaw!"

There was a laugh.

"Say, ain't you got the wrong coyote by the tail, Hall?" asked the Kid softly. "I guess you been after the Rio Kid so long you've got that fire-bug on your nerves. You sure you ain't dreaming?"

"I guess you've got this town fooled, Kid, but you can't fool me," said Hall. "You're my prisoner!"

"You reckon?" smiled the Kid. "Alive or dead," said Mule-Kick Hall.

"Fellers," said the Kid, looking round, "you don't want to get mad with this guy. He sure thinks he's got hold of the Rio Kid. The Kid sure has worried him a whole lot, and I guess it's got him a piece loco. I reckon he's ready to see the Kid in every guy he meets. But, dog-gone my cats, it surely does surprise me that he figures that he's found the Kid in a sheriff! Mister Hall, you want to look further than Plug Hat to find the Rio Kid."

"I guess I've got him under my gun," said Hall grimly. "And I guess I'm not letting him loose again."

"You got me under your gun," agreed the Kid, "and I'm letting you get by with it because you're a good little man, and I don't want to hurt you. But you want to remember that I'm sheriff of this burg, and since I bin sheriff gun-play ain't allowed in Plug Hat. You're a captain of the Rangers, and I respect you a whole lot, but I got to put you in the calaboose for pulling a gun."

Hall's eyes glittered. "Keep your hands up!" he said. "They're up," said the Kid cheerfully. "But if you burn powder, Jim Hall, it's the last thing you'll do on this side of Jordan. I guess my friends here will see you fixed for the cemetery."

"You bet your life!" roared Colorado. "Hall, you geck, put down that gun!"

Five or six guns were trained on the Ranger now. There was no doubt whatever that if he fired he would be shot down the next instant. If he had hoped that his name, his authority, would gain him support in the crowd he was disappointed. Not a man believed that the sheriff was the celebrated outlaw, and every man there was backing up the sheriff.

"Let up, you gink!" shouted Mesquite.

The crowd surged closer round the Ranger and the sheriff. A deadly gleam came into Mule-Kick Hall's eyes. He could never get his prisoner away, that was clear. And it was in his mind to make sure of him, even at the cost of his own life.

"Dead or alive, Kid!" he said between his gritted teeth. "You're my game, and I've got you dead to rights."

A hand reached from behind the Ranger and struck up his arm. The instant the gun was no longer covering him the Kid acted—with lightning swiftness. In one second Hall would have had the gun bearing on him again—and this time he would have fired, instantly, ruthlessly. But one second was enough for the Kid. He sprang

like a tiger, and his fist drove into the Ranger's face, knocking him backwards. A moment more, and a dozen hands were laid on Jim Hall, his revolver was wrenched away, and he stood writhing in the grasp of the Men of Plug Hat.

By Order of the Sheriff!

"LYNCH him!" "String him up!" "Get a rope, you guys!" roared Colorado.

Jim Hall struggled. But six or seven pairs of hands were on him, grasping him fiercely, and he was helpless.

His face was white with rage. Already the angry crowd were dragging him towards the big cotton-wood tree that stood near the sheriff's office. Mesquite ran for a lasso.

"Lynch him!" It was a deafening roar. The excited cowmen forgot, or did not care, that Hall was a Ranger—captain of the Texas Rangers. He had come near to shooting down their sheriff under their eyes, and that was enough for them. They wrenched and hustled and dragged him towards the tree.

"Lynch him!" Hall's eyes, as he went, turned back on the Kid with a glare of rage, and hate, and bitterness.

"You've beaten me, Kid!" he panted chokingly. "You've beaten me to it. But my men will get you—"

"That's enough from you!" shouted Colorado. "Where's that rope? Get a riata, dog-gone you!"

"Hyer you are!" yelled Mesquite. He came speeding back with a lasso in his hands.

Hall was under the tree now. The rope was flung over a high branch. A dozen men grasped the end of it, while Colorado fitted the loop round Jim Hall's neck.

The Rio Kid looked on. He was not smiling now. He looked on, while the wings of the Angel of Death rustled in the ears of Jim Hall.

The only man the Kid had ever feared—if ever he had feared living man—was at his mercy now. He had only to stand idle while the men of Plug Hat strung up the man who had threatened him, who would have shot him dead in a second more. No man in Texas, save Jim Hall, knew that the sheriff was the Rio Kid. When death closed his lips for ever, the Kid was safe—safe from the long hunt that had given him no rest; safe to live as sheriff of Sassafras county, and to throw behind him for ever the wild life of an outlaw.

Only Jim Hall stood between the Kid and all that the Kid wanted; and Jim Hall, with a rope round his neck, stood on the verge of eternity.

But—! The Kid could not do it! The man was his enemy, his bitter enemy, and while he lived there was no safety for the Kid. But in his own grim, sour way the man was doing his duty; and he was a brave man, and the Kid respected him. And the Kid was sheriff, and a lawless lynching it was a sheriff's duty to prevent. The Kid sighed. A minute more, and all that was left of Jim Hall would be swinging from the branch of the cotton-wood. But the Kid could not stand for it.

He strode forward. "Hold in your hosses, fellers," said

the Kid quietly. "Lynch law ain't the law of Plug Hat! Go slow."

"Dog-gone you, Texas Brown!" hooted Colorado. "I'll tell all Texas we're going to hang him."

"Up with him!" roared a score of voices.

"Lynch him!" The Kid shook his head.

"Fellers, this ain't good enough for Plug Hat," he said. "That guy surely came near to giving me my ticket for soup; but we ain't hanging a man, for all that. Forget it!"

"I'll tell a man—" "Aw, forget it, I'm telling you," said the Kid.

And he threw the noose of the lasso from the neck of the Ranger.

Hard and grim the face of Jim Hall looked. The Kid was saving his life, but that cut no ice with the Ranger. The Kid was his game, to be hunted down like a wolf. And if the Ranger lived, he lived to hunt him down. The Kid was wise to it, but it made no difference. The temptation was strong, but there would be no lynching in Plug Hat so long as Texas Brown was sheriff.

There was a roar of discontent from the excited cowmen. But the word of the sheriff was law. Slowly and reluctantly the Plug Hat men gave in.

"I guess it's you that's loco, sheriff!" grunted Colorado.

"Mebbe," smiled the Kid. "But we ran Cactus Carter and his bunch out of town to keep law and order in Plug Hat. There ain't going to be no lynchings in this burg."

"You letting him call you an outlaw and a fire-bug, and pull a gun on you!" snorted Colorado indignantly.

The Kid smiled. "I guess he ain't done a whole lot of harm," he answered. "He's sure crazy about the Rio Kid. But jest like I told him, no guy is allowed to pull a gun in Plug Hat. This hyer is a law-abiding town since I been sheriff, and I guess gun-play don't go any more. Take him to the calaboose."

"I guess I'd rather string him up." "Hombre, you wouldn't like to string that guy up so much as I would," said the Kid. "But a sheriff has got to stand for law and order. And we ain't hanging a guy for making a mistake."

Hall gritted his teeth. "Nary mistake!" he said. "You're the Rio Kid!"

"Aw, save your breath!" said the Kid disdainfully. "Take him along to the calaboose, you guys. I guess he'll cool down there and feel better in the morning."

Hall's lips set with savage anger. The Kid had saved his life, he knew that. But it got the Ranger's goat to see the outlaw, the hunted man, still playing sheriff, although he knew that Hall knew who he was. The captain of the Rangers was condemned to the town gaol, like a disorderly rough-neck—at the order of the Rio Kid! He ground his teeth with rage as he was hustled roughly along.

There was already one occupant in the calaboose—Doc Sharp, of White Pine, who had imbibed the potent fire-water not wisely, but too well. But Doc Sharp was kicked out, and the one-roomed prison left vacant for the new occupant.

Mule-Kick Hall, captain of the Texas Rangers, white with rage, was marched into the timber gaol.

At the Kid's order, he was searched for weapons. Then he was released.

The Plug Hat men crowded out. THE POPULAR.—No. 609.

lid last. From the doorway he looked back at the Ranger.

Hall's eyes met his, with a glare of deadly animosity. The Kid regarded him thoughtfully.

"You're getting by with it, Kid," said the Ranger, his voice suffocated with rage. "You've beaten me to it. But—"

"You want to take it quiet, hombre," said the Kid. "I keep on telling you that guys ain't allowed to pull guns in Plug Hat now this baby is sheriff."

"I know you. You know I'm wise to you," hissed Hall. "You got the gall to go on playing sheriff, when I know you're the Kid—the durned fire-bug that's wanted by half the sheriffs in Texas!"

"I guess I'm a sheriff myself, feller," said the Kid. "I guess what I say goes in this cow-town. You're in the calaboose for three days, and when you're let out you'll be run out of town."

"Three days! When my men hear of this they'll raise thunder in this burg," snarled Hall. "I guess your rough-necks won't argue with the Texas Rangers."

"Aw, go to bed and sleep it off," advised the Kid. And he shut the door of the calaboose, locked it, and put the key in his pocket.

He walked back slowly to his office. The crowd dispersed, excitedly discussing the affair. Colorado Bill joined the Kid.

"Say, sheriff!"

"Shoot!" said the Kid.

"I guess that galoot is sure loco," said Colorado. "But what the thunder, sheriff, put it into his cabeza that you was the Rio Kid!"

The sheriff laughed.

"That guy is jest crazy about the Kid," he answered.

"I ain't never seed the Kid," said Colorado musingly. "But I seen his picture stuck up at Packsaddle, with a reward of a thousand dollars. He ain't unlike you, sheriff."

"No?" asked the Kid.

"I mean jest about your age, and build, and so on," said Colorado thoughtfully. "Now I come to think of it I reckon you're like him some."

The Kid looked at him curiously.

"I guess punchers look a lot alike," he said, "and from what I've heard, the Kid was a puncher. I guess Mule-Kick Hall can't go around roping in every puncher that looks like the Rio Kid."

"He sure can't," agreed Colorado. "But I'm sure surprised at Hall. He ain't no gink, sheriff, and he ain't the guy to go off on his ear about nothing. He's got some reason, I reckon, for thinking that the Rio Kid is around in Sassafras county. But he sure did make one big mistake in figuring that our sheriff was that durned fire-bug. But it beats me, sheriff, for any guy in Texas will tell you that Jim Hall ain't the man to make fool mistakes." Colorado shook his head. "I allow it's got me beat!"

The Kid nodded and went into his office.

Plug Hat did not keep early hours, and it was late when the last shack closed and the last voice died away. But, late as it was, the sheriff was not in his bunk. While Plug Hat slept and the captured Ranger raged in the timber gaol the sheriff was pacing his office, thinking of anything but sleep. What the outlaw sheriff had feared had come at last, and the Rio Kid had some hard thinking to do.

THE POPULAR.—NO. 609.

Face to Face!

MULE-KICK HALL cursed, not loud, but deep.

There was no sleep for him that night, any more than for the sheriff.

He walked to and fro within the narrow limits of the gaol, and sat on the rough bench, that was almost all the furniture, stretched himself there once or twice, but rose again.

His face was black and bitter. He cursed the Rio Kid, and he cursed himself and his stars. It was the Rio Kid. He knew it! He would have staked his life that Sheriff Brown was the Rio Kid. Even in saving him from the lynchers, the sheriff had acted like the Kid. It was not the first time the outlaw had spared his life when he held it in the hollow of his hand. It was like the Kid!

But there was no gratitude, no compunction in Jim Hall's breast. He was not an ungenerous man. Men had found him a staunch and loyal friend. But that long and bitter trouble with the Rio Kid had soured him. In a long life on the trail, only one man had ever beaten him, ever held him at bay for any length of time. And that was the Kid!

It was unlike Hall, for generally he was as indifferent as Fate to the evildoers whom he roped in, in the way of duty. But somehow the cool, careless, disdainful Kid got his goat. Bitterness had crept in—bitterness that seemed likely to poison Hall's life till he succeeded in getting the Kid. His own life he counted as nothing—less than nothing—if he could get the Kid.

And, at long last, he had hunted him down, and had found him hiding under a new name and a sheriff's star—Sheriff Brown, of Plug Hat! And, fairly under his gun, the Kid had escaped him again. Escaped him—and boosted him into the town calaboose like a drunken rough-neck. Hall ground his teeth to think of it.

He was glad to live, if only to get after the Kid again; but it would have been less a wound to his pride if the Kid had let the rope finish his career. Contemptuously, like a real sheriff dealing with a "tough," the Kid had treated him, and he—Hall, captain of the Texas Rangers—was passing the night in the calaboose from which the drunken Doc Sharp had been ejected to make room for him. What would folks say when they knew? Captain Jim Hall cooling his heels in a cow-town gaol, at the order of an outlaw masquerading as a sheriff! His cheeks burned, his heart throbbed with rage at the thought of it.

And he cursed his own haste, his own keenness to cinch the Kid, which had landed him in this—landed him in a gaol, while the outlaw mounted and rode. For Hall had no doubt that the Kid would escape that night, and that Sassafras county would never see him again. Hall was so accustomed to command, so used to men jumping to obey his orders, that he had not realized that in Plug Hat he was one against a crowd—that the force was on the side of the outlaw. He had taken it for granted that when he denounced the Rio Kid the cowmen would take it from him, that his word was good enough for Plug Hat, as it was good enough for any crowd in Texas. But the Kid had got away with it, and here

was he—gaoled! If he had foreseen it, if he had not been so keen, if he had waited—waited, and left the outlaw in a fool's security till he could have called his troop of Rangers to his aid—it would have been a different tale then.

He cursed as he moved restlessly about his prison.

There was no chance of getting out. The walls were strong, of thick and heavy timber, the window small and barred, the door heavy, and safely locked. The calaboose had been built under the Kid's supervision, to hold any rough-necks who were too fresh to submit to the new sheriff's rule, and the Kid had seen the work done well. Jim Hall had examined the walls, the window, and the door, and knew that there was no escape. And while he was cooped up the Rio Kid was escaping—already, doubtless, on his famous grey mustang, burning the wind. For, of course, the Kid could not hope to keep up the sheriff game, now that Hall knew. His men would be in town the next day, and if they found him gaoled they would kick the calaboose to pieces if all Plug Hat stood in the way. They would arrest Sheriff Texas Brown if the whole cow-town turned out to stop them. Yes; the Kid was escaping. On the morrow he would be gone, without leaving a trail. He knew where he had to get off, and he was getting off.

Hall raged at the thought. To run his old enemy down and see him escape—ride away, laughing, care free! The mental picture of the Kid, galloping through the starry Texas night, maddened Hall.

There was a click at the door, and he spun round towards it and stood still. The key was turned back.

Hope leaped up in his heart. Had some of the dog-goned geeks realised how matters stood, realised that they had roped in the man who stood for the law and allowed an outlaw to escape, and come there to release him? He caught his breath.

The door swung outward.

In the clear, bright, starlight a puncher, in Stetson and goatskin chaps, stood there. Hall stared grimly at him. It was the Kid.

There were no bandages on his face now. They had ceased to serve their purpose and were gone. The cool, handsome, sunburnt face, with its steady blue eyes, was revealed in the glimmer of the stars. Hall's eyes devoured that handsome face. If there had been any doubt before it was gone now. He knew the Kid when he saw him.

His hands clenched convulsively. A quiver ran through him, as through a tiger about to spring. The starlight glimmered on a Colt.

"Hold in your hosses, feller," said the Kid quietly. "Don't make me spill your juice. Don't make it easy for me. By the great horned toad, Jim Hall, I'm powerful tempted to drive cold lead through your cabeza. I guess I'm a durned geek not to. Give me a whisper of trouble, dog-gone you, and you get yours, pronto."

Hall stood quite still. Well he knew that his life hung on the merest thread. Why the Kid did not kill him he did not understand. But with all the Rio Kid's wild reputation, it never had been his way to kill, unless he was crowded so bad that he had to. Jim Hall realised that he had better not crowd the Kid now.

"What do you want?" he hissed. "You denying that you're the Kid now—now that I can see your face, dog-gone you?"

The Kid smiled softly.

"I guess not, Hall. Not now that we're alone here. You got it right—and I'm here to talk to you."

He stepped inside and closed the door. The only light in the room was the shaft of starlight that fell in at the unglazed window. It lighted the calaboose dimly, and across the floor lay the black shadow of the bars of the window. In the dimness Hall's eyes gleamed like a cat's. He was calculating the chances of a leap—of the Kid missing in the dim light. He checked the impulse. The Rio Kid never missed, and Hall knew in his bones that the boy outlaw, who would not shoot him down unresisting, would shoot him without compunction if he attacked—that he would welcome the chance. He heard the low laugh of the Kid. His thoughts had been read.

"Guess again, hombre," said the Kid. "I've warned you not to make it easy for me."

Hall controlled himself.

"What do you want?" he hissed.

"Jest a pow-wow," said the Kid. "I'm sure going to talk to you like a Dutch uncle, Hall. You'll sit on that bench and keep quiet while I talk turkey to you."

Hall shrugged his broad shoulders and sat down on the bench. Across the dim room he eyed the Kid with fierce eyes, under lowering brows.

The Kid leaned on the door, facing him.

"You've nosed me out, Hall," he went on, in the same quiet voice. "You've trailed me down and found me to home. But you ain't cinched me yet—not by a whole jugful. Jest at present I've cinched you."

"How long you figure you can keep it up?" snarled Hall. "My men will be here to-morrow. I left them word to come on here when they was through with the rustlers in the buttes. Even the god-darned cowmen who've stood for your play, darn you, will be doing some thinking. Plug Hat won't be backing you to-morrow, like it did. Once my men are here—"

"You want to listen to a guy," said the Kid. "I've said that I'm here to talk turkey. Listen to me like a white man, and forget that I'm the Rio Kid. You've found me here, a sheriff! Ask any guy in Plug Hat, and he'll tell you that there ain't a cow-town in Texas with a better sheriff. I guess you've heard how I've cleaned up Plug Hat and turned it, from the wildest hole in Texas into a decent town. I guess afore I was sheriff a Texas Ranger couldn't have rode into this burg without getting shot on sight. Jim Hall, they made me an outlaw, and you kept me one; but I got a chance of making good, and I've taken it. And here I am—sheriff of Sassafras county. You stand for the law, and I stand for the law—now. Do you want to drive me back into outlawry?"

"I want to cinch you and see you strung up!" said Hall, between his teeth.

"You ain't giving a guy a chance to make good?"

Hall laughed scoffingly.

"I gave you a chance once," he said, "when you was a rancher. I took your word and gave you a chance. And what was the end of it?"

"I was driven off that ranch," said the Kid quietly. "I was hunted off'n

that ranch, Hall, and hunted back into an outlaw trail."

"And you figure you wouldn't be driven out of Plug Hat when the galoots get wise to you? You reckon your safe in Plug Hat for keeps, even if I let up on you?"

"I guess I'll try hard to make the grade."

Hall shrugged his shoulders. "Give a guy a chance," said the Kid. "I got you dead to rights. I could keep you quiet if I wanted. The boys would have strung you up if I hadn't horned in. Give me a chance to make good without that. Keep your teeth shut on what you know. Quit Plug Hat, and

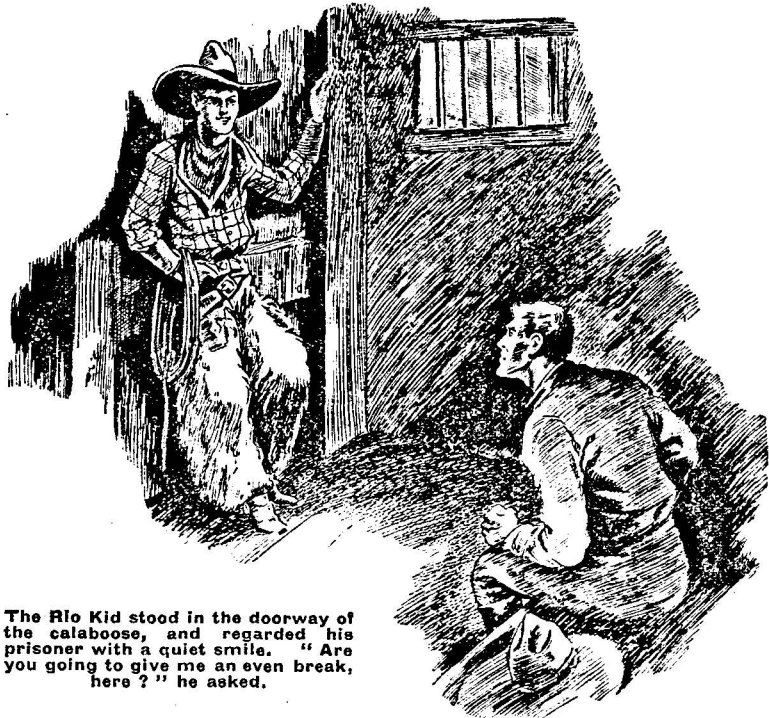
The Kid laughed—a hard laugh.

"You figure I'm leaving you here, to talk to Plug Hat men to-morrow and put them wise, and to wait for your Rangers to ride in? Forget it! I guess I'm toting you to a safe place."

Hall breathed hard and quick.

"I guess not," he said, between his teeth. "I guess I ain't standing for that, Kid!"

"You figure that I'm asking you?" sneered the Kid. "Why, you dog-goned geck, I'm jest honing for an excuse to blow your brains out over that wall. You lift a finger, you let out one yap, and you're a dead Ranger—and I'll be darned glad of the chance!"



The Rio Kid stood in the doorway of the calaboose, and regarded his prisoner with a quiet smile. "Are you going to give me an even break, here?" he asked.

leave its sheriff alone, and forget that you ever knew him as the Rio Kid."

"And when you're tired of playing sheriff you go back to the outlaw trail, same as you did after your ranching stunt?" sneered Hall. "Forget it, Kid. I've got to stand for the law, and I got to do my duty, if you chewed the rag from now till sun-up."

The Kid was silent, looking at him, his face a little pale. He had hoped little from an appeal to that man of iron; and he had no hope now. Hall watched his eyes and read his thoughts there. It was in the Kid's mind to shoot him like a dog. Those moments were big with fate for the captain of the Texas Rangers. His life was at the mercy of the boy outlaw, whom he defied and threatened, whose appeal he rejected. But not for an instant did Hall think of yielding. Whether he lived or died, he was the enemy and implacable pursuer of the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande.

"I guess I'm a dog-goned gink, Hall," said the Kid at last, with a sigh. "But I can't spill your juice, though I sure never heard a guy beg for it so hard." He stepped away from the door. Hall noticed now that a lasso was looped over his arm. "Stand up!"

Hall rose from the bench.

"What's this game?" he muttered huskily.

There was deadly menace in the Kid's quiet voice. There was death in his glinting eyes. He meant every word, and something like a chill came into even the iron heart of the Ranger. And Hall made no resistance as the Kid bound his arms behind his back and fastened a gag in his mouth. With the Kid's grasp on him, he stepped out of the calaboose into the brightness of the stars.

The Kid Means Business!

THE hoofs of the cow-pony rang on hard rock and loose stones. They had left the prairie behind, and the Kid was leading the cow-pony into the hills, by rugged paths and perilous ravines. The man who sat bound in the saddle wondered where they were going—wondered what the outlaw's ultimate intention was. Rage burned him like a fire; it gleamed and blazed from his eyes. But Jim Hall was helpless, bound to the cow-pony, led whither the Kid listed. The gag in his mouth choked back his curses.

The Kid tramped on in silence. He did not even glance at his prisoner; he gave Hall no heed. Plug Hat town was

far behind, across the wide stretch of prairie that separated the cow-town from the sierra. It was not to the buttes that the Kid had taken his prisoner; there were Rangers in the buttes. Five miles from Plug Hat, to the north, was a rugged sierra—arid, stony, desolate, scarce ever trodden by the foot of man or horse. And into the sierra the Kid led the bound Ranger, in silence, only the thud of the cow pony's hoofs waking the echoes of the night.

It was new country to Jim Hall; but he could see that it was familiar to the Kid. Only a few short weeks ago the Kid had ridden into Sassafras county, a stranger; but Hall bitterly reflected that the Kid was the galoot to learn at once the lie of the land—especially of rugged and solitary tracts where, in case of need, a hunted man might hide from his foes.

What was his intention? In spite of his courage—that had never failed him—in spite of the iron nerve that no peril had ever shaken, Hall was feeling a chill in his heart.

The Kid stopped at last.

Hall stared round him, in the bright starlight. Not a sound of life; not a sign; not even a coyote slinking among the rocks. They had stopped in a canyon, where a torrent cascaded down a steep acclivity, from the high uplands, forming a stream that flowed down the canyon to the prairie. The Kid unbound the lasso that fastened Hall to the horse's back and lifted him down. He removed the gag from the Ranger's mouth now.

Hall panted.

"Dog-gone you!" he hissed, his lips white with rage. "What's your game? What's your game, you durned scallawag?"

"I guess you'll soon be wise to it."

Taking the Ranger by one bound arm, the Kid led him forward on foot. He pressed close to the canyon wall, where the torrent tumbled down, and the spray dashed into their faces. To Hall's amazement, the Kid plunged into the waterfall, dragging the Ranger after him.

But he understood the next moment. There was a deep cavern in the cliff, behind the fall, the opening completely screened by the falling water.

Hall found himself standing in deep darkness. The Kid had released him, and he heard the outlaw fumbling. A light gleamed out. The Kid had lighted a candle, and he set it on a ledge of rock. Hall looked about him. It was a narrow cavern, but it bit deep into the cliff. How far it extended Hall could not tell; the interior was wrapped in gloom. Out of reach of the spray of the fall, several blankets lay on the rugged floor, and other things that told of a camp.

"Yep!" The Kid nodded. "I guess I found this shebang a piece ago, Hall, and fixed it up for lying doggo, in case I wanted it. I reckoned I knowed I might have to lie doggo when I heard that the Texas Rangers were around. You've guessed it."

"And what—" Hall hissed.

But he did not need to ask now. He knew.

"Them's your blankets," said the Kid, "I guess you're bedding down in this place, Hall. I fixed it up for this baby in case of need; but I reckon it will serve your turn. You can yell all you want; no galoot ever rides these hills, and I guess if one did he wouldn't hear you through the noise of the waterfall. You're bedding down here, Hall."

"You're leaving me here?"

"You've said it."

Hall's eyes gleamed, and the Kid laughed.

"I guess I'm leaving you safe," he said. "You'll see me again, Hall; and every time you see me you'll have a chance of talking turkey. You're a durned hard man, Jim Hall, but all Texas knows that your word is your bond, and I guess I'll take your word, when you give it."

From the pocket of his chaps the Kid drew a long, thin steel chain. There was a staple at one end, a padlock at the other. With a chunk of rock the Kid drove the iron staple deep into the wall of the cavern—drove it in hard and deep, till it almost disappeared.

"I guess a team of hosses wouldn't pull that out, Hall," said the Kid. "If you pull loose, feller, you're sure welcome."

He unbound the Ranger's arms. Round his left wrist the padlock snapped shut. It fitted closer than a handcuff. Hall stood trembling with rage. The Kid stepped back.

"I guess that fixes you, Hall," said the Kid. "I'm leaving you food, and I guess there's plenty to drink just at your doorway." He stepped towards the screen of falling water, paused, and turned. "Jim Hall, I've asked you to give me a chance to make good at Plug Hat. I'm asking you again."

A curse was the Ranger's only answer.

The Kid shrugged his shoulders and stepped away through the falling water and vanished from the Ranger's sight.

THE END.

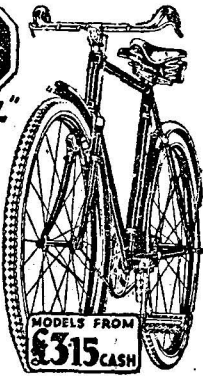
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