

WHAT'S HAPPENED TO THE CAPTAIN OF THE TEXAS RANGERS ?

Ask The Boy Sheriff—He Knows!

THE MISSING RANGER!

THE THRILLS ARE LINED UP,
one after another, in this stunning
Western Yarn!



Vamoosed.

"SHERIFF!"

The Rio Kid yawned. It was yet early in the cow town of Plug Hat.

Generally the Kid was an early riser. Seldom was the Rio Kid asleep after the sun had risen over the rim of the prairie and flocked the waving grass with gold. But this morning the Kid was loth to leave his bunk. The night had been a busy one to the Kid, though no man in Plug Hat knew it; and the sheriff of Plug Hat—once the outlaw of the Rio Grande—was still in his blankets when Colorado Bill thumped at the door and shouted.

"Sheriff! Say, sheriff!" roared Colorado. "You want to wake up, sheriff! I'll tell a man!"

Colorado was thumping at the door of the sheriff's office, which was between the Kid's bed-room and the street. But as the Kid was in no hurry to answer, the big cowman came round to the window of the bed-room and thumped on the pinewood shutter.

"Say, sheriff!" he bawled.

"Aw, what's got you?" yawned the

Kid, sitting up in his bunk. "What's biting you so bad, feller?"

"It's burning daylight, sheriff!" answered Colorado, through the pine shutter. "And I guess I got news. The calaboose is empty."

"Sho!"

"That guy has levanted, sheriff. That galoot, Mule-Kick Hall, the Ranger, that we locked up in the calaboose last night, after he pulled a gun on you, sheriff—ho's absquatulated."

The pine shutter at the window hid the Kid from the man outside, and hid the smile on the Kid's face.

Colorado Bill had no doubt that his news would startle the sheriff of Plug Hat. But the Kid was not startled a whole lot. He had no call to be surprised, as he had himself taken Jim Hall out of the cow town gaol the previous night, under cover of darkness, and marched him off into the sierra for safe and secret keeping.

But that was the Kid's own secret. Plug Hat would have been more than a little astonished, had it known; and the Kid did not figure on letting the cow town know.

"Say, what you giving me, Colorado?" yawned the Kid. "Wasn't the calaboose locked up safe, with that Ranger guy inside?"

"Sure! I see you lock it on him, sheriff, with my own two eyes," said Colorado. "But he's gone. And the calaboose ain't been broke, neither. The door was jest unlocked."

"By the great horned toad!" said the Kid. "Mean to say some guy's got a key to the calaboose?"

"It sure looks like it, sheriff!" said Colorado. "Unless you dropped the key around after locking in that Ranger guy."

"I guess not," said the Kid. "But I reckon there's a whole lot of keys would shift that lock, come to think of it. I guess I'll send as far as Pack-saddle for a new one. But you sure the guy has vamoosed!"

"There ain't hide nor hair of him left in Plug Hat, sheriff. I reckoned I'd put you wise to once. The boys is sure mad about it," said Colorado. "If them Rangers figure that they can buck agin the law in Plug Hat, they got another guess coming. You say the word, sheriff, and we'll saddle up and run that guy down, and bring him back to serve his three days in the calaboose, with a riata tied around him."

"I guess I'll be out in two shakes of a coyote's tail!" answered the Kid; and he turned out of his bunk.

Colorado Bill tramped away to the calaboose, round which a number of Plug Hat citizens were gathered.

The door stood wide open; and some of the Plug Hat men were looking into the timber gaol, where Jim Hall, captain of the Texas Rangers, had been locked the previous night.

It was empty; there was no sign of the Ranger. And there was wrath in the faces of the Plug Hat citizens.

Plug Hat was no longer the wild and whirling cow town it had been in the time when Cactus Carter and his crowd ruled the roost. It was no longer the hottest place in Texas. Under the rule of the new sheriff it had become the most law-abiding town in the section. Many of the rough-necks had been run out of town; others had left in disgust; gun-play and horse-lifting were things of the past. Respect for the law was firmly established now. So this defiance of the sheriff and his sentence, on the part of the prisoner in the calaboose, got the goat of Plug Hat.

It was not very long ago that gun-play in the saloons and the street had been rather the rule than the exception. But all that had been changed by the new sheriff; and three days in the calaboose was the punishment for pulling a gun in Plug Hat. The rough-necks—what were left of them in the cow town—repined; but peaceful citizens found it good. And they were ready to adorn a branch of the cottonwood with any guy who, having

been duly sentenced, broke out of gaol before his sentence was served.

Jim Hall was a captain of the Texas Rangers; but that cut no ice in Plug Hat. He had accused the sheriff of being no other than the Rio Kid, the celebrated outlaw and fire-bug, whose exploits were the talk of every cow camp between the Rio Grande and the Colorado river. He had pulled a gun to back up that amazing accusation. He had been pitched into the calaboose, according to law. And now he was gone—defying the sheriff and defying Plug Hat! And the citizens were wrathful.

The sheriff was not long in emerging from his shack and joining the indignant crowd at the calaboose. He looked into the empty timber gaol, and shook his head.

"He's sure pulled out!" he remarked.

"Some dog-goned scallywag let him out!" hooted Mesquite.

The Kid nodded.

"I guess he was let out!" he agreed.

Nobody, in fact, knew that better than Mister Texas Brown, the sheriff.

"Say, sheriff," exclaimed Pop Short, "I guess you want to rope him in again! I guess we want to show them Rangers that they can't run Plug Hat."

"I should smile!" hooted Colorado Bill.

The sheriff shook his head.

"I guess we ain't hunting trouble with the Rangers, fellers!" he said. "The galoot's beat it, that's a cinch! Let him hit the trail all he wants. I reckon he won't worry Plug Hat again."

Colorado gave a grunt of disgust. "And that guy allowed that you was the Rio Kid, and pulled a gun on you!" he snorted.

The Kid smiled.

"I'd sure get after him, and rope him in, if he had all the Rangers in Texas at his back!" growled Mesquite.

"Feller," said the Kid, "what's the good of hunting trouble? He's gone, and that's enough of him. Forget it!"

Clatter! Clatter! Clatter!

The excited discussion was interrupted by the thunder of galloping hoofs. From the prairie trail a horseman rode into Plug Hat at full speed, and up the ragged street to the plaza. All eyes were turned on him; and many faces were grim. For the horseman was a Texas Ranger—Austin Red, a member of Jim Hall's troop.

He dragged in his foaming broncho on the edge of the crowd gathered in front of the calaboose.

"Say, you guys," he panted, "where's Jim Hall? Cactus Carter has got away from us, and I guess I want to put Jim Hall wise. Where is he?"

when he left us in the buttes yesterday. Ain't he here?"

"He sure ain't!" drawled the Kid. The Ranger's glance turned on the sheriff. He grinned, for a moment, as he looked at him.

"Say, you been in trouble with a wildcat?" he asked.

The sheriff's face was criss-crossed with sticking-plaster. It rather spoiled his good looks. But the Kid did not mind that, so long as it changed them. The Kid did not want to look his usual self while Texas Rangers were around.

"Nope!" said the Kid. "Jest a cactus scratch, feller! I sure got a tumble in the buttes. But what's that about Cactus Carter? You let him get away?"

"I guess he didn't ask for any leave," grunted Austin Red. "But he's sure made his get-away."

"I reckon you Rangers want to give up the trail and open a shop and sell candy," said the Sheriff of Plug Hat, in great disgust. "Me, I trailed down them rustlers in the buttes, and handed the job over to you Rangers to cinch them; and left it all as easy as pie for you. And you can't keep a rustler when you got him! You sure want to take off them spurs and put on an apron and sell candy."

Red glared at him.

"You dog-goned cowpuncher—" he began hotly.

"Aw, cut it out!" interrupted the Kid. "I made you a present of that bunch of rustlers, and you muss it up this-a-way! You want me to pat you on the back and say you're a good little man!"

"We got the rustlers, the whole bunch!" snarled Red. "We got them along to Blue Grass, after Hall left us to hit Plug Hat. We got the whole bunch safe now—cepting Cactus Carter. He got away in the dark—and I guess nobody knows how—"

"If you knowed your business, you'd know how—and he wouldn't have got away!" retorted the Kid. "Me, I was trailing that fire-bug like a Comanche Injun, and I left him to you'uns. Now you allow he's got away; and it sure does get my goat!"

"I ain't asking you to trail him for us!" snapped Red. "I come here to put Jim Hall wise. Ain't he along to Plug Hat?"

"He sure ain't!" said the sheriff coolly. "Jim Hall forgot that he was in a law-abiding town, and he figured that he could run this show, and pulled a gun to make it good. So we cinched him in the calaboose."

Red jumped in his saddle.

"You cinched a captain of the Texas Rangers in the calaboose!" he roared.

"We sure did; and we'd cinch the governor of the State in the calaboose if he pulled a gun in this burg!" answered the Kid.

"I should smile!" said Colorado Bill.

"But he's made his get-away, jest like Cactus Carter!" grinned the Kid. "He didn't seem to be honing for three days in the calaboose; and he's gone. You want to look for him outside Plug Hat."

The Ranger's eyes gleamed at him.

"If he was in your durned calaboose now, I'd fetch the boys along, and we wouldn't leave one board sticking to another!" he shouted.

"I guess you'd find your hands full!" said the sheriff. "You want to know that Mister Texas Brown—that's me—runs the show in this hyer burg,

and I don't give a continental red cent for all the Rangers in Texas. I'm telling you that you're a crowd of rubes and green jaspers, and you can't keep a bolt on a rustler after I make you a present of him. Jim Hall's gone; and I guess you better go after him. You dog-goned pesky jays get my goat."

"Where's he gone?" demanded Red, choking with rage.

"Any guy know where Jim Hall's gone?" asked the sheriff, looking round. "If any guy knows, put this galoot wise, and let him ride. Plug Hat sure hasn't any use for these boobies."

"Aw, look for him on the prairie, feller!" jeered Colorado. "He left this town running, and I guess you'll find him still running if you pick up his trail."

"And tell him," said the Kid, "that if he shows up in Plug Hat agin he goes back into the calaboose; and any Ranger that bucks agin the law in this town goes along with him. You guys reckon you can ride into a cow town and run it as if it belonged to you! Forget it, feller! Go and lose some more rustlers, after I've trailed them down for you. But don't you figure that you can bulldoze Plug Hat! You can't get by with it."

"Not by a jugful!" hooted Colorado.

The Ranger, crimson with anger, glared at the sheriff and the Plug Hat men. His hand had dropped on the gun in his belt.

The Kid laughed contemptuously.

"Let go that gun!" he said. "You pull a gun in this burg, feller, and you go into the calaboose, jest like Mule-Kick Hall. And I reckon you want to get busy looking for Cactus Carter, now you've let him get loose. You figure that I'm going to do your work for you over agin?"

Austin Red half-drew the gun. There was a growl from the men round him. It was not fear, however, but the remembrance that he was a Ranger that caused Red to shove the gun back into the holster.

He sat in his saddle, uncertain. And the Kid, who had his own reasons—good reasons—for desiring to keep the Texas Rangers clear of Plug Hat, went on in a vein of cheerful insult.

"Best it, feller! I'm telling you that this town has no use for boobies! That guy Carter is loose agin, and I guess he'll be rustling cows, and all the ranchers in Sasafraas County hooting out to me to rope him in and get back their beasts. Next time I get the rustlers fixed I ain't letting any Rangers take a hand in the game. No, sir! You can't handle rustlers. You take my advice and give up ranging, and open a store and sell candy. That's your long suit."

There was a jeering laugh from the Plug Hat men. Plug Hat seemed to relish the way its sheriff was talking to the Ranger.

Austin Red jerked fiercely at his reins.

"If I wasn't a Ranger, and under orders, I'd get down off'n this cayuse and muss you up so's you wouldn't know yourself agin for a month of Sundays!" he hissed.

"Get down, anyhow, and see if you can get by with it!" invited the sheriff.

"I ain't any objection."

Austin Red looked disposed to take him at his word. But duty called, and the Ranger restrained his rage. He wheeled his horse.

Rough on the Ranger.

THE Kid looked curiously at the Ranger. Austin Red had evidently ridden hard; rider and horse were thick with alkali dust. Evidently, too, he knew nothing of what had happened in the cow town.

There was no answer to his question, and Austin Red stared at the Plug Hat crowd, puzzled.

"You hear me foot?" he exclaimed impatiently. "Where's Jim Hall? He allowed he was riding into Plug Hat

"I got to find Mule-Kick Hall!" he said savagely. "I ain't no use for you, Mister Texas Brown."

A yell of derision followed the Ranger, as he rode for the prairie. He half-turned in his saddle, his hand on a gun. But he restrained himself, and galloped away, hoots and yells ringing in his ears as he went. With a thunder of hoofs, the Ranger vanished into the prairie.

Cactus Carter's Hold-Up!

BUD JENKINS, who drove the two-horse hack up from Blue Grass to Plug Hat, tightened his grasp on the ribbons, and drew in his team, as a horseman pushed out of the chaparral beside the trail. The six-gun in the rider's hand

This was the first time the stage had run past Blue Grass in that particular direction. In the rough days at Plug Hat the stage company had not cared to run it there. But Plug Hat was now a peaceable town, under the new sheriff's rule; and the stage-line had been extended at last, and Bud drove up the hack on its first trip. Evidently Cactus Carter was wise to it. Gunman and bully in Plug Hat, he had been run out by the sheriff, and had taken to rustling cows in the buttes. Rounded up there by the sheriff, cinched by the Rangers, Cactus had escaped—but he had lost his bunch, lost his plunder, lost all he had. Now he was on a new trail; and he had held up the stage on its first trip to Plug Hat.

His eyes gleamed at Pop Short. Pop had been Mister Texas Brown's most enthusiastic backer in the election for sheriff; and it was the new sheriff who had beaten Cactus to a frazzle. The road-agent half-lifted his Colt as he looked at the fat hotel-keeper. And Mr. Short felt his plump heart sink almost into his boots.

"You durn geek!" said Cactus. "I guess I'm glad to meet up with you, Mr. Short, just a few. Your dog-goned sheriff ain't here now, hombre."

"Cactus, old-timer," said Mr. Short, in a quivering voice, "you ain't no call to get mad with me. I got five hundred dollars in my rags that I've jest drawn out of the bank to Blue Grass."

Cactus laughed shortly. "You ain't worth powder an' shot!" he said. "Pony up, you fat gink! Drop it in the trail!"

A roll of bills dropped in the trail, and Pop Short breathed more freely. Never had a galoot felt so pleased that he was not worth powder and shot.

The other three passengers waited their turn, with their hands up. All of them packed guns; but not one was disposed to pull a gun on Cactus Carter. The desperate gunman was too sudden with the Colt. The Sheriff of Plug Hat had beaten him; but no other man in Sassafras County had ever beaten Cactus Carter.

"Shell out, you 'uns!" grunted the road-agent.

And the passengers promptly shelled out. The horseman eyed them evilly.

"That the lot?" he asked.

"Yep!"

"I guess I'm goin' through you," said Cactus, "and if I find anythin' more you won't live long enough to want it."

Whereupon each of the passengers discovered that he had overlooked something, and promptly added it to the little pile in the trail. Cactus chuckled with grim amusement.

"Stand back and keep your hands up!" he snapped.



The flames caught the dry woodwork of the hack, and soon it was a blazing furnace. The road-agent looked on, his revolver ready for any attempt to save the vehicle.

"I guess," said Colorado, with a grin, "that them Rangers will get wise to it that Plug Hat ain't a healthy spot for them, nohow."

"I reckon!" assented the Kid, with a smile.

And he sauntered cheerfully down the street to the Plug Hat hotel for breakfast.

The escape of Cactus Carter did not worry the Kid a whole lot, though he figured that it meant more trouble with his old enemy. It gave him a pretext for a break with the Rangers; and that was what the Kid wanted. He had cause for a grouch, for he had run down the rustlers in their secret den in the buttes, and left the Rangers to corral them. And the Kid meant to make the most of that grouch. He did not want Rangers in Plug Hat; he did not want them to learn, if he could help it, that Jim Hall had accused him of being the Rio Kid. The less that was said about the Rio Kid the better, so long as "Texas Brown" was sheriff of Plug Hat. And Jim Hall was in a safe place, and could not talk.

The Kid ate his breakfast with a cheery, smiling face.

He was not going back to an outlaw trail, if he could help it. He was sheriff of Plug Hat, and he was staying sheriff. It was not easy, and he knew it; but for the present, at least, it looked as if the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande would get by with it.

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was not lifted; and Budd reckoned that he did not want to see it lifted. He did not wait for the man with the tanned face and evil eyes to rap out "Halt!" He drew in his horses with praiseworthy promptitude as soon as he saw the face of Cactus Carter.

The horseman rode closer to the hack. Four inside passengers blinked at him from the windows, in alarm. One of them was Pop Short, the hotel-keeper of Plug Hat; and Pop changed colour as he recognised the gunman who had once ruled the cow town with an iron hand, till he was run out by the new sheriff.

"Search me!" muttered Mr. Short. "It's sure Cactus Carter that them dog-goned Rangers lost when they had him cinched; and he's sure turned road-agent since the sheriff put paid to his rustling cows. Search me!"

"Morning, Mister Carter!" said Bud Jenkins politely, from his box. "You want anything with this hyer hearsie, sir?"

"I guess so!" answered Cactus grimly. "How many you got on board?"

"Four!"

"Tell 'em to light down."

"Sure!" said Bud.

He called to his passengers, and they unwillingly stepped down into the trail. Bud Jenkins sat and chewed tobacco, skilfully ejecting the juice past the ears of his team. And the four passengers, putting up their hands without waiting to be told, eyed Cactus Carter uneasily.

The four obeyed, lining up beside the trail. Cactus turned to the driver, sitting chewing tobacco on the box.

"Light down, Bud!" he said. "Say, you ain't going through a stage-driver, Cactus?" exclaimed Bud. "I guess—"

"Light down, dog-gone you!" Bud Jenkins climbed down into the trail.

"Cut them traces!" "Wha-a-t?" ejaculated Bud.

Cactus Carter eyed him evilly over the revolver.

"I guess you don't want to make me talk twice!" he said. "I ain't got a lot of time to waste on you, Bud. I said cut them traces."

The stage-driver drew a deep breath. "What you says goes!" he answered. Bud loosed a knife from his boot, and sawed through the leather traces of his team with a grim face.

The traces were cut, and the team stood free. Cactus Carter lifted his quirt with his left hand and lashed cruelly at the horses. They scampered away into the prairie with loose traces swinging.

"Now you want to fire that hack, Bud," said Cactus.

Bud started. "Aw, forget it, Cactus!" he exclaimed. "What the thunder do you want to fire the hack for?"

"Carry me home to die!" murmured Pop Short.

Cactus laughed disagreeably.

"I guess it was your dog-goned new sheriff that got the stage company to run this hyer hack up to Plug Hat," he said, "and I guess I don't stand for it! Plug Hat was good enough for me as it was afore Mister Texas Brown horned in; and I guess Plug Hat is going to be jest like it was afore it's much older. You get me? There ain't no darned stage going to run to Plug Hat."

"I'll tell a man—" "Quit chewing the rag!" interrupted the gunman. "You want to get hold of a few armfuls of dry bush an' stack it in the hack, and set it going with a match. And you want to do it quick! If I have to get down and do it, your eyes won't be open to watch me."

Bud Jenkins breathed hard. But the road-agent's revolver was looking at him, and Bud had no choice in the matter.

Under the staring eyes of his passengers, still standing with their hands above their heads, Bud gathered armfuls of dry wood and bush from the chaparral and stacked it inside the hack. He struck a match and set fire to it, and flames licked out of the doors and windows. Smoke rose in a dense column above the trail.

The flames rapidly spread to the vehicle, and it was soon a burning, smoking mass. Bud Jenkins eyed it with sorrowful eyes. He had driven that hack up from the Rio Grande camps to Blue Grass for fifteen years; and he was sorry to see it go. And it was going up in smoke, on its very first trip beyond Blue Grass. Dense smoke floated away over the chaparral, while the fire crackled and burned fiercely.

Cactus Carter laughed.

"I guess the stage company won't be in a hurry to run another hack up to Plug Hat, Bud!" he grinned.

"I guess you've said it!" agreed Bud. "And if they do I reckon they'll want to scare up a new driver. Me,

I've no hunch for driving on Plug Hat trails, I'll tell a man."

The flames soared up from the burning hack, and died down. It was sinking into a smouldering mass of wreckage.

"Now I guess you guys can hoof it to Plug Hat!" said Cactus, with a gesture of his gun towards the four passengers. "You want to tell the sheriff what you've seen; and you want to tell him that I ain't done with him yet; and next time he sees me I'm coming a-shooting. You got that, Pop Short?"

"I'll sure tell him, Cactus!" said Mr. Short submissively.

"Beat it!" snapped Cactus.

And Pop Short and his companions, dismayed by the prospect of a five-mile tramp across rough prairie, but glad to get out of range of the road-agent's revolver, started up the trail.

"Me for Blue Grass!" remarked Bud Jenkins. "I guess I got to report to the company."

"You for Blue Grass!" assented Cactus. "And when you hit Blue Grass, tell Mule-Kick Hall that I don't give a continental red cent for him and his god-darned Rangers. I guess they'd never have rounded up my bunch if that dog-goned sheriff hadn't put them wise. Tell Mule-Kick that I'll be glad if he'll follow my trail into the Los Pinos sierra."

Bud stared at him curiously.

"Say, what you giving me?" he asked. "I guess you know that Jim Hall ain't going to Blue Grass any more."

"Have the Rangers quit?" asked Cactus. "I heard they was bedded down at Blue Grass, looking for that fire-bug they call the Rio Kid."

"The Rangers ain't quit, and they ain't likely to till they're wise to what's happened to Jim Hall!" answered Bud.

Cactus stared at him.

"What's happened to the guy, then?" he demanded.

"I guess nobody knows if you don't," answered Bud, with a grin. "It's nigh a week now since Hall had a rookus with the sheriff at Plug Hat, and was cinched in the calaboose, and got away after dark. Since then no galoot's seed hide nor hair of him."

"Sho!" ejaculated Cactus, in astonishment. "Jim Hall lost?"

"Yep—if you ain't found him!" grinned Bud. "But the Rangers sure allow that you've met up with him somewhere on the prairie and plugged him, Cactus."

Cactus Carter whistled.

"They got another guess coming," he said. "I never knowed the guy was missing. I'd sure make it last sickness for him if I met up with him; but I ain't seed him since the time he cinched me in the buttes."

Then the road-agent wheeled his horse and dashed away across the prairie.

"Search me!" gasped Bud. "Away across the rugged prairie, riding like the wind, Cactus Carter vanished from sight."

Up to the Sheriff!

"SHERIFF!" roared Colorado Bill. "Aw, what's biting you now?" drawled the Rio Kid.

The Sheriff of Plug Hat was reclining at his ease, in a rocker, in the doorway of his office on the plaza.

It was a hot afternoon—hot even for the South of Texas—and the Kid reckoned that he wanted a rest. Now the sheriff was taking a deserved rest when Colorado came pounding up in great excitement.

The Kid sat up in the rocker.

"Sheriff!" gasped Colorado.

"Shoot!" said the Kid. "What's biting you? Some pesky bunch of cow-punchers riding in to shoot up the town?"

"Nope!" gasped Colorado. "Cactus Carter—"

The Kid was out of the rocker in a twinkling. A walnut-butted gun gleamed in his hand.

"Cactus Carter—hyer?" he ejaculated.

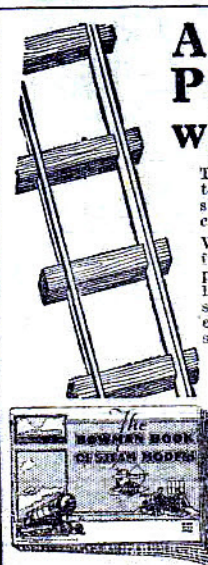
Colorado grinned.

"Not on your life!" he answered. "I guess Cactus knows that Plug Hat ain't healthy for him with our sheriff around. No, sir! But he's sure done held up the new stage from Blue Grass."

"Sho!" The Kid holstered his gun. "That pesky scallywag took to trail-riding, has he?"

"Yep! There's four guys hoofed it in, and they're turning the air blue at the Plug Hat hotel," grinned Colorado. "Pop Short's one of 'em—and I'll tell a man that he's cussing some, and then a few more. Cactus has done held up the hack, cleaned them out, burned the hack; and he allows that

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he won't allow a stage to be run to Plug Hat now."

The Kid's eyes gleamed like cold steel.

"I guess I'll get along and see them guys!" drawled the Kid. "The Rangers won't rope in Cactus; and I reckon this baby will have to take him in hand again."

The Kid strolled down the rugged street to the Plug Hat Hotel. A crowd had gathered there, where the four hapless passengers of the hack from Blue Grass were telling their story, over and over again. The Kid heard the voice of Pop Short as he came up to the piazza, and he grinned. Mr. Short was cursing with great fluency; and Mr. Short had a flow of language that was hardly equalled anywhere in the cow country. The stream of cuss-words was only interrupted when Mr. Short stopped to take breath; and his stops were few and brief.

He turned on the sheriff as the Kid came in, and glared at him. Pop Short had been the sheriff's keenest backer; but he was feeling sore and savage now.

"You, Texas Brown!" roared Pop. "You dog-goned gink! You call yourself a sheriff! Yep! And the hack burned out, five miles out of town, and the bunch of us cleaned out! Say, what sort of a god-darned sheriff do you call yourself, anyhow? Search me! I'm telling you that Cactus Carter has burned out the stage and gone through all of us down to the skin! Yep! I should smile! And you loafing around and letting him get away with it! Say, I guess you better go back to your school-marm, Mister Texas Brown, and leave a man's job to a man! Say!"

The Kid smiled. "Can it, old-timer!" he said. "I sure rounded up Cactus once, and the

Rangers let him vamoose again. I guess next time I'll sure see that he don't get loose a lot. He won't hold up a stage again in Sassafras County."

"Talk's cheap!" snorted Mr. Short. "What are you going to do? I'm telling you, he cleaned me out of five hundred dollars! I guess I'd rather see Cactus back in Plug Hat, like he was afore you horned in, rather than holding up the stage and cleaning a guy out of five hundred dollars! Yep!"

"Forget it old-timer!" said the Kid. "I guess even a sheriff can't be everywhere in the dog-goned country at once. I tell you I'm going gunning after Cactus, and if I don't get him I'll sure resign and go back to punching cows."

"Waal, I reckon you'll get him, if any guy can, sheriff!" said Pop, calming down a little. "But this sure does get a galoot's goat, and I'm telling you so! Five hundred dollars and—"

"Colorado allows that some Rangers was after him," said the Kid. "Mebbe they'll rope him in."

Mr. Short grunted. "Not in your life-time! There was three of them, and he shot up one afore he lit out. I saw that red-headed guy from Austin after him, and another guy! They won't get him in a dog's age."

There was a clatter of hoofs coming in from the prairie trail. The Kid turned to look; and every other head turned. From the prairie a dusty horseman, with a blood-stained neckerchief bound round his head under his Stetson, rode into the cow town. He was wounded; and on his horse before him held another man, still more sorely wounded. The rider was Austin Red, the Ranger.

"Great gophers!" said Colorado Tim with a whistle. "Is them the guys that was after Cactus, Mr. Short?"

"Them's the guys!" grunted Pop Short.

"It sure don't look as if they got him!"

The tired and dusty horseman rode up to the lumber hotel. Many willing hands relieved him of his burden, and the insensible Ranger was carried into the hotel. Austin Red, with a streak of crimson running down under the bandage round his head, reeled in his saddle from fatigue. The Rio Kid, with a gentle hand, helped him to alight, and Red leaned heavily on the sheriff's arm.

"You got Cactus?" asked several voices.

Red spat out a curse. "Nope! He got us! We followed him into the Los Pinos sierra, and he sure got us from behind a rock. Dog-gone him! Jest two cracks from his Colt and he rode away and left us!" The Ranger cursed again. "We'll get him yet—we'll sure get him—"

He lurched, and the Kid's strong arm held him as he fell. The sheriff of Plug Hat half-carried him into the lumber hotel.

The sheriff walked back to his office with a thoughtful brow. Cactus Carter was on the trail again; and it was up to the sheriff of Plug Hat to rope him in. And the Kid meant to do it; but he figured that he had a hard trail to follow before he put a cinch on Cactus Carter.

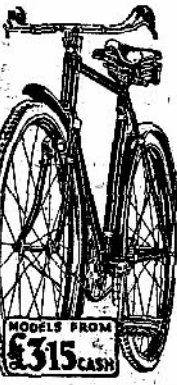
THE END.

(Next week's yarn of the Rio Kid is great! Don't forget TWO new series start in next week's issue.)

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