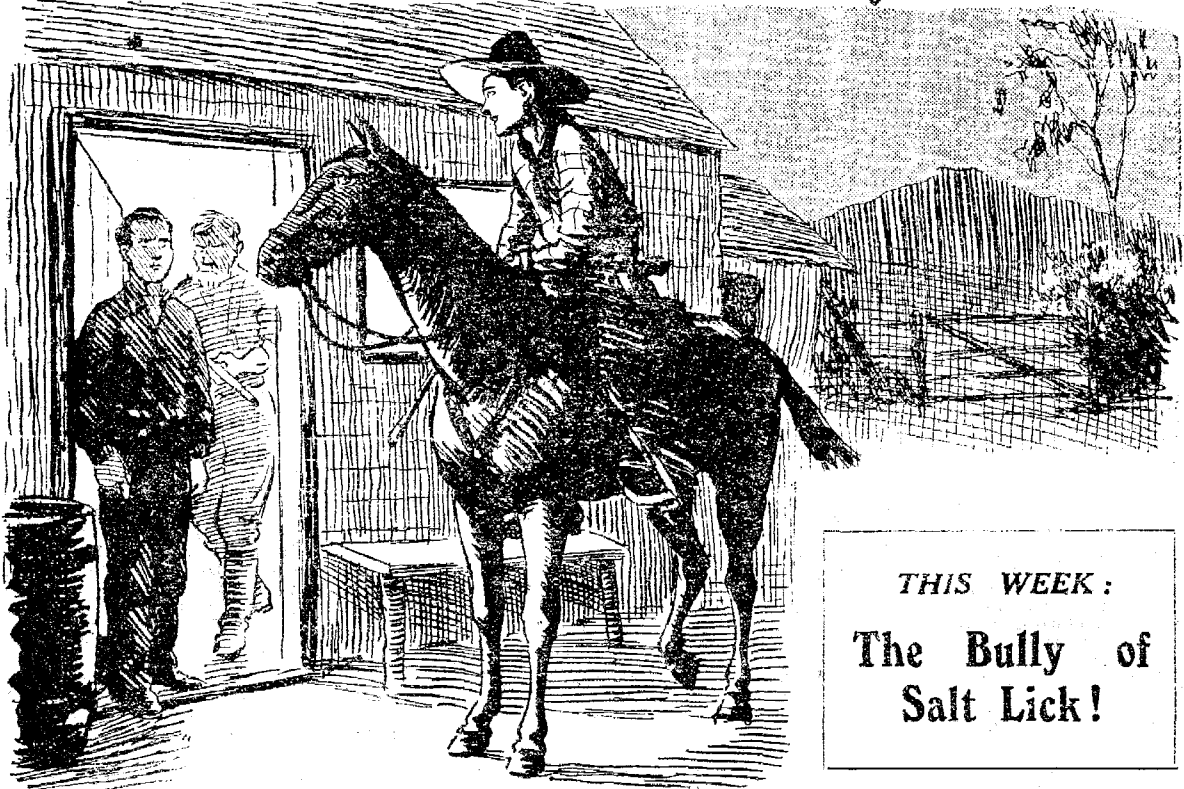


THE BOY WITHOUT FEAR! Jeff Blake, gunman and bully, was feared by all men in the little township of Salt Lick—until the Rio Kid rode into the camp! The coming of the Kid spelt trouble for Blake, for the Kid feared no man alive!

The Rio Kid!

BY RALPH REDWAY

THIS WEEK:
The Bully of Salt Lick!

A ROARING LONG COMPLETE WESTERN YARN, DEALING WITH THE ADVENTURES OF A DARE-DEVIL BOY OUTLAW—THE RIO KID!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
The Kid Dodges Trouble!

THE Rio Kid, when he rode out of Texas, had no idea whatever of lingering in New Mexico. He rode into New Mexico simply because it was on his way to Arizona and the gold country. The Kid was, in fact, anxious to get through that stage of his journey, and to leave the land that had known him far behind. He was tired—for the time, at least—of his outlaw life in the cow country, keen to try his luck in a new land. Luck had been against him in the valley of the Rio; faithless fortune had made him an outlaw sorely against his will; but far across the sierra they knew nothing of the Rio Kid. There he was resolved that he would make good, and stand by the law instead of standing against it and outside it. He vowed that he would learn to mind his own business, to keep out of trouble, to let the walnut-butted guns, which he was, perhaps, too ready to handle, rest in their leather holsters unused. New Mexico was but a stage in his journey to the west, and he intended to lose no time there. And yet, as it happened, the Kid was booked for a much longer stay in that country than he had anticipated.

The Rio Kid had no use for railroads; his wiry, black-muzzled mustang that had carried him so long and so faithfully over the Texan grasslands, was able to carry him as far as he wanted to go—a good many hundreds of miles this time. By road and trail and mountain pass, the Kid headed westward, day after day. It was a new experience for the Kid to ride through towns and camps where he was unknown, where no notice of a reward for his arrest was posted on trees or dead walls; where he could put up at an inn or posada and no questions asked, no curious or suspicious glances turned on his handsome sunburnt face. But he knew that as likely as not, pursuit was still on his trail, and wherever he stopped, his halt was brief. He went by lonely roads and unfrequented trails, and this, so far as making good speed on his journey to Arizona was concerned, was his undoing. It really seemed as if the Kid, with all his good resolutions, could not help horning into trouble if there was any trouble to be found. He was following the bank of Salt River, aiming to stay the night at Salt Lick, when the trouble came along. The sun was below the sierra, and a glimmer of moon showing in a dark sky, when the figures of three

shadowy horsemen loomed out of the dusk on the trail ahead, and a voice shouted to him to halt.

The Rio Kid halted. His hand fairly itched to drop on the butt of a gun. There was a sharp, bullying tone in the voice that called to him; and the Kid was not the man to take orders from anyone. But he checked his impulse, true to his resolve. It was not a hold-up, he could see that; the horsemen were not road-agents or rustlers. No gun was leveled, but the three riders blocked his way. What they wanted the Kid could not guess; but he resolved to have no trouble if he could help it. So he reined in the black-muzzled mustang with a prompt obedience that was very unlike the Rio Kid.

"Hallo to you 'uns!" he called out cheerily.

The three horsemen came closer in the dusk, peering at him from under their Stetsons. The Kid was little more than a shadow to them; they were little more than shadows to the Kid. But he could see that they were armed, and carried their guns low-slung, and he guessed that they were gunmen, and he guessed further that they were watching the trail for some

personal enemy, and had taken him for that enemy in the dusk. There was no need, after all, for the walnut-butted guns to come into play; and the Kid was glad of it; at least, he tried to feel that he was glad. He sat his horse and looked at them.

"I guess you're our mutton," went on the bullying voice. "I guess I've cinched you at last, Bud Wilson."

The Kid wondered who Bud Wilson might possibly be, and reckoned that, whoever he was, he was fortunate not to be riding that trail just then.

"Get off that critter!"

"Hold on a leetle," drawled the Kid. "I guess you've got the wrong steer by the tail, stranger."

"That sure ain't young Bud, Jeff Blake," said another of the riders. "If it is, he's sure got a new voice on him."

"He looks like him!" grunted the first speaker.

"I guess you must be some cat, to see what a pilgrim looks like in the dark," smiled the Kid.

"He don't talk like young Bud, either!" chuckled the other horseman. "Bud wouldn't hand out back-talk like that to you, Jeff."

Jeff Blake pushed his horse closer.

In the pale glimmer of the rising moon, the Kid could make out a big and powerful man, with a hard, harsh face. Two sharp eyes glistened at him from under the Stetson hat.

"You ain't young Wilson?" growled Blake.

"Nope!"

"Who are you, then?"

"Jest a cowpuncher from Texas."

"I guess we'll take a closer look at you, Mister Cowpuncher from Texas!" growled Jeff Blake. "Sirike a match, Dave Butt!"

The man named fumbled for matches.

"You keep still, Mister Man from Texas," went on Jeff Blake. "If you ain't the galoot we want, you can ride on, I guess; only don't give me any lip. If you ain't a stranger to this country, you'll know that Jeff Blake don't take lip from any galoot."

"I guess I'm a stranger," said the Kid cheerily, "and I disremember ever hearing of you, feller. But I sure reckon you're some powerful big medicine in this country, from the way you talk."

"Not so much chewing the rag!" snapped Jeff Blake.

The Kid set his lips a little.

He was not accustomed to listening to talk like this without making the talker sorry for himself.

But he kept to his resolution.

This gang of border gunmen and their quarrel with the unknown Bud Wilson were nothing to him; and he would not seek trouble. He asked nothing better than to go on his way in peace. Quietly he sat in the saddle while Dave Butt extracted a box of matches from his pocket, and struck one.

Jeff Blake peered at the Kid's handsome face in the flickering light of the match. He gave a disappointed grunt.

"It ain't Wilson!"

"I guess I mentioned that," smiled the Kid.

The match went out.

"What you doing on this trail?" growled Blake, evidently in a quarrelsome mood in his disappointment.

"Jest riding."

"That ain't an answer," said the gunman, in a tone of menace. "You don't want to fool with me, puncher!"

"I'm sure riding for Salt Lick, to put up for the night," said the Kid civilly, though civility went against the grain in this matter. "I'm from Texas,

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and heading for Arizona. A ny thing more you want to know, Mr. Blake?"

"I guess you're t' durned fresh," grunted the gunman.

"I was sure born fresh," sighed the Kid. "It's led me into a lot of trouble. But I ain't looking for trouble now."

"I guess you might find some without looking for it," growled the gunman.

The Kid's eyes sparkled. His whole nature was yearning for trouble with this bully. He longed to wade in and try his hand at cleaning up this gang of night-riders. But he checked himself again. What was the use of a good resolution if a pilgrim fell to the first temptation?

"Give it a miss, pardner," he said mildly. "I guess what I want is a supper and a bed, not a rookus with a galoot I've never seen before. You fellers through?"

The bully of Salt Lick growled again; but the quiet civility of the Kid checked even his readiness for trouble.

"I guess you can ride on," he grunted. "You seen a man on this trail?"

"Not a man till you galoots woke me up."

"A kid about your own age and size, most likely riding a pinto," said Jeff Blake. "That's the galoot we want."

"I'm sure sorry; I guess I ain't seen hide or hair of him," said the Kid. "If he knows you galoots are laying for him, I reckon he'd be a wise man to keep off this trail."

"I guess that's a cinch," said Jeff Blake. "I'll tell a man that Bud Wilson is a pesky coward, and he don't dare show his face in Salt Lick, and I'm hunting him. I'll get him, too!" The big man gritted his teeth. "I guess all the town is laughing at him for a durned coward; he can ride some, but he can't shoot worth a red cent. Anyhow, he don't dare pull a gun."

"You got some bad trouble on with the guy?" asked the Kid, rather curious now.

"Sure! You see him any time, and you tell him that Jeff Blake is hunting him!" growled the gunman. "You tell him I figure to quirt him in the street at Salt Lick, with all the town looking on, if he don't dare to pull a gun like a man."

"I guess it wouldn't help him none if he did pull a gun on you, Jeff!" grinned Dave Butt.

The Kid's lip curled.

He could figure out now fairly well how the matter stood—a quarrel between the gunman, skilled and ruthless in the use of deadly weapons, and some lad who was, perhaps, plucky enough in his own way, but no use in a "rookus" with a professional gunman. It was not to be wondered at that Bud Wilson, whoever he was, was keeping clear of this dangerous bully. Once more temptation strongly assailed the Kid. The gunman had no terrors for him, and he was sorely tempted to take up, here and now, the quarrel of the man he had never seen, and give



Jeff Blake all the trouble he wanted, and a little over. It needed all the Kid's resolution, this time, to resist the temptation.

"Ride on, cowboy!" grunted Blake, quite unaware of the thoughts in the Kid's mind. "You happen to see that Bud Wilson, you tell him the boss is waiting for him at Salt Lick, hitched to the rail outside Donovan's place, if he dares to fetch it. He won it in the rodeo, and he allows he won it fair and square; but I guess that cayuse will die of old age afore Bud Wilson lays a hand on his rein. Now git!"

The Kid got.

Three shadowy horsemen disappeared into the darkness, and the Kid rode on, with a thoughtful brow. He had kept to his resolution; he had avoided trouble. But he was dissatisfied. His thoughts wandered to the unknown Wilson, who apparently had won a horse in a riding contest, and dared not claim the prize for fear of the gunman. Fear was an unknown quantity to the Rio Kid; and he could not savvy what the fellow Wilson was like—what he could be like. But he was sorry for the fellow, all the same, and tempted to ride back and talk trouble with the gunman.

He laughed a little—it was his old weakness; he never could mind his own business, he told himself. Bud Wilson was nothing to him—he had never heard the name before—what call had he to take up a quarrel for a stranger he had never

LIGHTNING
the crowd as
grasp closest
the bully of
been

seen? He shook his head and rode on; but he was feeling more and more dissatisfied.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Fate!

"**O**LD boss, I guess we've hit the wrong trail!" yawned the Rio Kid.

He pulled in his steed.

It was a new country to the Kid, but he had the cowboy's knack of finding his way in any country. But the trails were dim and scarcely marked, and the Kid realised at last that he was not on the route to Salt Lick. Darkness surrounded him; but he knew that long ago he should have sighted the lights of the town, had he been on the right road. He was keen to get to Salt Lick—he wanted to look in at Donovan's place, which the gunman had mentioned, and look at the prize horse that was hitched to the rail there, waiting for a man who dared not claim it. But it was growing clear to the Kid that he would not reach camp that night.

his route. The mountain air was keen; but the night was fine, and the Kid decided at last to look for a camp.

It was then that he discerned a faint light gleaming through the night from afar.

The Kid looked steadily at the twinkling light in the distance.

It evidently came from some lonely dwelling; perhaps some solitary ranch-house; possibly the hut of some "native" New Mexican.

Whatever it was, wherever it came from, the Kid decided to head for it. He wanted to pass the night under a roof if he could.

"That's our way, old boss!" he said cheerily.

And he rode steadily towards the distant twinkling light.

He found himself following a path through an alfalfa field, and then he had to lean down and hitch open a gate. Then he rode up to the little building, dim and shadowy in the faint light of a crescent of moon. It was a timber ranch-house, and it was closed for the night. The door was fast; the window shuttered. It was from a crack in a wooden shutter that the glimmer of the light came that had drawn the Rio Kid to the spot.

With the butt of his quirt the Kid struck on the door.

There was the sound of a movement in the house at once. The Kid's keen ears detected voices within. But the occupants of the house were not in a hurry to open.

"Who knocks?" called out a voice at last.

"A stranger wanting to bed down for the night," called back the Kid.

"I guess you can bed down in the barn and welcome!"

"Many thanks!" said the Kid. "There must sure be rustlers in this section, rancher, if a man's afraid to open his door at night."

There was a sound of a bar being removed.

"Stop that, boy," said the voice again.

"It's a stranger, father," said a younger, fresher voice, "and no man in New Mexico is going to say that I'm afraid to open the door."

There was a pause.

"Right, my boy," said the older voice. "Right! And I guess I've got the shotgun ready, if it's a firebug from Salt Lick."

The old man peered at him.

"Name?" he said.

"I guess you can call me Carfax."

Since he had ridden across the Straked Plain out of Texas, the Kid had used that name wherever a name was needed. The name as well as the past of the Rio Kid was left behind him in the land of the Rio Grande.

"Light down, Mr. Carfax, and come in," said the boy. "It's not a rich ranch here, but I guess we can lodge a stranger for the night."

"Look here, I guess the barn will be good enough for me," said the Kid good-humouredly. "I never figured that I'd startle the house when I rode here. In Texas, where I come from, a puncher can always ask for a roof over his head in the cow country.

"Light down, my boy," said the older voice. "Right! And I guess I've got the shotgun ready, if it's a firebug from Salt Lick."

"Come in, and let up on the chin-wag," said the boy impatiently. "The door's open for you."

The Kid dismounted.

"I'll show you where to put up your horse," said the boy, stepping out of the doorway.

"Bud!" exclaimed the old man in anxious tones.

"I guess it's all right, father."

The Kid started and stared at the boy. The name uttered by the old rancher startled him.

"Blazes!" ejaculated the Kid. "I guess there's plenty of Buds cavorting around; but does it happen that you're Bud Wilson, by any chance?"

"That's my name," said the boy.

"Oh, holy smoke!" said the Kid.

There was fate in it, the Rio Kid felt that. He had resolved to ride on his way, giving no further thought to Jeff Blake the gunman, or the enemy he was hunting. And here he was, asking a shelter for the night from the Bud Wilson for whom the gunman had been seeking on the trails. The suspicious watchfulness at the lonely ranch was explained now; the Wilsons had feared a visit from the gunman of Salt Lick.

"You know my name?" said the boy, looking at the Kid. He was a tall and rather handsome lad, about the Kid's own age and size.

"Yep!" said the Kid. "I heard it from a firebug back on the trail, two or three hours ago. Galoot named Jeff Blake."

"Looking for me?"

"Yep."

"I guess I wish he'd found me," said the boy. "Bring your horse this way, Mr. Carfax."

The Kid, in a good deal of wonder, followed the boy and put up his horse. Then he was led into the little ranch, and the door carefully boited and barred behind him. The old rancher had hung up the saved-off shotgun now, and his manner to the unexpected guest was courteous and hospitable enough; but the signs of uneasiness and trouble in his face were only too plainly to be seen.

The Kid supped with the father and son, and little was said. The old man was in troubled thought, the boy restive and ill-at-ease. Trouble brooded over that household, as the Kid very easily saw, and he knew that it was due to Jeff Blake, of Salt Lick; yet the boy did not strike him as a coward, as the gunman had called him. The Kid guessed that he was chafing under some restraint, and he guessed at last that the old rancher was the restraining influence. It was a silent and uncomfortable meal, and the Kid was not displeased when it was over and the boy took him to a room to bed down for the night.

The Kid put in some thinking before he went to sleep.

He had sworn that he would ride clear of trouble—that he would even take rough words in silence, rather than lift a gun from his holster. But his besetting sin was upon him again; the Rio Kid was born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. Before his eyes closed in slumber the Kid's mind was made up; his good resolutions were thrown to the winds, and he knew that he was going to horn into the trouble that was going on at Salt Lick.



ON THE DRAW! There was a sudden, swift backing of Jeff Blake reached for his gun. But before the gunman's on the butt, the Rio Kid's Colt flashed. Bang! Blake, Salt Lick, went crashing to the ground! The Kid had quicker on the draw once again! (See Chapter 4.)

Not that that was a matter of concern to the Kid to any great extent. He had his bed-roll, and he was accustomed to camping down anywhere on

You-uns look as if you're figuring on an Indian raid, I guess, and I don't want to make you uneasy. Me for the barn."

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

To Save Another!

"I GUESS I'll walk a piece with you, Mr. Carfax."

Bud Wilson made that remark after breakfast the next morning when the Kid had saddled his horse. There was an anxious call from the old rancher at once.

"Not out of sight of the house, Bud!" The boy made an impatient gesture.

"Father, I'm shamed before all the section! Don't shame me before a stranger!" he exclaimed.

The old man winced. "Bud, have a little hoss-sense!" he said. "If it was a rookus with a man of your own weight I wouldn't stop you. What chance have you got with a gunman who's killed more men than he's got fingers and toes? You're a dead man before you get your gun out if you meet Jeff Blake! You're a dead-man if you ride into Salt Lick!"

"Better dead than afraid!" muttered the boy.

"I'll sure be glad if you'll walk a piece with me," said the Kid, breaking in—"just as far as the farther gate!"

"No farther, Bud!" said the old man.

"It's your say-so, father," said the boy. "I'll turn back at the gate."

"I trust you, Bud!"

The Rio Kid looped the reins over his arm and walked beside the black-muzzled mustang, and the boy walked on his other side. His face was flushed, his eyes downcast. The Kid glanced at him once or twice. He felt a friendliness towards this unhappy young fellow that he was keen to put into deeds rather than words.

"I guess it ain't my business to horn in, feller," said the Kid softly. "But you've treated me white, and I'm sure sorry to see trouble around on this shbang. Anything a galoot can do?"

They stopped at the gate, and the boy leaned on it, with a black and bitter brow.

"I guess you couldn't talk my father round," he said. "And even if you could, I ain't sure that's what I want. I know I ain't a chance against Jeff Blake; he would riddle me with lead before I could get a bead on him. And what's to become of the popper if he's left alone on this ranch? It's a hard living with me to help him."

The Kid nodded.

"Tell a man the trouble," he said. "I was sure riled by that bully from Salt Lick when I met him on the trail last night. He's what we call in Texas a bad man!"

"He's sure bad!" said the boy. "If you'd lighted down in Salt Lick, you'd have heard the story soon enough." He coloured. "You see, we had a rodeo in this section last week, and I can sure ride my pinto with any man in Mexico. I won the big race, and beat Jeff Blake by a neck, and he was sure mad. The prize is a hoss, and he's some beauty, and the winner has to fetch him from Donovan's place in Salt Lick. I've heard that Dan Donovan hitches him to the rail at his place every day, ready for the winner to come and take him away. But—"

The boy broke off, his cheeks crimson. "But—" asked the Kid softly.

"Jeff Blake can't claim the hoss, but he's put it round the town that I never rode fair. All Salt Lick knows it's a lie, but they don't argue with Jeff; he's too sudden on the draw. He allows he's going to quirt me when I show up to take the prize cayuse. If you quirt a man, he pulls a gun on you in this country."

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"Sure!" assented the Kid.

"Pulling a gun on a fire-bug like Jeff Blake is asking for sudden death. He's quicker on the draw than any other galoot from the sierras to the Rio Colorado. He's never missed a man. Where do I come in? I reckon I can handle a gun, but I'm no gunman. He will fill me with lead afore I can pull trigger! Popper knows it, and he won't let me go and claim the hoss. But— It's hard luck on popper, but I'm goin'! I can't let them say in Salt Lick that I'm afraid to face a man, even a pesky gunman like Jeff! I'm sure riding my pinto into the town this afternoon and taking my chance!"

The Kid looked quietly at him.

Remembering the hard-faced, desperate gunman he had met in the dusk of the river trail, he knew what the boy knew—that he was going to certain death. He understood the feelings of the old man on the little lonely ranch.

"I guess your popper's right in riding herd over you, feller, in this matter," said the Kid.

"Like enough. He knows I go under if I go to Salt Lick after that prize horse. And he's an old man, and he's got only me!" The boy's face quivered.

"But I got to go! The Wilsons ain't cowards!"

"And you're going?"

"The popper will be busy in the alfalfa field this afternoon, and I figure on slipping away then!" said the boy. "I got to go!"

The Kid nodded.

"You got to go!" he agreed. "Better die a brave man than live a coward!"

"That's what I'd like the popper to get on to," said the boy. "Jeff don't dare to come to the ranch for me; the popper would riddle him with slugs if he showed up here! But he brags in Salt Lick that I'm afraid to face him, and, from what you say, he's riding the trails with his friends looking for me. It's bound to come, even if I don't go for the hoss! I ain't riding from any man! I've been putting in some practice with my gun these last three days—not that it will be much use. But I'm goin'! That hoss at Donovan's place is mine, fair and square, and I'm goin' to fetch him home or die tryin'!" He looked at the Kid. "You're goin' on to Salt Lick?"

"Correct!"

"You drop in at Donovan's place and tell Dan Donovan I'm coming for the horse this afternoon, then."

"I'll do that."

After a few more words they parted, the boy walking back slowly to the ranch, the Kid mounting his mustang and riding onward towards the distant town. The boy had directed him to the right trail, and the Rio Kid headed in a bee-line for Salt Lick.

Out of sight of the Wilson ranch, the Kid drew the walnut-butted guns from his holsters and examined them carefully.

There was a smile on his face as he slipped them back.

Those guns, which he had determined should never burn powder in New Mexico, if he could help it, were to see service again, after all. That boy was not going to his death at the hands of a ruffianly gunman if the Rio Kid could prevent it, and the Kid thought he could. Bud Wilson was riding into Salt Lick that afternoon. But the Kid was riding in that morning, and the Kid knew what he was going to do in Salt Lick.

"I guess the boy'll be O.K. this afternoon, old hoss!" he said to the black-muzzled mustang. "I sure reckon he'll have good luck, unless I have bad luck,

critter! I guess I ain't a galoot to mind his own business, and never was!"

The Kid laughed as he galloped on the trail.

The bully of Salt Lick had stirred his anger the previous evening, but the Kid, true to his pacific resolves, had taken Jeff Blake's rough talk quietly. He knew that he had given the gunman the impression that he had a yellow streak in him, and he had cared little. Now the matter was different. The Kid, who would not have pulled a gun on his own account, was going to horn into another man's quarrel, and, at the same time, give Jeff Blake something back for his rough talk. The man was what they called in Texas a "killer." But if he terrorised Salt Lick, he had no terrors for the Rio Kid.

The Kid's face was bright and cheery as he sighted the town at last. With a smile on his handsome face he rode into Salt Lick, and pulled in his mustang outside Donovan's saloon.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Gun to Gun!

DAN DONOVAN stood in the doorway of his saloon, looking out into the rugged street of Salt Lick.

There were half a dozen horses tied to the hitching-rail; among them a splendid black horse, which all the town knew to be the prize Bud Wilson had won in the rodeo, and which he had not yet claimed.

For three days that horse had been regularly led round from the stables and tied to the rail, ready for his owner to take him. At night, still unclaimed, he was led back to the stables.

Every day there was a crowd gathered about Donovan's place, in anticipation of the trouble to come. Jeff Blake was generally there; and when he was not, some friend of his was there, to carry him word at once if Bud Wilson was seen riding into the town.

Donovan glanced at the young stranger who rode up.

"I guess this is Donovan's place?" asked the Rio Kid.

"Yep."

"You Donovan?"

"Yep."

"Then you've got Bud Wilson's hoss hyer, I reckon?"

Dan pointed to the big black horse at the rail.

"Some cayuse!" said the Kid, gazing at it admiringly. "Bud is sure a lucky man to get that critter."

"Lucky if he gets it," grinned Donovan. "Jeff Blake is goin' to talk to him when he comes for it—and I reckon he won't come."

"Wrong in once," said the Kid. "I've got a message from him. He's sure coming to-day."

"I guess, if you're a friend of his, feller, you want to give him the office to keep clear," said Donovan. "Jeff's going to quirt him, and drill him if he puts up a hand to stop it. The hoss is a good cayuse, but he ain't worth it."

"This Jeff is sure some big fire-bug. I hear," said the Kid. "I met him on the trail last night, and I allowed he was as ugly a man as ever I saw!"

Donovan stared at him.

"You come to Salt Lick looking for a place in the town cemetery?" he asked.

The Kid laughed.

"Nope. Why?"

"If you shoot off your mouth in that style here, you'll sure be fixed for a funeral," explained Donovan. "Jeff is

in my place now, and if he hears you call him fancy names he will step out."

"Oh, shucks!" said the Kid. "I guess I'll call an ugly man an ugly man if I choose, and that galoot Jeff is the ugliest critter I've ever woke up. Anyhow, I've got a message for him, and if he's hyer I want him to hear it."

The Kid slipped from his mustang, and hitched the animal to the rail. Five or six men were looking out of the saloon now, and others were gathering in the street. The Kid's manner was cool and unconcerned. There was a smile on his face, but the glint in his eyes belied the smile.

Donovan stared at him again, and then called into the building:

"You, Jeff! I guess there's a man come in with a message for you."

The burly gunman stepped out into the sunlight at once.

"Oh, you!" he said, recognising the Kid at once. "I've sure seen you afore."

"You have," agreed the Kid. "You had the durned impudence to stop me on the trail last night, and put questions to me. Remember?"

There was a thrill in the gathering crowd. Talk of this kind to a man like Jeff Blake meant the burning of powder.

The gunman stared hard at the young puncher from Texas. The Kid faced him smiling, his hands down at his sides, within easy reach of the walnut butts that peeped out of his low-slung holsters.

"I've got a message for you," went on the Kid. "I seen young Bud Wilson, and he allows he's riding into Salt Lick this afternoon to take away that cayuse that belongs to him."

"He don't dare!" sneered the gunman.

"He does dare, and he's sure coming. He allows that if you say he never won the big race in the rodeo fair and square, you're lying!"

"What?" roared Blake.

"Lying," said the Kid cheerily. "That's young Wilson's word. You're a liar, according to his say-so."

The gunman's brow grew black.

"Let him come and tell me so," he said. "I guess he won't know what happened to him afterwards."

"You're sure a big man with your mouth," said the Kid. "If talk could frighten a man, I guess you'd have all New Mexico stared stiff!"

There was a chuckle from some of the Salt Lick men gathering on the scene. All of them were very carefully keeping out of the line of fire between this cool young stranger and the big gunman. That shooting was to follow talk like this was a foregone conclusion.

"Bud Wilson gave you that message for me?" asked the gunman between his teeth.

"He sure did."

"And you reckoned that you could deliver a message like that and ride away afterwards?" asked Blake.

"Why not?" asked the Kid cheerily.

"But it ain't jest a message from Bud; it's endorsed by me, feller, if you get me. Bud allows that you're a liar, and I sure allow the same. You was beaten in the rodeo because you can't ride, feller, and you're jest blowing off your mouth in tall talk about quiring the man that beat you. I guess you'll be howling for cover when you see Bud Wilson riding into town. If you got the sand to face him when he comes, I shall sure stand around and watch him fix you for a funeral!"

A breathless silence followed the Rio Kid's words.

Amazement was mingled with rage in the hard, harsh face of the gunman. It was many a long year since the bully of Salt Lick had listened to talk like this. This lad, hardly older than the boy whom he had resolved to shame before all the camp, and to shoot down if he resisted, was defying him with cool unconcern; and it dawned upon the bully's mind that the young puncher, so far from fearing trouble with him, was asking for trouble. The Kid stood at ease, smiling, but watching the ruffian like a cat. Jeff Blake was known to be quick on the draw, but the Rio Kid was not slow. His supple hands hanging carelessly, were almost touching the walnut butts of the guns low-slung at his sides.

"And that ain't all," said the Kid easily. "You allow that Bud Wilson never won that hoss fair. You got to take that back."

"I got to take it back?" gasped Jeff Blake.

"Sure! Else Bud Wilson is going to drive it back down your iving throat, with his fists after it," said the Kid. "I'm going to see him do it."

"I guess you won't see much happen in Salt Lick, feller," said the gunman hoarsely. "I guess your eyes will be shut when Bud Wilson rides in."

"Forget it, feller," jeered the Kid.

Next Week's Programme!

"THE ST. JIM'S RUNAWAY!"

A Rollocking Long Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's.

By Martin Clifford.

"GUNNER PLAYS THE GOAT!"

A Rousing Long Complete Story of Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood.

By Owen Conquest.

"MICK, THE UNTAMABLE!"

A Thrilling Long Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co., the Chums of Greyfriars.

By Frank Richards.

"THE RIO KID!"

Another Roaring Western Tale, featuring this Amazing Boy Outlaw.

By Ralph Hedway.

"THE FORTUNE HUNTER!"

A Gripping Long Complete Story of Ferrers Locke, Detective, and his Boy Assistant, Jack Drake.

"Why, I'd wade in now and shoot you up, only that would disappoint young Bud. But if there's anything left of you after he's through, I'll sure lay my quirt round the remains!"

There was a sudden swift backing of the crowd as the gunman, with a blaze of murderous rage in his eyes, reached for his gun.

Every man there expected to see the cool young stranger roll on the rugged street the next instant, with a bullet in his brain.

But swift as the gunman's action was the Kid's was swifter. His gun flashed out even as Jeff Blake's grasp closed on a butt.

Bang!

The roar of the .43 was followed by another; but the bully of Salt Lick was falling even as he pulled trigger, and his bullet missed the Kid by inches.

Crash!

Jeff Blake went down crashing, the smoking revolver gripped in his hand. There was a roar from the crowd. The Rio Kid, with his left hand, jerked the Stetson from his head, and smiled at a bullet-hole in the brim.

"I shall sure want a new hat," he remarked.

"Great gobbers!" murmured Dan Donovan, staring down at the fallen gunman.

"Jeff's got his!" said an awed voice from the crowd.

The Rio Kid glanced round swiftly. He was fully prepared for gun-play on the part of Jeff Blake's associates. But no gun was pulled. There was more awe and admiration in the looks that were bent on the Kid than hostility. The fellow who had shot up Jeff Blake was a fellow Salt Lick could admire and with whom no man there wanted trouble.

The Kid unhitched his horse from the rail.

Under the stare of a hundred eyes he mounted the black-muzzled mustang, lifted his Stetson politely to the staring crowd, and rode away down the street.

"Gum!" said Dan Donovan. "That galoot is sure some gunman!"

And every eye stared after the Rio Kid until he was out of sight.

It was two or three hours later that Bud Wilson rode into camp.

He stopped at Donovan's place and dismounted.

His face was pale and set. He had come, as he believed, to face certain death; but he had come.

There was a buzz in Donovan's place as he entered.

"I guess I've come for my critter, Dan," he said; and, in spite of his courage, there was a faint quiver in his voice.

Dan Donovan looked at him.

"You'll sure find him hitched to the rail, Bud," he answered.

The boy stood very still.

All eyes were fixed curiously on him. It was clear that he did not know what had happened at Salt Lick.

"Ain't Jeff Blake around?" he asked at last.

"I guess not," grinned Donovan. "Jeff Blake was shot up this morning, Bud, by a puncher from Texas."

The boy gasped.

"Shot up?"

"Sure. Jeff's got his," said Donovan.

"I reckon there's a good many galoots in Salt Lick kinder glad that feller from Texas rode this way. You won't see any Jeff cavorting round this burg again."

"Dead?"

"Sure."

The boy gasped with relief. He had relieved himself to the ordeal, and the relief made him almost giddy.

"A reglar kid firebug, that puncher," said Donovan. "He jest came in and asked for trouble with Jeff, and wouldn't take no for an answer. Never seen a galoot so sudden on the draw. Jeff was sure quick, but the puncher beat him to it."

Then the boy knew. It was Carfax who had horned in—for his sake.

"Where is he now?"

"I reckon he nit the trail after he shot up Jeff. I reckon he was aiming for Arizona."

Bud Wilson rode back to the ranch on the prize horse, leading his pinto. An old man's blessing followed the Rio Kid as he rode on the Arizona trail, and perhaps it brought him luck. The Kid needed it, for the trouble he had woke up at Salt Lick was not done with yet, and he was not destined to be clear of New Mexico so soon as he figured.

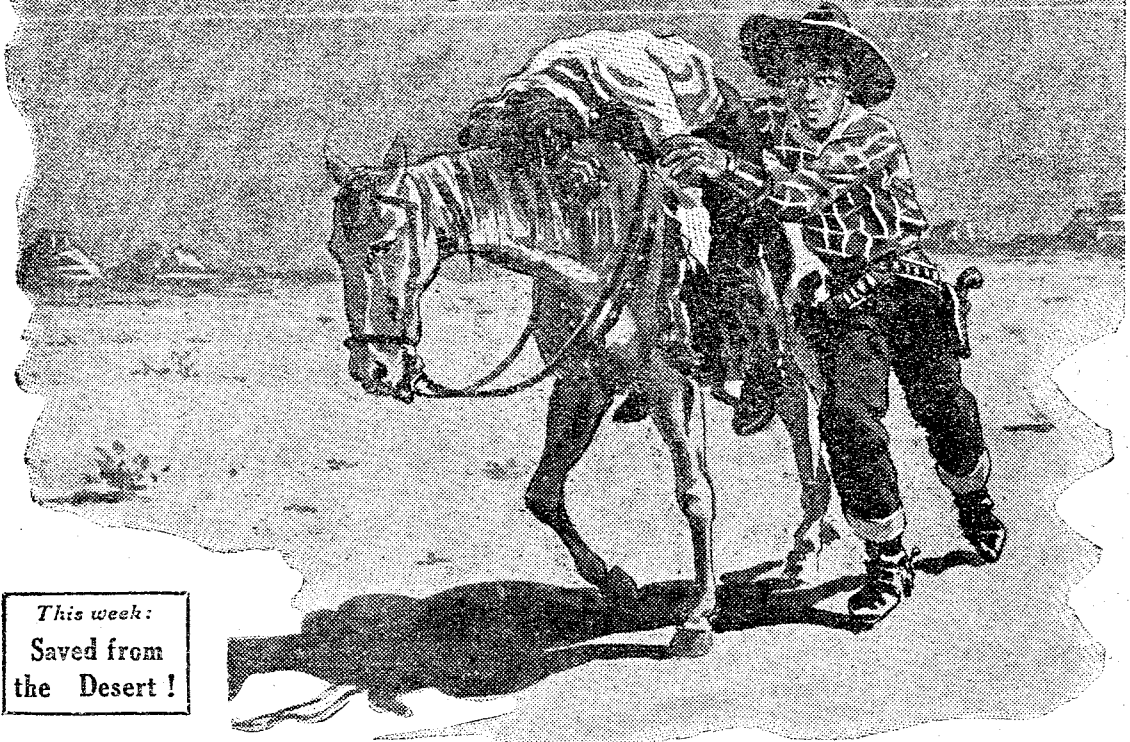
THE END.

(Don't miss next week's story of the Rio Kid!)

THE TRAIL OF PERIL! The Rio Kid strikes across the Red Desert, little dreaming of the adventure that awaits him in the heart of that great expanse of sand—an adventure which is destined to change the whole of his fortunes!

THE RIO KID!

By *Ralph Redway:*



**This week:
Saved from
the Desert!**

ANOTHER ROARING LONG WESTERN TALE, FEATURING THE RIO KID—BOY OUTLAW!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Three Gunmen!

THAT he was trailed, the Rio Kid knew before he was many hours out of Salt Lick. He had not expected it, and he was not specially on his guard; but wariness, with the Kid was second nature. He had owed his life to it many a time on the Texas grasslands and in the dusky chaparral on the banks of the Rio Grande. It had not deserted him now that he was riding by lonely trails through New Mexico with Arizona and a new life before him.

The figure of a horseman that showed for a moment on the sky-line; the rising of a flock of startled jays from a belt of cottonwoods; these and other signs, imperceptible to an eye less keen, told the Kid that he was trailed, and he knew that the trailing was done by men who knew the game. And he smiled whimsically as he rode the grey mustang at an easy gallop.

For long days, as he rode westward, the Kid had avoided trouble. He had sworn that he was done with trouble, and that he would never pull a gun again if he could help it. But his old besetting weakness had found him out

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at last, and at Salt Lick he had hunted for trouble and found it. True, it had been for another's sake—in defence of the weak against the strong—in such a matter the Rio Kid simply could not refrain from horning in.

There had been gun-play at Salt Lick, and the bully of the camp had been a little slower on the draw than the young puncher from Texas. The Kid had no regrets that he had shot up Jeff Blake; he had saved a much more valuable life thereby. But the trouble he had woke up was following him.

The Kid pondered it as soon as he knew without doubt that he was trailed. He was too far from Texas now for his old enemies to be on his track. The Staked Plain and a range of mountains lay between him and the sheriffs who wanted him so badly. Even the sheriff of Frio, defeated at the finish, when the Kid was almost in his grip, was not likely to have trailed him so far. He was done with Texas and the sheriffs of the Lone Star State; the Kid was clear on that point.

The men who were trailing him now were not a sheriff's posse; they were not men who stood by the law. He guessed that they belonged to Jeff Blake's crowd at Salt Lick, and that they were

trailing him to avenge the death of the gunman. Had they known of the Rio Kid and his reputation on the Rio Grande, likely enough they would have stayed in Salt Lick and let him ride. But the Kid was in a country now where he was not known, and he was taken at face value, as a young puncher little more than a boy.

Salt Lick had gaped in amazement when the dreaded gunman went down under his fire. Not a hand had been raised when the Kid rode out and hit the trail for the west again. Not a man in the gang had cared to tackle the puncher single-handed; and on Main Street, in Salt Lick, they could not venture to attack him in a gang. Salt Lick was a wild camp, but there was a limit. The Kid figured that they were following on his trail to deal with him where there were no eyes but those of the buzzards to see what happened to him.

That they knew their business the Kid was very soon aware. Through the hot afternoon he rode, watchful as a hawk, and, save for one glimpse of a horseman, for a second, he saw nothing of them. Once he drew into a clump of pines and waited for an hour, with his hand on a six-gun. But they did not come up. They were keeping their dis-

ance, and the Kid knew that they were waiting for night. When he camped, they—

How many there were of them the Kid did not know; he guessed three or four. Three or four gunmen were not an easy crowd for even the Rio Kid to handle; and yet they did not ride him down, as they might have done, for his horse was growing weary from a long trail, and their animals were fresher. They were not taking chances with the puncher who had shot-up Jeff Blake. But they were holding on to his trail like bloodhounds.

When the sun set over the Gila Mountains in the west the Kid did not think of riding on in the darkness and giving his pursuers the slip. In the first place, his mustang was weary, and the Kid was a man to think of his horseflesh before he thought of himself. In the second place, he was not the man to dodge away in the dark.

But when he camped, the Kid was infinitely cautious.

He was well aware that it would be a case of shooting on sight. If the enemy drew a bead on him, his game was up. They had followed him from Salt Lick to shoot him up without parley. The Kid did not mean to give them a chance if he knew it.

He corralled his horse in a thicket of pecans, and twenty yards from that spot he built a camp-fire of pine chips and branches. Beside the fire he arranged his bed-roll, with a log in the blankets that looked like a sleeping figure. He lighted the fire, and stepped away quietly into the cover of the pecans.

The Kid had ridden long and hard that day, but he was not thinking of sleep. Sleep that night would have proved a sleep from which there was no waking.

He waited.

The fire blazed and burned and crackled, casting strange lights and shadows among the surrounding trees. Beside it lay the log under the blankets, and the Kid himself could almost have sworn that it was the figure of a sleeping man, so natural did it look. He waited with a six-gun in his hand, and a glint in his eyes. He expected to hear every moment the ring of a rifle, and the crash of a bullet on the log under the blankets. And as soon as a rifle flashed in the darkness the Kid was ready. The flash of the rifle would be guide enough for him, and one, at least, of the gunmen of Salt Lick would be sorry he had followed the puncher's trail.

The minutes were long as he waited.

The blaze of the camp fire showed for a great distance, through the open woods; it could not fail to guide the pursuers to the Kid's camp. But they were long in coming.

The Kid waited patiently. His life had taught him patience. This was not the first time he had waited, gun in hand, in the clinging darkness, for an enemy. Scarcely a glimmer of the fire reached him, where he lay in cover in the pecans, and waited and watched.

Crack!

It was the ring of a rifle at last.

The Kid jumped.

"Great snakes!"

It was at that moment that the Kid learned the kind of foes he had to deal with.

For the bullet was not aimed at the dummy by the fire. It was aimed at the Kid crouching in the pecans, and it went so close that he felt the wind of it on his face. His enemies had seen through the trick, and the dummy by the fire was unheeded. He did not even

see the flash of the rifle: it was fired from a direction he had not expected.

"Great snakes!" murmured the Kid.

He rolled over in the darkness under the pecans, and only just in time.

Crack-ack!

Two bullets struck the ground where he had been crouching a moment before. The Kid, silent as a snake, crawled through the darkness to the spot where he had hidden his horse. Without a sound the mustang rose at his touch, and the Kid led him softly away, his left hand on the bridle, a six-gun in his right. Three rifles rang within a few seconds of one another. But the gunmen were firing at random now, and the bullets tore leaves and twigs.

The Kid trod softly away. He knew that he had three enemies to deal with now, and he knew that every one of them was bad medicine. The Kid was not a man to take useless chances against odds. He had underrated the gang, and he knew that now, and for the present moment he aimed at retreat. In soft silence he retreated, and the darkness of the night swallowed him up, and the silence behind him told that the enemy knew that he was gone, and that they were saving their lead.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Kid Burns Powder!

IT was days later that the Kid sighted the bunch that had followed him from Salt Lick. The Kid was not riding on the Arizona trail now. To ride on his way, with three desperadoes dogging his trail, did not suit the Kid's ideas at all. If the Salt Lick gang wanted trouble, they could have it, and the Kid's idea was to round-up that bunch before he left New Mexico behind him. For a day they had trailed him, and now the Rio Kid was trailing them.

In the lonely foothills of the Santa Rosa Sierra, the Kid hunted the bunch who were hunting him. He knew that they knew he had turned on them, for they kept well out of his way. Three to one as they were, they feared an open encounter with the puncher who had shot-up Jeff Blake.

It was a game of hide-and-seek, with life or death as the stake; but the Kid was a past-master of the game, and he came on the bunch at last.

Lying on a rocky mesa, screened by the sassafras that grew in the ledges and clefts, the Kid looked down into a deep canyon, shadowy even when the sun was at the zenith, deeply shadowed in the early morning, and watched the Salt Lick gang breaking camp. Dave Butt, the leader of the gang, he knew by sight; the others were strangers to his eyes, though he fancied they had been in the crowd outside Donovan's place in Salt Lick, when he had pulled on the gunman there.

He watched them saddle up their bronchos; and then for a time they stood in consultation, as if in doubt. They had lost the Kid's trail, he was sure of that; and perhaps they doubted whether he had lost theirs. He saw them casting anxious and doubting glances round at the rocky slopes of the canyon.

The Kid waited and watched grimly.

He might have gone back to his mustang, which he had left hidden in an arroyo near at hand, and hit the trail again, leaving the baffled desperadoes behind him. But it was likely enough that they would have followed on; and he had learned that they were good men on a trail. The Kid had made up his

mind to be clear of that bunch, and he waited and watched.

They mounted at last and rode up the canyon, and the Kid smiled; for their way lay past the mesa, and they were riding into easy revolver range. The Kid jerked a six-gun from his holster as the three Stetson hats bobbed on the canyon trail below, but he did not pull trigger. They were three to one, and they had trailed him to shoot him up; but it went against the grain with the Kid to fire from ambush. He waited till the bunch of riders, going at little more than a walk, came within easy range from the mesa. Then he stood up, a gun in either hand.

"Halt, you 'uns!"

The Kid's voice rang sharp and clear. The Salt Lick gang started and stared round. For the moment they did not see the Kid, though they heard him. The flat-topped mesa rose to a height of a dozen feet; the Kid, standing against the skyline, was above their heads, looking down at them over his guns.

The Kid laughed aloud.

"This way, fellers!" he called out. "Here's your mutton, with the wool on! Put 'em up!"

Three pairs of startled eyes stared up at the Kid then.

"Put 'em up!" he shouted.

But before the words had fairly left his lips he was firing; for three hands were reaching for guns, and there was not a second to waste.

Crack, crack!

Two riderless horses went dashing up the canyon, clattering wildly over the rocks.

The Kid dropped into cover again instantly, as Dave Butt blazed away. Bullets spattered on the rocks round him as the gunman pumped out lead.

The Kid lay and laughed.

Clatter, clatter!

The man was riding now.

The trouble had ended almost as soon as it had started. Dave Butt was alone now, and even as he pumped lead at the mesa he knew that he was wasting his fire, and that he was within easy shot.

The Kid had been too much for the Salt Lick gang; and Dave Butt grabbed at his reins and dashed away at a desperate gallop, only hoping to get out of range before he was dropped.

The Kid stood up again and looked after him, still laughing. The Salt Lick gunman was riding desperately to escape. But he was an easy target for the walnut-butted guns; the Kid could have riddled him with lead as he rode had he chosen so to do. But he did not choose; he would not fire on a fleeing man—to kill, at all events. Though the time was soon to come when he would regret that he had not let daylight through the fleeing ruffian.

The Kid's guns barked out together. A bullet tore the Stetson from Dave Butt's head; another clipped a lock of hair away; a third stripped skin from his ear; a fourth passed between his arm and his ribs. It was fancy shooting, for which the Kid had been famous in Frisco; every one of the bullets would have passed through the horseman had he wanted them to. But to the escaping man it seemed that he was narrowly missing each shot; and he was sweating with the fear of death as he drove on his broncho to a mad gallop.

He vanished at last among the rocks of the canyon, and the Kid's mocking laugh followed.

"I guess I'm through with that bunch!" chuckled the Kid. "I reckon that Butt won't pull rein this side of Salt Lick. He won't if he knows where

he's healthy. He was sure going like he was sent for."

And the Kid clambered down from the mesa and stepped out for the arroyo where he had cached his mustang.

He was through with that bunch now, and he rode on the south-western trail without wasting a further thought on them. Even the Rio Kid, keen as he was, was liable to make mistakes. Two of the bunch would never trouble him or any man again; and Dave Butt had fled for his life, with the fear of death in the very marrow of his bones. But, if he had only known it, the Kid was not done with the man from Salt Lick, though he dismissed him from his mind as he rode away, with the Gila Mountains on the skyline before him.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Jornada de la Muerte!

It was a fresh trail, and it was the trail of a man on foot. Eyes less keen than the Kid's would not have picked it up at all, for the shifting sand of the Red Desert covered most of it in the hot wind. But the slightest sign was enough for the Rio Kid. He was curious at first, and then he was interested; and then he realised, with a laugh, that he was falling into his old way again, minding somebody else's business instead of his own.

Standing there beside his mustang on the edge of the desert, among the scrubby yuccas and cactus, the Kid stared at the tell-tale sign and swept the desert with his eyes.

The Journey of Death lay before him, and the Kid did not want to tread that desert marked by the bleached bones of men and horses, where even the gaunt prairie wolf starved for prey. He did not want to face heat and dust and stinging flies and thirst and a likely death; his way lay elsewhere. But he knew that he was going into the desert.

Jornada de la Muerte was the old Spanish name for the desert in the days when New Mexico was a province of Old Mexico, and both were ruled by the Spaniard. These days were long past. New Mexico, Arizona, California had been wrested by the Anglo-Saxon from the descendants of the old Spanish conquerors. That they had once been Mexican territory, and grasped away by the strong hand, was almost forgotten. But the old name of the desert survived—Jornada de la Muerte—the Journey of Death—though it was named also the Red Desert. Few cared to tread its half-obliterated trails, to face its burning winds. The Rio Kid did not care to do so, if he could have helped it. But that track decided the matter for him.

Some man had trod there—trod away into the trackless desert—on foot! Why?

The Kid knew why.

The man, whoever he was, had lost his horse; the beast had died, perhaps, under the hardship of a hard trail. On foot, the man was seeking to keep on. But the Kid guessed that he was hard hit; for obviously he had lost his trail. No man in his senses would have gone

into the desert on foot; and this man, whose sign he was reading, was on foot in the desert. The man was lost. Dead already, perhaps, in the burning sun, the prey of the coyotes and the zopilotes. But that track touched the Kid strangely. If the poor wretch still lived, staggering on his way afoot, helpless and doomed, the Kid was not the man to pass him by unaided.

He sighed. He did not want to ride the Jornada de la Muerte.

"You never was a galoot for minding your own business, Kid!" he told himself banteringly. "Come on, old hoss!"

Much against the grain, but without hesitation, the Kid pushed on into the Red Desert.

His mustang went at a walk, the Kid, sitting in the saddle, picking up sign here and there with a keen eye.

The trail was fairly fresh, or the dust and sand would have blotted it out. Most of it, indeed, was blotted; but sign enough remained to guide the Kid. Mile after mile the black-muzzled mustang trod across the sandy waste, where so many a man and beast had fallen by the way and perished of thirst. Nothing lived in the desert but the sharp yuccas, the prickly cactus, and myriad of stinging flies.

The Kid puzzled over it. The wanderer whom he was seeking must have been out of his senses, he figured. Or why had he taken the most fatal direction of all that lay open to him? Sunstroke, perhaps; or the madness that comes of suffering and solitude. Whatever it was, the Kid was going to find him and help him.

"Great snakes!" the Kid ejaculated suddenly.

He shaded his eyes with his hand and stared before him.

The dim, dusty desert far ahead had vanished from his view, and, in place of dust and sand and spear-like yucca, he saw a pleasant, green valley, with giant ceibas casting a grateful shade over running waters.

The Kid's face lighted up.

The sight was comforting, as well as amazing, in the heart of the fatal desert.

"Come up, old hoss!"

The Kid urged on his mustang to a gallop. He was surprised, indeed, that the horse did not break into a gallop of his own accord. The sight of that cool and smiling valley, with its glistening stream, should have attracted the mustang as it attracted the Kid. But the mustang seemed not to heed it, though he obeyed the urging of his rider and galloped onward.

The Kid understood now why the lonely wanderer, whose track he was following, had plunged into the desert. From afar, doubtless, the unknown man had seen that glorious sight of verdure, and had headed for it on foot, after his horse had fallen by the way. The Kid fully expected to find him under the shade of the ceibas by the flowing stream.

And then, with a suddenness that was dazing, the stream, the ceiba-trees, the green valley vanished like the vision of a dream.

The Kid stopped, and rubbed his eyes.

Was he dreaming?

A minute before that smiling verdure had been spread before his sight, seemingly only a mile or so distant. Now the barren desert stretched for mile on mile—barren, arid, fatal.

"Jerusalem!" murmured the Kid.

He knew now why that pleasant stream had not attracted his mustang.

"Mirage!"



THE LAST OF THE GUNMAN! "I got you!" the gunman was yelling as the Kid stole up. "You wiped out my cards, but I got you at last!" They were Dave Butt's last words. The Kid's six-gun roared, and the gunman spun round and fell heavily! (See Chapter 5.)



A VICTIM OF THE DESERT! With a slash of his quirt, the Kid drove the vultures away, and knelt down beside the man. Two wild eyes stared up at him. "All in, I guess!" muttered the Kid. (See Chapter 3.)

The Kid snapped his teeth.

The Rio Kid, an old hand of the plains and the deserts, had been deceived by the desert mirage, like the veriest tenderfoot.

The next moment he laughed aloud. "You durned gink!" he said to himself. "You sure want to learn your way about, you pesky locoed geck! Jest a mirage!"

It was only a mirage, and it had vanished. Only the barren desert lay around the Kid.

But the vision had enlightened him.

Doubtless the lonely wanderer had been led on by the mirage, even as the experienced Kid had been. That accounted for the apparent madness of the man in entering the trackless waste on foot.

In that hurried gallop after the mirage the Kid had lost the faint, almost imperceptible sign he had been following.

He could have tried back and picked it up again; but there was no need. The Kid knew all the signs of the desert, and from where he had halted a new sign told him its own tale.

From the blue sky a black, floating figure dropped to the earth. It was a zopilote—a black vulture.

Here and there, winging through the blue, came other black wings, some of them mere specks in the distance.

The scavengers of the desert were gathering to a feast.

It might have been the body of some desert wolf that drew them, but the Kid guessed now that he knew where to look for the wanderer.

He turned his mustang towards the spot, half a mile distant, where the black vulture had dropped to earth.

There he would find the prey that drew the carrion birds from afar.

If it was the man he sought, he was not yet dead, or the obscene birds would have reached the spot before this. At the last gasp, the Kid

reckoned. The vultures knew they had only to wait.

He rode up at a gallop, and sighted three hideous black vultures sitting on the sand, watching. Within a few feet of them lay a man, and their red eyes were fixed upon him.

With a slash of his quirt the Kid drove the vultures, croaking and cackling, away, and leaped from his horse.

He had found his man.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Gambusino!

"All in, I guess."

The Rio Kid knelt beside the man who lay on the barren earth, unsheltered in the blaze of the sun.

Two wild eyes stared at him without comprehension. The man was in the grip of delirium.

It was evident that he was utterly spent. His lips were dry and black with thirst; his water-bottle lay empty at his side. Dust covered him like a garment. Wild words babbled from his lips; and among the disjointed words the Kid caught one repeated again and again.

"Oro! El oro—el oro!"

"Gold!" murmured the Kid.

The man was a Mexican; his swarthy face and black hair, and his babbling in the Spanish tongue, showed as much. A prospector for gold—a gambusino. As he lay in delirium he babbled of the gold he had sought in the rocky sierra and the arid desert—the gold he had perhaps found. He was a man past middle life; a gambusino of experience, and yet he had been led astray by the mirage of the desert. The Kid placed his own water-bottle to the dry, parched lips, and the man swallowed the water with avidity. Still he babbled and babbled of gold.

The Kid fed him sparingly with

water; it was dangerous to give too much at once to a man dying of thirst. He bathed the blazing face sparingly, too, for water was precious. The Kid had but his bottle, and he was many miles from water. The black-muzzled mustang was panting with thirst, his throat caked with the hot dust of the desert; the Kid himself was athirst. But for his horse and himself there was no drink; he needed it all for the hapless wanderer who had sunk down there to die, under the watching eyes of the black vultures.

"I guess we want to get out of this, feller," the Kid remarked.

He lifted him from the earth to a sitting posture. To place him on the mustang, and lead him away,

was all that the Kid could do; it was death to linger. He would strike water in time to save the gambusino's life and his own—at least, he hoped so. A heavy sack hung by straps over the man's back—heavy and clinking. The Kid marvelled as he saw it. Staggering from weakness as the man must have been before he fell, he had not abandoned that heavy sack.

"Specimens from a strike, I reckon," the Kid remarked.

The Kid detached the leathern sack; it weighed not less than twenty pounds. The neck of it was secured by a loose cord; it came half-open as the Kid lifted it to the horse's back. A yellow gleam struck his eyes.

"Jerusalem! Nuggets!"

The Kid stared into the sack.

It was crammed, not with rough specimens of pay rock, as he had surmised, but with gold nuggets—gold, almost pure, with little rock. No wonder the Mexican gambusino was babbling of "oro." He had struck it rich, and the gold in the sack was worth thousands of dollars.

The Kid drew a quick, deep breath.

There was a fortune in his hand, and the man to whom it belonged lay dying at his feet—dying, if the Kid did not save him.

The Kid's laugh rang out strangely on the silent desert.

He was not tempted. That sort of temptation did not appeal to the Rio Kid, wild as was his reputation in his own country.

He hung the sack of nuggets on the saddle-bow, and then lifted the Mexican into the saddle.

Taking a grip on the man to keep him there, the Kid spoke to his mustang and trod away.

The sun blazed down on him. The dust rose in clouds under his feet and

the horse's hoofs. Behind him, the vultures croaked and cackled their disappointment.

It was a weary trail.

Hour after hour the Kid tramped on, tramping back the way he had ridden, but on foot the way was long and weary. He stopped at times, to moisten the babbling man's lips with water, never his own. The Kid was hardy; he knew how to suffer and be silent. The man was a Mexican, and the Texas puncher had no love for Mexicans. The man was a stranger, and the Kid was little interested in strangers. But he was going to save the gambusino, and set him on his way again with his gold safe in his sack, or die in the desert by his side.

Well was that fatal desert named the Journey of Death! Had he had but a few more miles to cover, the Kid knew that he would never have done it alive; without abandoning the man who lurched in the saddle, supported only by the Kid's strong arm. And having once befriended him, the Kid could not abandon him; that was not to be thought of, and he did not think of it. Mile after mile, dusty and deadly, under burning heat, stung by flies, choked by dust, parched with thirst, the hardy Kid tramped on, with an aching arm holding the babbling gambusino in the saddle.

The Kid was almost sinking when he left the dust and blaze of the desert behind him, and led his horse into a canyon of the Gila mountains, on the edge of the desert. The blazing sun was sinking low, almost touching the rim of the desert in the west, blazing like a ball of red fire in the steely blue. But the Kid did not halt. His last drop of water had been given to the delirious gambusino, and he dared not halt till he struck water.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Dave Butt's Last Shot!

HIGH over the Gila mountains, and the Gila desert, the full round moon soared. Clear white light fell in deep canyon and rocky arroyo; and it fell upon a camp among brown rocks, where a tiny spring bubbled, and spread verdure for a little distance. By the spring grew trees and thickets, a spot of life in the barren rocky canyon. The Kid had struck water there at midnight, and there he had camped. His horse had drunk deep, and lain down to sleep in the shadows; on the Kid's blankets the gambusino lay, silent now. The delirium had passed, and the man was sleeping.

The Rio Kid had lighted a camp-fire, of wood from the thicket. The night was cold in the mountains.

He sat with his back to a big rock, his feet to the fire, watching the sleeping man. The man had been stirring, and the Kid was ready to tend him when he wakened.

The wild, dark eyes opened in the moonlight.
"Agua!"

The Mexican spoke faintly.

The Kid placed a pannikin of water to his lips. The Mexican drank eagerly, and lay back on the blankets. His black eyes were fixed on the Kid. The man was himself again now, and his strength was returning. The Kid could see that he was puzzled, and he smiled.

"I reckon I picked you up yonder in the Jornada de la Muerte," the Kid explained.

"A Gringo!" muttered the Mexican.

"Sure!"

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"You have saved me from the desert!" said the gambusino, speaking in English now.

"Correct!"

"Gracias! I had had not water for two days—my horse fell and died; and then—it was the mirage," said the gambusino, in a low voice. "I was led by the mirage—yet I might have died in the mountains, as my horse died. You have found—you have seen—" He broke off, his black eyes wandering to and fro, and the Kid knew of what he was thinking.

The Kid picked up the heavy sack and pushed it towards him.

The Mexican's eyes glistened.

"You know what is in that sack, seniorito?"

The Kid laughed.

"Sure! You've struck it right way back in the sierra, I guess!"

"The gold was yours to take—I was dying in the desert," muttered the gambusino, eyeing him in wonder. "You saved my life, and you give me back my gold."

"Forget it, feller!" grinned the Kid. "You ain't butted into a rustler or a hold-up man, sure."

The gambusino lay silent for a long time, his black eyes fixed strangely on the Kid.

He spoke again at last.

"You are right, senior; I have struck it rich in the sierra. And you—what are you doing here in the desert?"

"I reckon I'm heading for the mines," answered the Kid. "I'm goin' to try my luck prospecting!"

"You are a Gringo, and I am Mexicano," said the man in the blankets. "But you have saved me. Half of what I have shall be yours."

The Kid shook his head.

"Forget it!" he answered.

"But I am in earnest, senior," said the gambusino. "I have a fortune in this sack; and in the Golden Canyon is the mine I have found. I have the map in my belt—without that even I should never find it again—a lonely canyon on the border of the Jornada de la Muerte. It is the richest strike ever made in Arizona." His eyes gleamed: "I shall be rich, senior, and you shall be rich for saving me from the vultures of the desert. Amigos!"

He stretched out his hand, and the Kid took it lightly. He had not expected much gratitude from a Greaser; and it was not in the Kid's mind to accept the generous offer the gambusino had made. The Kid wanted no reward for what he had done.

But he smiled cheerily.

"Amigos!" he assented. "I reckon you'd better get some sleep now, and in the morning we'll hit the trail for Los Pinos."

The Mexican nodded.

He lay down in the blankets again, and the Kid retired to his resting-place by the rock on the other side of the fire.

The night was cold; but the Kid had thought nothing of giving up his blankets to the man who was still weak from his terrible experience.

The Kid slept.

It was a stirring of his mustang that awakened him, and he awakened with all his senses on the alert, and his hand on a six-gun.

Crack!

The sharp ring of a rifle rolled like thunder through the silence of the canyon.

There was a faint cry from the Mexican, rolled in the Kid's blankets by the fire. One cry; and silence! Trampling feet rang on the rocks.

A burly, stubby-faced man, haggard with long trailing, rushed into the light of the camp-fire. His face was blazing with triumph.

"I got you at last, puncher!" yelled Dave Butt.

For an instant, the Rio Kid lay still, in the shadow of the rock beside his mustang. It was Dave Butt, the gunman of Salt Lick; and he had trailed down the Rio Kid—the Kid who had almost forgotten his existence. For long days and nights the gunman had been on the trail, and the glare of the camp-fire, evidently, had drawn him to the camp in the canyon; and he had shot the sleeping man in the blankets from cover before he rushed into the camp. The Kid's teeth set hard—evidently the gunman knew nothing of his companion, and he had shot the sleeping Mexican in mistake for the Kid.

"I got you!" the gunman was yelling. "You wiped out my pard; you durned puncher, but I got you at last."

They were Dave Butt's last words.

Bang!

The Rio Kid's six-gun roared, and the gunman spun round and fell heavily on the rocks, dead before he touched the ground.

"You durned guink!" shouted the Kid savagely.

He sprang up and ran across to the Mexican.

The gambusino was raised on his elbow, staring at the gunman as he lay in the moonlight. His face was deadly white.

"You're hit?" panted the Kid. His face was ablaze with rage; had Dave Butt had a hundred lives, the Kid would have taken them all at that moment.

The gambusino groaned.

"I am struck to death, senior!"

The Kid knew it. He knew that the gunman had waited and watched, and dwelt on his aim, and taken every cunning care, before he showed himself. He had trailed down the Rio Kid, but it was a stranger who had fallen to his bullet; and the gunman's life had paid for it. But the life was ebbing from the face of the gambusino.

The Kid knelt beside him—he would have examined the wound, though he knew it was useless.

The gambusino made a gesture.

"It is useless, senior! Adios! You saved me—but it was my fate to die in the sierra! There is none of my blood to survive me—take the sack—take the map from my belt—I give you all—"

His voice trailed away.

In the light of dawn, the Rio Kid made a grave of rocks for the Mexican gambusino, whose life he had saved in the desert, and who had so strangely and terribly saved the Kid's life in his turn. With a clouded face the Kid mounted his mustang, and rode out of the canyon. In the rising sunlight, the desert stretched before his gaze, the Jornada de la Muerte, fatal to so many—almost fatal to the Rio Kid. With a black brow he gazed over the desert, hating it as if it were a living enemy; but he turned his back on it at last, and rode away, grim and silent, through the echoing hills.

THE END.

(The Rio Kid sets out in search of the Golden Canyon. But many obstacles lie in his path before he strikes gold. See next week's roaring tale of this amazing boy's outlaw, entitled: "THE RIO KID'S BONANZA.")

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THE FIRST CHAPTER.
At Los Pinos!

"GOLDEN CANYON?"

"Yep!"
"Stranger hyer?" asked Cassidy, staring across his bar at the puncher.

"Sure!"
"I reckoned so, or you'd know Golden Canyon," said Cassidy. "Any hombre in Los Pinos will tell you. Looking for lost cows?"

The Rio Kid grinned.
The Kid was in Arizona prospecting for gold; but never had a mining prospector looked the part less. From his jingling spurs and baggy chaps, to his silken neckscarf and Stetson hat, he looked a cowpuncher. His hands were used to the reins and the quirt, and the grip of a gun; but seldom had they handled pick or shovel.

Cassidy, who kept the Red Eye saloon at Los Pinos, supposed that he was a cowman down from the Arizona cow country; but his inquiry was a jest. Lost cows never strayed so far from the cow country as that township on the edge of the Red Desert.

"Nope," said the Kid cheerily.
"Prospecting."
Cassidy laughed.
All sorts of pilgrims came to Los Pinos to prospect for gold in the foothills on the edge of the desert. But a boy cowpuncher in spurs and chaps, with a quirt under his arm, was the unluckiest-looking fossier that Cassidy had ever seen.

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"Forget it, boy," said Cassidy. "You ride back to the ranch and ask your boss to take you on again. You been fired?"

"Sort of fired!" chuckled the Kid.
He did not tell Cassidy how he had been "fired"; that he had ridden out of Texas, leaving baffled sheriffs behind him, and a reward of five hundred dollars on his head.

All that was dead and buried now.
The Rio Kid, the outlaw of the Texas grass-lands, had ceased to exist. Kid Carfax had come to life in his place. In the Arizona gold country they had never heard of the Rio Kid; and they never would hear of him, if the Kid could help it.

"I got a hunch that I'm sure going to strike pay dirt in this sierra," the Kid explained.

And Cassidy chuckled again.
"You won't strike it in Golden Canyon, I reckon!"

"Why?"
"Because it ain't there," said Cassidy. "Last year the Arizona Con sunk a shaft in that very canyon, and sunk thousands of dollars on it, and gave it up again. The old shaft's still there, filling up with water."

"What's the Arizona Con?" asked the Kid.

"You sure are some greenhorn if you ain't heard of the Arizona Consolidated Gold Mines!" said Cassidy pityingly. "I calculate they own half Los Pinos and some more!"

"Never heard of them," said the Kid carelessly. "I reckon there's a store in

this burg where I can get a mining outfit?"

"Next door," said Cassidy.
He turned away to spin bottle and glass across the lead counter to a customer.

The Rio Kid, leaning on the counter, looked over the saloon.

He was new to the mining country, and all that he saw there interested the young puncher from Texas.

The hour was yet early; but the Red Eye had a good crowd already. From the street came a red glare of the sunset and the roar of the stamp-mills, that filled the valley with incessant noise.

State laws to the contrary notwithstanding, Cassidy sold all varieties of fiery liquors across his bar; in that matter, as in many other matters, Los Pinos was a law unto itself. Every man in the Red Eye packed a gun; it was no place for a tenderfoot, and the Rio Kid, to the eyes of the rough men of Los Pinos, looked the veriest tenderfoot.

Near him a poker party sat at a little table, playing for high stakes, with set, grim faces. The faro lay-out had already started business, though the table was not yet crowded, as it would be later in the evening. There was an incessant hum of voices that mingled with the buzz of machinery floating in through the open doors.

A tall man, with a short black beard and two low-slung guns, came in at the door and lounged across to the long bar; and the Kid noticed that the patrons of the Red Eye made respectful way for him.

The Kid knew the type well enough; he had happened on plenty of gunmen in his own country. Cassidy's manner was very respectful as he served the tall man with drinks, and the Kid smiled faintly.

The gunman glanced at the Kid, and glanced at him again, not liking the cool glance the puncher gave him in return. He contracted his brows and stared hard at the Kid; and the Kid, with a faint smile of amusement, returned his gaze steadily.

A tap on the arm, however, caused the Kid to look round. It was Cassidy.

"Spill it!" said the Kid.

"You slide out, boy," said Cassidy, in a low voice. "Two-gun Peters don't like being stared at."

"That long galoot?" asked the Kid.

"Sure! Slide out, I tell you!"

"I guess not!"

Cassidy shrugged his shoulders and went about his business. He had put the tenderfoot wise, and if the tenderfoot did not choose to take the hint he could get what was coming to him.

The Kid looked thoughtful.

His resolve to dodge trouble in this new country was weakening. The aggressive look of the gunman irritated the Kid; he was not the man to be scared by aggressive looks. But, after all, he had dropped into the Red Eye in search of local information, and certainly not in search of trouble.

It was wiser to pull out without a "rookus." And the Kid, having bitten on that, kept his glance away from the gunman; and Two-gun Peters, having stared at him with grim aggressiveness for some minutes without drawing a glance in return, shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and gave him no further heed. Out of the tail of his eye the Kid noted that contemptuous shrug, and his eyes gleamed for a moment. But he let it pass.

A dusky figure in a tattered blanket lurched in at the door. Many eyes turned upon it, among them the Kid's.

The newcomer was an Indian—an Apache. The dust of the desert grimed him from head to foot; his moccasins were ragged, his leggings dusty and torn, his blanket a rag. But there was a certain dignity in the way the Redskin draped the tattered blanket round his tall figure as he strode into the saloon.

The Kid knew Indians, and he figured that the Redskin was a chief, one of the "wild" Apaches, who preferred the hard, savage life of the desert to the confinement of the Indian Reservations. On that point the Rio Kid could sympathise with him, though he shared the general opinion of his race that Indians were "pizen."

"Hallo, Rainy Face!" said Cassidy across the bar, with a grin.

Evidently he knew the Apache.

The Indian gave him a dignified nod. "Set 'em up!" he said, in a guttural voice, and he laid a little bag of gold-dust on the bar counter.

The Apache had come into the Red Eye for the potent fire-water—the insidious enery that was exterminating his race.

"Three fingers?"

Rainy Face nodded.

Cassidy spun over the glass. The Redskin was about to pick it up when Two-gun Peters reached across and knocked the glass spinning into the sawdust on the floor.

"I guess you don't drink here, Injun!" he said. "Git!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Kid Chips In!

THE Rio Kid breathed hard. The gunman had come into the Red Eye in an aggressive mood, looking for trouble. The Kid had steered clear of trouble with him—unwillingly. All the other men in the saloon either gave him a wide berth, or treated him with marked deference. Nobody, it was very clear, wanted trouble with Two-gun Peters.

From sheer swaggering aggressiveness the ruffian had picked on the Apache.

The Redskin was unarmed; no Redskin from the desert would have dared to come armed into Los Pinos. Un-

armed as he was, he turned a fierce, furious glare on the gunman and his dusky hands clenched.

The gunman grinned at him.

He stood leaning on the bar, his hands loosely at his sides, within easy reach of the guns low-slung from his belt. He half-expected the savage Apache to spring at him like a tiger; but had Rainy Face done so, he would never have reached the gunman; he would have rolled in the sawdust on the floor with a bullet through his heart.

"Shooting up!" a Redskin was a trifling matter in Los Pinos.

Two-gun Peters made a gesture towards the door.

"Git!" he said. "You don't drink here, Injun! Hit the trail, lively!"

The Apache stood motionless.

"You ain't good?" grinned Peters.

"I guess I'll stir you, Injun!"

He drew a revolver from his right-hand holster. There was a scurrying back out of the line of fire. The Apache's eyes blazed, but he did not speak, and he did not stir.

Bang!

The gun roared, and the bullet crashed on the floor within a fraction of an inch of the Indian's ragged moccasin.

Rainy Face jumped clear of the floor. "Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of laughter from the crowd in the saloon. This kind of gun-play was a jest in the Red Eye at Los Pinos.

Bang!

The gun roared again, clipping a strip of ragged fur from the Apache's moccasin. Again the Indian jumped; the bullet had taken off a strip of skin as well as a strip of fur.

"Beat it, Rainy Face!" called out Cassidy.

Bang! Bang!

Two-gun Peters was enjoying his joke. "I guess I'll make him dance!" he chuckled. "Dance, you Injun thief, dance!"

The Indian did not dance, but he leaped wildly to escape the bullets that crashed round his feet. Only his leaping saved him, for Peters was aiming at the ragged moccasins now.

The Rio Kid set his teeth.

He had no call to intervene; he liked Redskins little enough, and he had seen this kind of game played before, many a time. But the bullying aggressiveness of the gunman got his goat. If the Apache had been a little less active, the bullets would have crashed through bone and sinew; and the Kid decided that it was not good enough.

"I guess that game's gone far enough, feller!" drawled the Kid, facing round at Two-gun Peters.

"What?"

"Let up on the Injun!"

Two-gun Peters stared at him. He could hardly believe that this boy puncher was talking to him.

The Kid smiled back at his enraged glare. His hand was very near his gun, but he had not touched it yet. Many a man along the Rio Grande could have told the bully of Los Pinos how fast the Kid was on the draw; but in Los Pinos they did not know the Kid. It seemed to the staring crowd in the Red Eye that he was asking for sudden death, and some of them gave him commiserating glances, though not a man thought of chipping in. Two-gun Peters was a bad man to cross.

"You talking to me, puncher?" gasped the gunman, at last.

"Sure! You'll be damaging the Injun with that gun-play," remonstrated the Kid. "Let up on it, feller."

Two-gun Peters clicked his teeth. He did not speak again, but his gun, which had been aimed at the Indian, swung round towards the Kid.

Crack!

It was not Peters' gun that barked. It seemed like magic to the Red Eye crowd; a split second before, the Kid's gun had been in his holster; now it was in his hand, and it had barked out sharply before the gunman could draw a bead on him.

There was a yell from Two-gun Peters.

The gun spun from his hand to the floor, and a shower of crimson spattered the sawdust.

The gunman clasped his right hand in his left.

He backed away, and leaned heavily on the bar, his face whitening. There was a bullet-hole clean through his hand.

The Kid smiled at him.

"You sure asked for it, feller," he said.

The gunman released his wounded hand, and his left groped for his other gun. The Kid's .45 came up to a level.

"Drop it!" he said tersely.

The gun clanged to the floor.

"That's sure better," smiled the Kid.

"I guess I don't want to fix you for a funeral, Mister Two-gun Peters. Kick that gun over this way."

The gunman, sullen, savage, subdued, obeyed. The Kid stamped his heavy heel on the gun, putting it out of action.

"You sure won't want a gun for months to come, feller," he drawled. "You want to take that paw of yours round to the doc. You Injun, I reckon you can soak up your pizen."

The Apache fixed his black eyes on the Kid, with a strange glance.

"Little white chief big medicine!" he said gutturally. "Rainy Face no forget!"

He stalked up to the bar again, draping his tattered blanket round him. The gunman, white as death with the pain of his wound, was staggering towards the door. Faces that had been subdued when he came in, were grinning now—Two-gun Peters had lost his terrors for the men of Los Pinos. A laugh followed him as he staggered into the street.

"They sure taught you to shoot on your ranch, puncher!" exclaimed Cassidy.

"They sure did!" agreed the Rio Kid. And he walked cheerily out of the Red Eye, leaving the saloon in a buzz behind him.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Golden Canyon!

IT was a couple of days later that the Rio Kid rode into Golden Canyon.

He had put in two days at Los Pinos, picking up knowledge of local topography, and laying in supplies for his trip.

Miner's tools were added now to the slicker pack that the Kid carried behind his saddle. The Kid was ready for fossicking.

In Los Pinos, many eyes had turned on the graceful figure of the Kid, when he walked the street, or shopped in Baker's Store. Few who were told could believe that this boy from the prairie had shot up Two-gun Peters. The two-gun man was laid up in his cabin, with a bandaged arm in a sling, and a temper on him that made it unsafe for the curious to ask him questions. With his right hand he would never shoot again; and there were many in Los Pinos glad to know it. The gun-

fighter was dreaded, but he was not popular. Los Pinos stared at the Kid so long as he remained in the town; but he did not remain long. With a miner's outfit added to his pack, he rode out of the town one morning and vanished into the foothills.

The Kid looked round him, in Golden Canyon, with a rather grim eye. Some hopeful pilgrim had doubtless given the place its name; but its look was not promising—a rugged wilderness of wild, rocky walls, with trickling water here and there, and in one place looking out on the deadly desert—the Red Desert, the Jornada de la Muerte of the old Spanish days.

The hot breath of the desert reached the Kid as he came over the divide into the canyon, reminding him of the day when he had ridden into the waste of death to rescue the Mexican gambusino. That had been a kindly deed; the Kid carried in his wallet the map the dying gambusino had given him, in the same wallet a bundle of gold nuggets, proof that the gambusino had indeed found gold in the Golden Canyon as he had told the Kid. Most of the nuggets the Kid had sold to pay for his mining outfit and to fill out the roll in his belt. The Kid had a fat roll these days, and it was good to think of; though probably he would have changed it freely for a cowboy's pay on the old Double-Bar ranch in Texas, could the past only have been blotted out.

"So this hyer is the place," the Kid murmured, as he rode into the wide, shallow, rocky canyon, encompassed by a wilderness of barren rock.

Fifteen miles from Los Pinos lay the Golden Canyon, where the wandering gambusino had struck it rich—the gold-seeker who had made the Rio Kid his heir.

The Kid thought of him now. Long and hard had been the gold-seeker's trail, and he had found riches only to perish. In the barren hills food and water had failed him, his horse had perished, yet in his desperate attempt to get back to the settlements he had carried a heavy sack of nuggets. He had wandered in the Red Desert, losing his way; his fate had been upon him; the Kid had saved him from the desert, yet a ball had struck him down; it seemed like destiny to the Kid when he thought of it. He did not even know the Mexican's name—only he knew that the gambusino was from Old Mexico, a stranger in Arizona. And the Kid was heir to the mine he had found, if the gambusino had not dreamed it, as the Kid half dreamed. The sack of nuggets spoke for themselves; but the rich mine, of which the Mexican had babbled—that was perhaps a figment of a sick man's imagination. Anyhow, the Kid was there to see. If the mine was there he would find it.

Wild and desolate looked the canyon, dusty with the dust that blew on the hot wind from the desert. The Kid halted where a ruined wire fence still partly stood, and misshapen wrecks of abandoned machinery lay red with rust. The opening of the old shaft showed there—a gaunt, yawning pit, uncovered to the rains; a proposition that had been taken up and then abandoned by the Arizona Con—the most powerful gold-mining company operating in that part of the country. A rich company had tried there, and failed; the mine was left derelict after it had eaten up thousands of dollars. Not a good augury for the Rio Kid's quest.

In Los Pinos they had warned him to keep his eyes peeled when he went into Golden Canyon. The wild Apaches

from the desert had been sometimes seen there, he had been told, and a lonely prospector, far from help, was likely to meet with short shift at the hands of the outcast Redskins. The war-trail was a thing of the past long ago, the days of wild Redskin warfare almost forgotten, but a solitary white man who came on a gang of thief-Apaches in the desert was not likely to ride home again. The Kid heard the warning, and heeded it; but he rode alone to Golden Canyon, all the same. He could not afford to have eyes on him when he sought for the mine that the gambusino had discovered and marked. A hundred men would have followed him, had they even suspected that the Kid held a clue to a rich strike. A hundred guns would have been ready to riddle him with lead for the secret. But that the Kid held a clue nobody suspected. He knew how to keep his own counsel; and as for such a prospector striking it rich on his own, Los Pinos laughed at the idea. Cassidy, at the Red Eye, expected to see the young puncher come trailing in, dusty and broke, if he did not die of thirst in the desert, or hunger in the foothills. And the Kid was quite willing to leave that impression behind him at Los Pinos; he did not want watching eyes upon him while he sought for the gambusino's gold.

The Kid drew rein and regarded the abandoned mine of the Arizona Con with a thoughtful eye. Wild and desolate it looked, weeds and grasses growing among shattered cabins, snakes creeping among the thickets. He rode on again at last, down the canyon towards the Red Desert.

He camped by a little spring, where a big cottonwood-tree grew, in a patch of green round the spring. He fed his horse and himself, and then he drew from his wallet the strip of leather on which the gambusino had drawn the map of the bonanza. It was not an easy map to follow. The Mexican had drawn it for his own guidance in returning to the spot; to a stranger's eye it was puzzling. It was drawn in scratches from the sharp point of a knife on the hard leather—scratches and lines, with only one word, scratched deep—the Spanish word "Oro"—gold! That word indicated the strike, the Kid figured out, but there was no scale on the map, no landmarks that he could recognise.

That the bonanza was in the canyon he knew, for the gambusino had told him so. But the leather map seemed little guide. But the Kid was patient. If there was a fortune to be found in that wilderness of rock, he was going to worry it out somehow.

For three days the Kid quested. He left his horse camped by the spring, taking an easy time, while he explored the rocky canyon on foot, little as he liked foot work. He would study the map scratched on the leather by his camp-fire, at night, and gradually he drew more meaning from the blur of scratches. He worked it out that a scratched circle indicated the shaft of the old mine of the Arizona Con, that another circle indicated the desert on which the mouth of the canyon looked. Between the two was the distance of a mile, and that gave him, roughly, the scale of the map. On that scale the spot marked "oro" was half a mile from the old mine, and the Kid was glad to see that. If he struck it rich he did not want to strike it on land that was already taken up, the property of a powerful company, though they had ceased to work it. But if the mine was half a mile from the abandoned shaft he was on safe ground.

On the fourth day the Kid broke camp in a hopeful mood. Leaving the black-

muzzled mustang in the grass by the spring, the Kid shouldered his pick and started on foot once more. He knew enough of mining to know pay rock if he struck it, and, though he had not struck it yet, he did not allow his hope to die. But that day he was to be busy in matters far other than fossicking for pay rock.

On the sloping side of the great canyon the Kid worked his way, every now and then stopping to test the rock, the clang of his pick ringing and echoing far through the vast silence of the canyon. In the clear mountain air sound travels far and fast, and so it was that the Kid heard the shrill squeal of his mustang at a great distance. And at that sound—the warning of danger—the Kid forgot all about fossicking and leaped upon a boulder to stare back at his camp by the spring in the bottom of the canyon.

His teeth came together hard.

By the cottonwood-tree five or six ragged figures were gathered, with dusky faces, and feathers stuck in their matted black hair.

"Injuns!"

The Kid muttered the word between his teeth.

His eyes blazed.

The black-muzzled mustang, lossoed by one of the Apaches, was struggling helplessly in the rope. The Kid gripped his guns.

There was a clatter of hoofs in the canyon.

A score of tattered riders came into his view and grouped under the towering cottonwood.

The Kid released his guns.

Five or six of the thief-Apaches would have been enough, even for a good man like the Kid. There were nearly thirty of the desert wanderers in sight now; more out of sight, as likely as not. The Kid's horse was taken, and the Kid realised that he was in a bad way. His first thought had been to hit for camp and handle the bunch of Redskins there and get his horse. But he abandoned that idea now. Nearly every man in the Indian gang carried a rifle, and the Kid did not need telling that they knew how to shoot. He knew that he would be riddled with balls as soon as he left the cover of the rocks on the hillside. He stayed where he was and watched.

The mustang was roped in and tied to the tree. The Kid had no fear for him; he was a valuable prize for the Redskins. The Apaches were seeking sign now, and staring round the canyon with their wild, black, gleaming eyes. They knew that the mustang's master could not be far away, and they had little fear of his escaping them without his horse. The Kid's face set more and more grimly. He felt nothing like fear, because fear had been left out of the Rio Kid's composition, but he knew that if he lived to see the sun set that day he would be a lucky puncher. A white man, alone in the foothills, far from help, was fair game to the thief-Apaches, his guns and his mustang valuable plunder to them, his scalp a trophy to be taken back to their hidden lair in the Red Desert. There were a score and a half of the ruthless savages, and they were picking up the Kid's trail.

"I sure reckon you're for it, Kid," said the Rio Kid to himself, coolly. "Those galoots back in Los Pinos knew what they were talking about when they chewed the rag about the Apaches. But I reckon some of that gang will come to the happy hunting grounds along with me."

His guns were in his hands now.

The whole gang of Apaches were crossing the canyon towards the rugged hillside, where the Kid lay among the

rocks. With a grin the Kid stuck his Stetson hat over the rocks, and in an instant two bullets crashed through it. There was a yell from the Apaches as the lead flew. Then the whole gang came on at a rush—which was exactly what the Kid wanted. They were rushing on in the open, yelling. And the Kid's guns spoke death from the cover of the rocks.

Bang! Bang! Bang!
Three shots he had time for, and every shot rolled an Apache in the canyon and silenced his yelling for ever. Then the Apaches hunted cover, and the Kid ceased to fire.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Striking Gold!

CRACK!
Crack! Crack!
Not a feather was to be seen of the Apache gang that had sunk so suddenly out of sight under the fire of the Rio Kid's guns.

farther on, almost perpendicularly, so that a coyote or cougar could scarcely have found footing there.

The Kid retreated among the rocks, crawling from boulder to boulder; but perforce his retreat drew him farther and farther up the rugged slope. It was the only way to prevent the creeping enemy from closing round behind him.

A bullet joited the Stetson hat on his head; another grazed his shoulder. The Kid's face was white and set now, but it was anger and the fierce fighting

shown his head, as he sought to fire, rolled back down the rocks with a bullet in his brain.

His death-yell was answered by a fierce whoop from the rest of the gang, and for an instant the Kid expected a rush—a rush in which he knew that he must go down, but in which he was grimly determined to take at least six or seven of his foes with him across the dark river. But the habitual caution of the Redskins overruled. They did not rush. But he knew they were creeping on like wild-cats; and he worked his way farther and farther



THE GUNMAN'S JOKE! "I guess I'll make you dance!" growled Two-gun Peters, and he dragged out his gun and pumped bullets at the feet of the Redskin. Rainy Face gave a howl, and leaped into the air. Bang! Bang! Bang!
(See Chapter 2.)

But if they could not be seen they could be heard. Warming their way among ragged rocks and boulders, ever closer and closer to the spot where the puncher lay, the Apaches loosed off shot after shot as they crept and sprawled, and some of the lead whizzed uncomfortably near the crouching Kid.

"I guess I got to get out of this," mused the Kid, and he jammed his guns back into his holsters.

There was no retreat from the canyon open to the Kid. His only chance was to keep in cover of the rocks on the sloping side. Behind him, as he faced the enemy, the canyon wall rose higher and higher—at first in an easy slope;

spirit that whitened it. It was a fight to the death between the Kid and overwhelming odds. A scene familiar enough in the desolate foothills, where men took their lives in their hands in the hunt for the precious yellow metal.

The fight in the Red Eye saloon at Los Pinos, which had made the crowd open their eyes, was child's play to this. Gladly enough the Kid would have exchanged his present foes for Two-gun Peters, or a dozen of him. But the Kid was a bad man to crowd, as the Apaches were learning. Twice a bullet had narrowly missed him; but when the Kid burned powder again he did not miss, and an Apache who had

back among the rocks, to keep from being surrounded.

Had he been able to choose his way it would have been well with the Kid; but with that gang of yelling fiends almost circling him he had no choice; he had to retreat where he could. And so it was that he came up against a rugged wall of rock that cut off all farther retreat, and the triumphant yell of the Apaches told that they knew that he could go no farther. In his exultation, one Redskin lifted his head above cover and glared towards the Kid, and the next instant dropped back dead. The Kid was fighting mad now, and

more dangerous to crowd than a grizzly bear in his lair.

And then fortune, which had frowned so blackly on the Kid, seemed to smile again. In the rugged wall of rock that barred all farther retreat, a deep crevice opened, and the Kid backed into it promptly as soon as he saw it. It was a fissure in the rocky wall of the canyon, two feet wide at the most, but it widened out into a "pocket" farther on. The interior of the crevice was a jumble of rocks, affording ample cover. The opening was too narrow for more than one man to enter.

The Kid chuckled as he crouched behind cover at the extremity of the crevice and watched the opening. A dusky head and a bunch of feathers appeared there, and the Kid's gun roared, and the Apache dropped like a stone. A burst of yelling, and a scrambling of moccasins among the rocks, told the Kid that the gang were gathering round the fissure, but they did not venture yet to push in.

The Kid had a breathing space. High over his head the fissure closed in solid rock. On either side were rocky walls. He could be attacked only in front. In such a position the Kid would have undertaken to hold off all the Apaches in the Red Desert, so long as his cartridges held out. He longed to see them rush him, and give him a chance for gun-play; but the Redskins were in no hurry for that.

Minute followed minute, and there was no rush. The Kid shrugged his shoulders. He had little expectation that the Apaches would throw away their lives crowding into the narrow fissure so long as the sun lasted. When the darkness came it would be a different tale. It was only a respite that the desperate Kid had gained.

He rested and waited, and his eyes fell upon an object that lay among the rocks where he had taken cover. It was a Mexican machete. The keen blade was dulled, red with rust. And the Kid's glance lingered on it strangely. Someone had been here before him—a Mexican, by the weapon—and he had left the machete there. The Kid thought of the gambusino. Undoubtedly it was the lost gold-seeker he had found in the desert who had left his machete in that hidden fissure of the canyon wall. The Kid's eyes gleamed. Where the gambusino had been using his machete was where he had been seeking gold—where he had found it. The Kid knew that now, in the hour almost of death, he was close on the trail of the Mexican's bonanza.

Crack, crack, crack!
Bullets whizzed into the fissure, crashed on the rock, and dropped flattened. At every shot there came a fierce yell from the Apaches. They fired and yelled, but they did not rush. The solitary white man, cornered in that hole in the canyon wall, daunted them. Five of the gang had fallen under his fire, and dread of his guns was mingled with the Apaches' longing for vengeance. Bullet after bullet crashed in, chipping the rocks, and scattering fragments over the Kid as he crouched, wary, watchful.

"Oro! El oro!"
The word on the Mexican's leather map seemed to leap to the eye of the Kid as the chips of rock fell round him. He picked up one of the larger fragments.

It gleamed yellow to the eye.
"Jerusalem!"
The Kid caught his breath. He turned his startled eyes upon the canyon wall behind him. Gleam after gleam of yellow caught his gaze. The

rock that was chipped away by the crashing bullets was thick with ore.

"Oh gum!" breathed the Kid. "To hit on the bonanza with that yelling gang of fiends jest going to put me over the range. Oh shucks!"

The Rio Kid had found the bonanza. Riches untold lay in the rocks round him. An adit driven into the hillside would unearth a fortune, and that fortune was the Rio Kid's. And he was doomed to die there, and his scalp to hang at the belt of some "dirty thief-Apache of the Red Desert." The gambusino's gold-mine was the grave of the gambusino's heir.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Rainy Face!

THE long, hot day was drawing to a close, and still the Rio Kid lay in cover in the fissure, watchful as a cat; and outside, among the rocks, the Apaches hemmed him in and waited for nightfall. The Kid had heard the trampling of horses in the great canyon, and he guessed that more of the gang had arrived, that foes almost without number crowded the rugged hillside, barring and blocking every possibility of escape.

Some vague hope he had had of help coming—of white men hearing the firing and coming along to see what the "rookus" was. But the Golden Canyon had for years been abandoned and untrodden. No prospector ever trod it now.

Within fifteen miles of the roaring stamp-mills of Los Pinos, almost within sound of the busy machinery, the Rio Kid was to be done to death by a mob of Apaches. And still he was cool as ice as he watched and waited for the deadly rush that he knew would come with the dark. And suddenly, in the red sunset, a voice shouted to the Kid—a guttural Indian voice that seemed to have something of a familiar ring to his ears.

"Paleface!"
"Hallo, you!" called back the Kid cheerily.

"Let the paleface listen to the words of his red brother," came the guttural voice from outside the fissure. The Indian was standing close, but he was not showing as much as a feather for the Kid's fire.

"Spill it!" jeered the Kid.
"Wah! I have seen the horse that was roped by my warriors," went on the chief's voice—evidently it was a chief who was speaking.

"Then you've sure seen a good cayuse, Injun," said the Kid.

"I have seen the horse another day, ridden in the street of Los Pinos by a little white chief."

"What about it?"
The Kid spoke over levelled guns. He suspected that he was being kept in talk to divert his attention for a sudden rush to be made.

"The rider of the black-nosed horse is the friend of Rainy Face," went on the chief.

The Kid started. He knew the name, and he knew the voice now. The Redskin who was speaking was the tattered Apache he had saved from the gun-play of Two-gun Peters in the Red Eye at Los Pinos.

"Rainy Face!" he exclaimed.
"Let the paleface listen. If he is the little white chief of Los Pinos, he is the brother of Rainy Face. Let him speak."
"I guess I'm that little white chief, Injun," grinned the Kid. "But what does it come to, getting down to cases?"

"Rainy Face came, because he received news that his warriors were in fight with a white man," said the chief.

"But when Rainy Face saw the black-nosed horse, he knew it. The little white chief is the brother of Rainy Face. Let him put up his guns and come to his friends."

"Oh, Jerusalem!" murmured the Kid. He pondered it.

It might be a trick to get him out of cover, but he did not think so. There was a ring of sincerity in the voice of the Apache. In the Red Eye he had said that he would not forget.

"If my white brother does not trust the Red man, Rainy Face will come to him with no weapons in his hands," said the chief.

"That's talking turkey, chief. Hop in!"

The tall, dignified figure of the Apache chief stepped in at the fissure without a moment's delay. His hands were empty.

The Kid lowered his guns.
"I guess I trust you, chief," he said; "but—"

"My young men will not touch the little white chief. Rainy Face has given his order."

The Kid smiled.
"I guess your young men don't feel too friendly to me, chief, after I've made it last sickness for half a dozen of them. Let them bring my horse, and stand back while I ride."

"The little chief has spoken!" said Rainy Face.

He turned and called to the tattered gang of thief-Apaches in his own tongue. There was a murmur, and the chief called again, in hard, stern tones, and the murmur died away. There was a clattering of hoofs among the rocks. The Rio Kid waited, his heart beating. The sunset was red and deep. It wanted less than an hour to dark. Rainy Face had arrived on the scene only in time to save his life—for the last desperate struggle could have ended only one way the Kid was well aware. Truly he had done well for himself when he had chipped in between the Apache chief and the bully of Los Pinos.

Rainy Face made a gesture.
"Let my white brother take his horse," he said.

He stepped back. The Kid followed him from the fissure into the open of the hillside, in the flood of crimson light from the setting sun. The Apaches had fallen back to a distance. Wild, dark, fierce eyes gleamed at the Rio Kid, but not a hand was raised.

If the chief was playing him false, the last fight might as well come in the open. But the chief was not playing him false. The Redskin's memory was as long for a benefit as for an injury. Rainy Face, who would have butchered any other white man in the desert without compunction, was more concerned for the Kid's life than for his own.

The Kid slid into his saddle. It was sheer joy to feel his mustang under him again. Rainy Face made a gesture of farewell. The Rio Kid waved his hand, and rode clattering up the canyon.

"I guess that was a close call, old hoss," the Kid remarked, as he hit the trail for Los Pinos, and galloped. "It was sure a close call, old-timer. I reckon we've got a claim to stake out, old hoss, and a title to register at Los Pinos. And the galoots there will sure stare when they see the Rio Kid's bonanza."

And the Kid galloped on contentedly as the stars came out, gleaming in the velvety sky.

THE END.

(Another roaring Rio Kid yarn next week, chums, entitled: "THE RIO KID'S GOLD-MINE!")

OVERWHELMING ODDS AGAINST HIM! The Rio Kid is used to facing fearful dangers, and combating overwhelming odds. But he finds he needs all his resource and pluck to meet the new enemy in the Los Pinos mining camp!

THE RIO KID!

RALPH REDWAY



This week:

"THE RIO KID'S GOLD MINE!"

ANOTHER POWERFUL WESTERN YARN, FEATURING THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Some Strike!

LOS PINOS hummed with the news.

Cassidy, who kept the Red Eye Saloon, had a crowd in his place morning, noon, and night. They discussed one topic, and one only—a topic of which no man in Los Pinos ever seemed to tire.

It was the biggest strike since Los Pinos had had a local habitation and a name. News had come into the gold camp many a time of a rich strike in the sierra; within an easy reach of Los Pinos there were a score of mines working and paying, and in every canyon and dusky gulch for many a long mile prospectors hunted for pay-dirt. Many a man had struck luck; many a dusty pilgrim had shown rich nuggets over the bar of the Red Eye. But the new strike eclipsed them all.

The Gambusino Mine was some proposition, Cassidy told his patrons across the bar; it had the Yellow Dog beat to a frazzle, and the Yellow Dog was a rich mine—hitherto the richest in the valley. And the man who had located it and staked it out, and claimed and registered it with all due formality, was a mere kid—some boy from Texas, a puncher who had come out to Arizona prospecting, Cassidy had heard. A boy puncher, dropping into luck like this on his first gold-trail—it made the mouths of the Los Pinos men water.

Los Pinos lay in the wide, shallow

canyon, looking out on the Red Desert. From the windows of Cassidy's place the desert could be seen, stretching far and wide from the base of the hills. The Red Desert—the Jornada de la Muerte of the old Spanish days; a "Journey of Death" then, a journey of death now. On the edge of the arid desert Los Pinos had been a little settlement in the Mexican times, incessantly raided by the Apaches, the Navajos, the Comanches; but even in those old dangerous days hardy gambusinos had settled there, hunting for gold in the foothills of the Gila Mountains.

Those days were long gone. The Mexican border lay to the south now; the golden land of Arizona had long been left away from the sons of the Spanish conquerors. There were still Mexicans in the town, but they were few.

Men from all the States gathered there; not one voice in ten still spoke the musical Spanish on the streets of Los Pinos. Indian raids had vanished into the past; the citizens of Los Pinos would have smiled or stared at the idea of Apaches or Comanches coming down on the camp on the war-path. Apaches and Comanches—what were left of them—were shut in reservations, save for a few desperate gangs that wandered in the desert.

Los Pinos was a busy camp. All through the day the stamps roared; even at night the graveyard shift kept the machinery going at the Yellow Dog. Noise was so incessant that it was disregarded; had an accident stopped the stamp-mills, the silence would have startled Los Pinos like a thunderclap. Busy as the town was, the railroad did not reach within twenty miles; the difficulties of construction were great. Newspapers were old when they reached the camp, and gold-dust was still legal

tender, as in the days of '49. Every man in Los Pinos packed a gun; and Rube McCoy, the town marshal, had been elected town marshal for the good reason that he was lightning on the draw.

Now Los Pinos was agog with the news of the Gambusino Mine. Why a Texas puncher had given his bonanza a Spanish name no one knew; how he had discovered it was equally unknown. But men who had seen specimens from the mine pronounced that it was a wonderful strike, and that young Carfax—that was the puncher's name—would be one of the richest mine-owners in Arizona if the Gambusino panned out as it looked like doing.

And many a gunman who loafed round Cassidy's bar wished from the bottom of his heart that he had happened on young Carfax before the boy from Texas had legalised his claim to the mine. But it was too late to wish that now; young Carfax was the owner of the mine, and it was known that he had thousands of dollars in the Los Pinos Bank, and not a man in the camp ever dreamed that young Carfax had ever been known along the Rio Grande and the Pecos as the Rio Kid, and that in far-off Texas there was still a reward of five hundred dollars offered for him, alive or dead.

Men who had seen him were not likely to guess that he ever had been an outlaw, and the Kid kept his own secret. Perhaps his heart ached sometimes for the wide grasslands and the dusky chapparals of his own country, for a sight of the silvery waters of the Rio Frio, for the old bunkhouse at the Double Bar, and a ride with the bunch.

But coolly and deliberately the Rio Kid had thrown his old life behind him. Texas and its boundless prairies was a sealed book to him now! Never again did he think of looking on the rolling waters of the Rio Grande, never again did he think of riding to the round-up with the Double-Bar bunch. And he had many things to console him. His new life was within the law; in Arizona no sheriff's hand was outstretched to seize him, and within the law he prospered as he never had dreamed of prospering outside it. If there were times when the Rio Kid would have

given the Gambusino Mine for a day's ride on the banks of the Frio, he shrugged his shoulders and dismissed the thought.

And the excitement of the big strike was still strong upon him. Fifteen miles from Los Pinos lay the mine he had discovered and located and claimed, and that was now his. It lay in the Golden Canyon on the edge of the desert; often the hot winds from the Red Desert swept along the canyon, scattering impalpable dust. Already fifty or more timber shacks had been run up; already thirty men worked in the mine, thirty names were on the Kid's pay-roll. The nearest mine was half a mile away—an abandoned shaft that belonged to the Arizona Consolidated Company—a powerful company that owned much of Los Pinos in mines and buildings, and was rumoured to own the town marshal also.

The Kid was his own mine manager; he enjoyed it with a boyish enjoyment. He had had a frame-house put up near the mouth of the mine. Fixings had been brought up on the backs of mules at enormous cost; the Kid did not care for the cost. His bonanza was turning out gold faster than he could have spent it had he thrown it away with both hands. Within half a mile of the spot where the Consolidated had sunk large sums and failed to make good the Kid was picking up a fortune.

Sometimes, when he watched the miners changing shifts, he wondered whether it was all a dream—whether he would wake up some morning in the old bunkhouse at the Double Bar.

He had saved the life of a Mexican gambusino, a gold-seeker whose name even he did not know, in the Red Desert, and the Mexican, shot down by treachery, had made the Kid his heir, giving him the map that located the mine in the Golden Canyon—the mine that the Kid had named after him as well as he could.

Fortune had smiled on the Kid, and it seemed like a dream. Only a few weeks ago he had been riding the black-muzzled mustang to the west, seeking fortune, and the fortune had fallen upon him like this. It was still novel enough for the Kid to enjoy it, though often he closed his eyes on the wealth that was his, and saw a vision of spreading grasslands and grazing cattle.

The Kid knew something about mining, but not much. He was his own manager, but he had picked out a good foreman, and Jud Clay had named his own salary—that he had not named three times the figure proved that Jud was a square man. The Kid was careless in such matters. He was going to be one of the richest hombres in Arizona, but he had not lost the easy ways of the cowpuncher with money. It was still easy come and easy go with the Rio Kid.

So far little machinery had been put up at the mine; the ore went on wagons to the stamp-mills at Los Pinos to be crushed, and it crushed richer than any other ore that went to the mills. A deep adit had been driven into the sloping hillside, and pay-ore had been stowed out in stacks, as Jud told the Kid. There was no need to sink a shaft; the level adit reached the rich heart of the mine.

"It's sure some bonanza!" Jud told the Kid, for the hundredth time. "And I guess you'll be a millionaire if the Consolidated let you."

And the Kid grinned. He was not afraid of the Consolidated, though there were many men in Los Pinos who were afraid of it.

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"I guess the Consolidated cuts no ice with me, Jud," he answered.

Jud waved his grimy hand towards the abandoned workings, visible half a mile away across the canyon.

"That's where the company sunk thirty thousand dollars, and gave it up at the finish," he said. "I guess the Consolidated won't like you striking rich in the canyon where they sunk dollars and failed."

The Kid laughed again.

"I allow that they can like it or lump it," he remarked. "This hyer mine belongs to me, don't it?"

"Sure!" assented Jud.

"And there's law in Arizona?"

"Some!"

"Then what can the Consolidated do, even if they don't like me striking it rich where they slipped up on it?"

Jud Clay shrugged his shoulders.

"The Consolidated keep inside the law," he said. "But you can sure do a heap of things inside the law. I guess they'll buy you out."

"I guess I won't sell."

Jud smiled.

"You're new to the mines," he said. "If the Consolidated decide to take over the Gambusino Mine, I guess they'll take it over. They've bought up half the mines round Los Pinos. Galoots who don't sell when the Consolidated want to buy are liable to meet with accidents."

"Oh, shucks!" said the Kid. "Is that within the law, you Jud?"

"Money talks," said Jud.

The Rio Kid chuckled.

"You figure out that if I refuse to sell, an accident may happen to me?" he asked.

"Yep."

"Sort of shooting accident?" grinned the Kid.

"Mebbe."

"I can sure shoot a little myself," remarked the Kid. "I kinder reckon that if an accident happens, it won't be to me. And the Consolidated can go and chop chips, Jud."

"I guess I've put you wise, Mr. Carfax; but you got to learn," said the mine foreman. And it dropped at that, the Kid still laughing. As yet, at least, the Arizona Consolidated Gold Mining Company had no terrors for him. He dismissed them cheerfully from his mind, and gave no thought to any scheme that might be hatching for roping in the Rio Kid's bonanza.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

No Sale!

"SEÑOR!"

"Spill it," said the Kid. A Mexican half-breed did the chores in the Kid's frame-house. The Kid was coming in from a long ride, and he was taking the grey mustang round to the stable himself, when the Mexican came to him. The Kid might be a rich mine-owner now, but he was still cow-puncher enough to look after his horseflesh himself.

"A caballero come see the señor," explained the half-breed.

"A visitor?" yawned the Kid.

"Si, señor."

"Waiting?"

"Si, señor. It is the Señor Drew, of Los Pinos."

"Drew?" said the Kid. "I guess I don't know the name."

"It is the agent of the Arizona Con, señor."

The Kid whistled.

"Tell him I'll be along."

"Si, señor."

The Kid rubbed down his mustang before he went to the house. He was not keen to see Mr. Drew, the Los Pinos

agent of the Arizona Consolidated Gold Mines, and if the man had waited he could wait a little longer. The Kid remembered now that he had heard the name—it was a name of power in Los Pinos. Jas Drew represented the all-powerful company that had Los Pinos in its pocket. His word was as good as law in the mining town. It was because he was big gun—powerful medicine, as the Kid termed it—that the Kid let him wait. He knew, without being told, why Jas Drew had come out to the Golden Canyon, and the Kid had no intention of "talking turkey" to the boss of Los Pinos. From what he had heard of the man he did not like him.

But when he came into the frame-house the Kid's manner was civil. A slim, steady-eyed man in store clothes rose from a chair.

"Mr. Carfax?" he asked.

"Sure," assented the Kid.

"I'm Drew."

The agent of the Con spoke as if his name was enough; he was used to carrying things with a high hand in the valley. But the Kid shook his head seriously.

"Drew?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"I don't get you," said the Kid.

"Agent of the Arizona Con," added Drew, biting his lip.

"I guess I've heard of that crowd," assented the Kid. "So you're the agent? Sit down Mr. Drew, and tell a man what you've come about."

The agent of the Con sat down. His keen eyes were on the Kid's face, reading him.

"I'm here on business of the company," he said.

"Yep?"

"I've waited some hours for you, Mr. Carfax."

"Now I'm to home," said the Kid cheerily, "spill it, feller."

Jas Drew's dark brows contracted a little. It was evident that he did not like the free-and-easy mode of address of the puncher from Texas.

"The Consolidated are making you an offer for your mine," he said tersely.

The Kid smiled.

"Thanks; but I ain't selling."

Drew smiled, too—a pitying smile. This young Carfax was, he concluded, a cow-puncher who knew something about cows, but nothing at all about the ways of big combines in the business world. He did not even know that he had to sell if the Con wanted to buy.

"My Company offers fifty thousand dollars," he said, as if the Kid had not spoken.

The Kid roared:

"That's generous! I figure on taking more than that out of the mine every year!"

"It's a good sum for a new mine, hardly proved as yet," suggested Drew.

"I guess if it wasn't proved the Con wouldn't be offering a hatful of money for it," said the Kid good-humouredly. "Cut it out, Mr. Drew. I ain't selling to the Con or anybody else."

"Name your price, then."

"Nix," said the Kid. "I ain't tired of the stunt yet. I'm sure some gold-miner when I get going. If I sell, I shan't sell to the Con. I reckon they've got too big a grip on this section already."

"You will sell," said Drew quietly. "The offer remains open for three days, Mr. Carfax."

"Three years won't make any difference to me."

"After three days a thousand dollars will be taken off the figure daily, and you will lose money when you sell."

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"I reckon I've mentioned I'm not selling."

"Oh, come off!" exclaimed Drew, showing signs of anger. "You're a greenhorn from the cow country, but you sure ought to have hoss-sense enough to know that you've got to sell!"

"And who's going to make me?" queried the Kid quietly, but with a glint in his eyes.

"The Con."

The Kid snapped his fingers.

"That for the Con and its agent!" he answered. "The Con cuts no ice with me, feller! I ain't selling!"

Jasper Drew rose to his feet.

"Take advice from your foreman, or from any man who knows the ropes in Los Pinos," he said coldly. "Any galoot will tell you you've got to sell. The Con don't take no for an answer."

"I guess they got to take it in this case!" smiled the Rio Kid. "I've sure said no, and that goes!"

Drew made a step to the door, but he turned back.

"You're a kid-puncher," he said, as if compassionately. "You don't savvy what you're up against. If you don't sell, you won't be allowed to work the mine. You'll have to shut down. You might even meet with an accident in the canyon. I'm warning you for your own good."

"Keep your warnings till I ask for them," said the Kid contemptuously. "I've sure run into rustlers and durned thieves before, and they never put it over me. You're threatening me, feller, and I don't stand for that. Beat it while you're safe."

Drew stared at him hard, and walked out of the house. The Kid, from the window, saw him mount his horse and ride away to Los Pinos.

His brow was thoughtful as he watched the agent disappear by the trail up the canyon.

"They made me an outlaw in Texas, because Old Man Dawney made a mistake about the galoot that pinched the pay-roll!" he murmured. "But I reckon if I had pinched it, I'd be a better man than that hombre. I reckon I've hit up against rustlers on the Rio Grande that didn't deserve stringing up so much as that galoot and his crowd. I'm sure new to big business in the West; but I'm learning something. I was a gink to let him go without knocking his nose through the back of his cabeza."

Then the Kid laughed.

He was aware that any man in the gold country who stood up against the all-powerful Consolidated needed to know how to take care of himself. But the Rio Kid was accustomed to taking care of himself; and on second thoughts, as his brow cleared, he was glad that he had let Jas Drew ride away without having had his nose knocked through the back of his head.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. The Rough Stuff!

THREE days passed—and a week followed them.

The time of grace had expired; and no word had come from the Kid to Mr. Drew in his office on Main Street at Los Pinos.

The Kid had, in fact, almost forgotten Jas Drew.

He would have forgotten him totally, perhaps, but for the forebodings of his foreman, Jud Clay; to which he listened with a smile, but with respect, for Jud had been a mining man in Arizona long before the Kid's eyes had opened on the world at all. Jud was an honest man,
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the Kid knew that; and he knew he was lucky to get such a foreman; he trusted Jud absolutely in mining matters, but he listened incredulously to what Jud had to tell him of big business in the gold country and its methods.

"They own the Yellow Dog in Los Pinos, right in the town," Jud told him. "That was the big noise in these parts till you struck the Gambusino, Mr. Carfax. How do you reckon they got the Yellow Dog?"

"Located it," suggested the Kid.

"Locate nothing! The Con never locate! They buy proved mines."

"Then I figure they bought it?"

"Man wouldn't sell—an ornery cuss like you, Mr. Carfax. But after he was picked up at the bottom of a winze with his neck broke, his relations sold."

"You want me to believe they gave him the rough stuff like that, Jud?"

"Sure!"

The Kid laughed.

"That hombre Drew sure don't look as if he could break the neck of a jack-rabbit," he said.

"Not in his lifetime," said the foreman. "But he's got plenty of rough-necks on his pay-roll, Mr. Carfax."

"What was the town marshal doing? I've heard he's some hombre."

"The town marshal draws his salary from Los Pinos, and three times as much from the Arizona Con."

"Oh, shucks!" grinned the Kid. "You sure want me to take it that a big mining company is no more than a bunch of rustlers."

"A bunch of rustlers has nothing on the Arizona Con, Mr. Carfax," said Jud Clay. "If you won't sell, watch out!"

"I guess I'm watching out."

"Where are you going to-day, sir?"

The Kid was standing beside the black-muzzled mustang as he talked to his foreman.

"Jest a paseo up the canyon."

"Look out for falling rocks. A rock fell on Hank Wilson when he wouldn't sell out to the Con."



A NARROW SHAVE! As the Kid appeared in the doorway a sharp crack came from the shadows, and he felt the wind of a bullet. Bang! The next moment the Kid's .45 roared and from the darkness came a piercing yell.
(See Chapter 3.)

The Kid roared, and he was still laughing as he rode up the canyon, past the old abandoned shaft, and out of sight of the Gambusino. That the Arizona Con, through Jas Drew, would get hold of the Gambusino Mine by any kind of trickery, if they could, the Kid little doubted; but he did not believe that they employed "rough-necks" to beat up rivals in the mining business.

The Kid cantered along cheerily in the sunny morning. He liked a solitary ride up the canyon, to the top of the divide, which reminded him of days in the rocky Huecas of old.

He rode through a narrow winding gulch, where the walls of rock were only a few feet from his horse's flanks on either side; and he had already forgotten Clay's warning.

It was a whinny from his mustang that first apprised the Kid of danger.

It was not the first time that his horse had saved his life in the dangerous days and nights that the Rio Kid had known.

The Kid came sharply out of a reverie and looked about him; and then, as Clay's warning came back into his mind, upward.

"Jerusalem!"

From the high, steep side of the gulch, where it almost overhung the horseman, a gigantic rock came rolling and bounding.

For a fraction of a second the Kid froze as he saw death rushing down on him with the speed of lightning.

Only for a fraction of a second. Then his spurs dashed into the mustang's flanks, and the horse leaped frantically on—a leap for life.

He was barely in time.

Crash!

Two yards behind the mustang's swishing tail the huge rock crashed on the earth, splitting to a thousand fragments.

The Kid dashed on.

His nerve was of iron; but his bronzed face was white under its tan. His heart throbbed.

He pulled in his mustang a minute later, under a scrubby bunch of pines that grew in the gulch, and wheeled round. His keen glance swept the high side of the canyon where the great rock had come whirling down. Had that huge mass become unloosened by chance—had it fallen by chance just as the Kid was riding underneath?

The Kid's teeth were set, his eyes gleaming fire. Had a man's head shown among the rocky ledges of the gulch side his gun was ready to speak. But there was no sign of an enemy. If a human hand had sent that rock hurtling down the treacherous enemy had hunted cover at once.

For many long minutes the Kid sat his horse there, watching; but the gulch was still, silent, deserted.

"I reckon it was just chance!" the Kid muttered; but his face was very thoughtful as he rode onward at last.

When he rode homeward he rode by a different route.

Jud Clay came to supper with the Kid in his frame house that night, as was his custom. The Kid told him of the falling rock.

"They're beginning," was the foreman's comment.

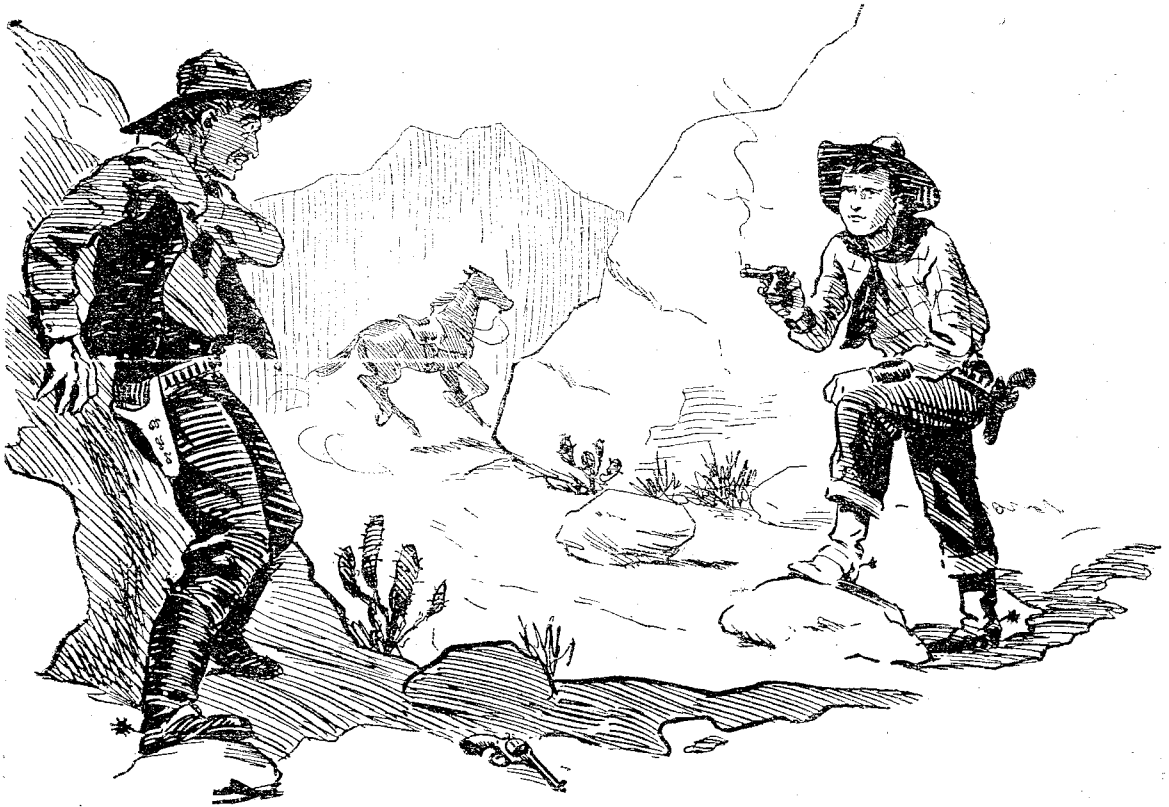
"You figure that it was a rough-neck behind that rock?" asked the Kid.

"Sure."

"With Jas Drew at the bottom of it?" asked the Kid, with a sparkle in his eyes.

"You've said it."

"I guess I'll make sure before I call on that hombre," said the Rio Kid in a



GETTING AT THE TRUTH! The Kid's gun roared, and the bullet passed between the gunman's arm and his ribs, and smashed on the rock behind him. Starbuck gave a convulsive start. "You're asking for it," said the Kid quietly. "Now tell me, who put you on my trail?" (See Chapter 4.)

drawl. "If I get him fixed for fair, I guess he will learn how heavy a quirt can be, with a Texas puncher's grip on it."

"You want a front place in the Los Pinos cemetery, for sure," said Jud.

The Kid shrugged his shoulders.

He said good-night to Jud Clay at the porch of the frame house, with the stars twinkling overhead, and lights glistening from the row of miner's shacks near the adit of the Gambusino. Just as he stepped back, a sharp crack came, like a bark from the shadows of the night, and he felt the wind of a bullet on his cheek.

Bang!

The Kid's .45 roared like an echo of the rifle-shot. From the darkness came a piercing yell.

"He's got hi!" panted Jud.

The Kid was running for the direction of the shot and the cry. From the shacks a dozen miners came swarming.

Twenty yards from the Kid's porch, a Mexican lay on the earth, and his black eyes rolled wildly at the Kid and the foreman. Jud stared at him and stared at the Kid.

"You're sure some hombre at shooting, Mr. Carfax," he said, in an awed voice. "I never even saw a shadow—"

"I guess the flash of the rifle was enough," said the Kid coolly. "That dago has got his."

The Mexican shivered and lay still. The Rio Kid stared down at him, coolly, curiously.

"Search me!" he said. "I want to know why that hombre took a pot-shot at me at my own door, Jud."

"Ask the Con," said the foreman.

"It sure begins to make a galoot suspicious," said the Kid, and he walked to his house, with a frowning brow.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Kid Means Business!

THE Rio Kid lay low for some days.

He was thinking it out.

Jas Drew had warned him, as well as others, that accidents were liable to happen to prospectors who refused to sell out their claims when the "Con" wanted to buy. The Kid was beginning to believe it.

He was not thinking of selling. On the Rio Grande and the Pecos, in the old days, the punchers had been used to say that the Kid was a bad man to crowd. If he had been determined before, his determination was now like iron. But he could see that Jud Clay, and, indeed, every man on his pay-roll at the Gambusino Mine, believed that the Con were after him, and that they would get him.

Miners who came back from a jamboree in Los Pinos reported that it was common talk at Cassidy's place there. The falling rock and the midnight shooting had been talked of, and Los Pinos drew its own conclusions—the same conclusions that the Kid was drawing now.

But he wanted to be sure before he acted. The respectable board of directors of the Arizona Consolidated Gold Mining Company, sitting in respectable state at far-off Tombstone, no doubt knew nothing of the company's peculiar methods. The president of the company probably knew, and told his colleagues little if anything; indeed, his instructions to Jasper Drew, at Los Pinos, were no doubt vague—only clear enough to be understood. The Gambusino Mine was to come into the ring; methods were left to the Los Pinos agent, who did not need telling what to do. The president of the great company—a prominent man great in Western politics—would not wait to be told details—

would probably refuse to hear them. Jas Drew was paid a big salary to do his work and hold his tongue. The Kid was beginning to understand.

In locating his mine in Golden Canyon the Kid had been cornered by a gang of thief-Apaches from the desert, and he had had one of the closest calls. He was beginning to understand now that a mine agent in store clothes, with a boiled shirt and a clean-shaven face, might be as ruthless as any Apache in the Red Desert, and more dangerous. But the Rio Kid was a bad man to crowd.

Every day the camp in the canyon was growing. It was going to be a town if nothing happened to stop its growth. The number of shacks had grown to a hundred, a store had opened, a timber saloon was building. A two-horse hack ran every day from Los Pinos with passengers, news, and baggage. Every day a line of wagons wound away down the canyon with stacks of ore from the Gambusino Mine, with teamsters cracking their long whips, heading for the stamp-mills at Los Pinos.

Loafers and gamblers, Chinese washing-men, all sorts of pilgrims, drifted in daily, along with prospectors seeking for other lucky strikes in the canyon. Among that motley crew Jud told the Kid that there were sure spies sent by Jas Drew to watch his movements, and the Kid had no doubt of it. One of the latest arrivals was Bud Starbuck, a professional gunman, and upon him the Kid cast a keen eye more than once. If the Con agent had sent a gunman to shoot him up, the Kid was more than ready for gun-play. But if Starbuck was "after" Kid Carfax, as all the camp suspected, he gave no sign.

That was the state of affairs when the Kid rode out of camp one day and

trotted away carelessly down the canyon. He had let it be known that he was riding over to Los Pinos that morning, and he rode away with his quirt under his arm, humming a tune.

But a mile out of the camp the Kid dismounted and concealed his mustang in a clump of junipers. Then he clambered to the top of a high rock, and, keeping in cover, watched the trail. And a grim smile curved his lip as he saw, in the far distance, a horseman coming on, and recognised Bud Starbuck.

"That galoot's sure got business outside the camp, just at the same time as me!" grinned the Kid.

He descended from the rock. From the distance he heard the clatter of hoofs, and knew that the gun-man was spurring at a gallop to overtake him. Keeping in cover of the junipers where he had hidden his mustang, the Kid waited for the pursuer to come abreast. At this point the trail was only a few yards wide, with irregular rocks stacked on either side of it. The Kid had chosen the spot with care. Faster and faster came the clatter of hoofs, and the gun-man came galloping into sight. He was almost level with the bunch of junipers when the Rio Kid stepped out, with a six-gun at a level and his eyes glinting over it.

"Put 'em up!" called the Kid.

Starbuck stared at him with startled eyes. The six-gun covered him, and he knew what he had to do. He dragged in his horse and put his hands up over his head, his eyes glinting at the Kid. The Kid stepped towards him, with a smile.

"What's this game, Mr. Carfax?" asked Starbuck, between his teeth. "Is this a hold-up?"

"Jest that," agreed the Kid. "You followed me from the camp, hombre." "I guess I never knew you'd left. I was riding to Los Pinos."

"You wasn't after me—with the big idea of shooting me in the back on the trail?" grinned the Kid.

"No; I've no trouble with you!"

"Wasn't you sent along to my camp to make trouble, you darned lobo wolf?"

"You've got it wrong, Mr. Carfax," said the gun-man. "I sure never knew you was on this trail."

"You figure that I'm making a mistake?" asked the Kid, with an air of doubt. "I sure allowed that you was after me."

"Forget it, Mr. Carfax, nothing of the sort," assured Starbuck.

"I allow you may be all right," said the Kid, and he lowered his revolver. "You can put down your paws."

He stepped back, with a careless air. The gun-man lowered his hands, and with the same movement jerked a six-gun from his holster and threw it up to fire.

Bang! It was the Kid's gun.

The Kid had been watching, fully expecting that move, and he fired from the hip without lifting his gun.

There was a yell from Starbuck as the bullet from the .45 crashed through his shoulder, and his drawn gun dropped from his hand with a clatter on the rocks.

"You was quick, hombre," smiled the Kid, "but not quick enough. Why, you lobo, I knew your game, and was fooling you on. I reckon I wanted to make you show your cards before I pulled trigger on you. Get off that hoss!"

The gun-man was swaying in the saddle, his face deadly white, blood streaming down his arm. He almost fell from the saddle, and the Kid flicked his horse and sent it galloping on.

"Let up!" muttered the gun-man hoarsely. "You're got me beat! Let up!"

He staggered against a boulder.

The fear of death was in his eyes as he stared at the Kid.

"You was after me?" grinned the Kid.

The gun-man nodded; it was useless to deny now.

"Who put you on my trail?"

"Nobody," muttered Starbuck. "I was jest arter you because you shot up Two gun Peters, who was a pard of mine."

Bang!

The Kid's gun roared again, and the bullet passed between Starbuck's arm and his ribs, and smashed on the rock behind him. The gun-man gave a convulsive start.

"You're asking for it, hombre," said the Kid quietly. "I'd shoot you like a coyote, but I reckon I want you to talk. The next bullet takes your ear off. Who put you on my trail?"

The gun-man panted. He saw that the Kid would be as good as his word.

"Jas Drew," he muttered thickly.

"I reckoned so," assented the Kid. "This is the third time Jas Drew has handed me the rough stuff, and I figure that it's going to be the last. You was going to report to him after you'd shot me up?"

Starbuck nodded.

"Where?" asked the Kid.

"Cassidy's place in Los Pinos," breathed the gun-man. "Jas Drew is always there at nine o'clock."

"Well, you're not going on to Los Pinos—you've sure got nothing to report," grinned the Kid. "You can crawl away, you lobo wolf—but chew on it that if you ever try to pull a gun on me again it will be the last time you ever touch one. I guess I'll keep your appointment with Mr. Drew."

"You may as well put a bullet through my head as let on to Jas Drew

that I've given him away," muttered Starbuck.

"I guess I'm telling him nothing—I ain't talking to him with my tongue! I've got a quirt to talk to him with," chuckled the Kid. "This galoot Drew seems to have Los Pinos scared stiff; but he don't scare me worth a red cent. You can beat it, you darned coyote!"

The gun-man stared at him.

"You're goin' into Los Pinos to quit Jas Drew?" he muttered.

"Sure."

Starbuck laughed hoarsely.

"I guess if you beat up Jas Drew you won't tell them about it at your camp afterwards," he said.


"Quiet sobs!" said the Kid carelessly. He called to his mustang and leaped lightly into the saddle. The wounded gun-man stared after him as he rode down the trail, and laughed again.

The Rio Kid knew that he was riding into danger, but his handsome face was care-free as he rode, and he hummed the tune of a Mexican fandango. Only when the lights of Los Pinos gleamed from the dusk ahead the Kid halted and carefully examined his guns. Then he rode on, with the roar of the never-ceasing stamp-mills in his ears, into the lighted street, and dismounted at Cassidy's place and hitched his horse to the rail. Cassidy's place was waking up for the evening, and the saloon was crowded when the Rio Kid strolled in—and there was a general stare and buzz of interest as the cow-puncher nine-owner appeared. Cassidy gave him a nod of welcome from behind the bar, and spun forward bottle and glass.

"Soft for me!" drawled the Kid. "It was a quarter to nine. The Rio Kid lounged on the bar and idly sipped lemonade while he waited for the agent of the Arizona Consolidated to enter.

THE END.

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"THE HIDDEN HAND!"

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Whipped!

THAT the Rio Kid was hunting trouble, no one would have guessed from his looks.

He leaned his elbows on the bar in Cassidy's place in Los Pinos, and surveyed the crowded saloon with a smile on his tanned face.

Occasionally he sipped at the glass of lemonade that stood on the lead counter at his side.

Hardly a man in Los Pinos took soft drinks; it was seldom that Cassidy or his bar-tenders were asked to pass anything of the sort across the bar. Indeed, it was scarcely safe for a man to ask for soft drinks in Cassidy's. Such a sign of softness was liable to draw upon him rough jeering, likely enough to be followed by rough handling. But the Rio Kid never took anything else, and the Los Pinos men knew better than to jeer him. The boy puncher who disdained whisky, and sipped lemonade in the sight of all the town, had shot up Two-gun Peters, the most dreaded gunman in Los Pinos; after which he could drink anything he pleased without adverse comment. For the Kid, cheery and pleasant as he looked, packed two guns, low-slung

ready to his hands if he wanted them; and he had proved that he could shoot better on lemonade than Peters on whisky. So if any man in the Red Eye saloon grinned at the soft drink that stood by the Kid's elbow, he was careful to turn his face away before he grinned.

The Kid had his quirt under his arm. In his chaps and high-heeled boots and clinking spurs, the Kid looked the cow-puncher he was—and not at all the successful mine-owner that he also was. A kid puncher from Texas they called him in Los Pinos—Kid Carfax of the Gambusino Mine—never dreaming that he had been known along the Rio Grande as the Rio Kid, with a price on his handsome head. Los Pinos, in the mountains of Arizona, was a far cry from Texas; and the Kid had left his name and his fame behind him on the other side of New Mexico.

He had resolved to leave trouble and gun-play behind him, too, if he could; but that had not been in his power. Trouble haunted the footsteps of the Rio Kid. And, in spite of his careless manner and his pleasant smile, the Kid was hunting more trouble at this very moment, and that with the most powerful man in Los Pinos—Jas Drew, the agent of the Arizona Consolidated Gold-Mining Company of Tombstone.

The mills in Los Pinos had closed down for the day, save for the graveyard shift at the Yellow Dog Mine, which kept on an unceasing roar. Men from the mines crowded in at the Red Eye saloon, rough men from the stamp mills, rough teamsters from the trails; gunmen and gamblers; men in store clothes from the offices on Main Street, loafers and loungers of all sorts. A motley crowd. Rube McCoy, the town marshal, stood looking at the faro layout, which it was his duty as town marshal to suppress—a duty that McCoy never dreamed of performing. The faro lay-out did not tempt the Rio Kid. He was a rich man now, since he had struck the Gambusino Mine in Golden Canyon; but he did not see any sense in throwing his ample dollars away on

a gaming table. The rest of the crowd were at the Red Eye for pleasure—or what they called pleasure—but the Kid was there on business. And occasionally he glanced up at the big gilt clock over Cassidy's bar. At nine o'clock Jas Drew was accustomed to lounge into the Red Eye; and it was close on nine now.

There was a stir and a murmur when the agent of the Arizona Con appeared in the doorway, and the Kid's eyes glistened.

Jasper Drew, slim and well-dressed in store clothes, with the whitest boiled shirt in Los Pinos, sauntered in. His hard, keen face was almost expressionless, as it generally was; but little interest as he seemed to take in his surroundings, few things escaped his keen eyes. Almost his first glance fell upon the boy puncher idling at the bar, and a gleam shot into his black eyes for a second. But he took no open heed of the Kid's presence; certainly he never dreamed that Kid Carfax had come there specially to hunt for trouble with him. Men made way for the agent, who controlled half the mines in the vicinity of Los Pinos, and whose company owned most of the buildings in the town.

Jas Drew's word was law in Los Pinos. He ran the town, and he ran the town marshal; and if he was hated and feared more than he was liked, at least no one ventured to display hatred openly. Slim, well-dressed, debonaire, quiet in his manners, the agent carried no gun that could be seen; but some knew that he packed a six-shooter in his breast-pocket, and that on occasion he could draw as fast as any gunman in the mountains.

Drew was greeted on all sides, and he nodded to many acquaintances as he strolled across to the bar. Cassidy hurried to serve him—he was too important a man to be left to a bar-tender.

The agent leaned an elbow on the lead bar, and glanced over the motley assembly in the saloon, quietly, but with

an unmistakable air of being monarch of all he surveyed. And the Rio Kid detached himself from the bar, coolly finished his lemonade, and strolled across to where the agent stood, his manner cool and careless, but a mocking gleam in his eye, and the quirt under his arm ready to slip down into his hand.

"Evenin', feller!" said the Kid.

All eyes were upon him at once.

Jasper Drew glanced at him.

He gave a brief nod, without answering the greeting.

"I guess I've ridden into town to speak to you, hombre," went on the owner of the Gambusino Mine.

Drew raised his eyebrows slightly.

"Business?"

"Sure."

"Come to my office to-morrow, then," said Drew. "I don't do business in here in the evening, Puncher."

"I guess my business won't wait."

"I guess it must wait."

"That's where you slip up on it," declared the Rio Kid. "Fact is, I want all these galoots to hear my business with you, Jas Drew."

There was a buzz of voices, and a gathering round. Poker games stopped at the little tables; even the dealer at the faro lay-out paused as the players turned from the game to stare at the two men at the bar. It was seen at once that Kid Carfax was looking for trouble—and it almost took away the breath of the Red Eye crowd. There were "bad" men in Los Pinos, plenty of them; but the most reckless of the bunch never sought for trouble with the agent of the Arizona Con. And this

kid puncher from Texas was asking for it.

Drew looked at him with a glister in his eyes.

"You moseyed along to the Gambusino Mine one day, and made me an offer to buy," said the Kid.

"The offer's still open," said Drew.

"You allowed that the Arizona Con had figured on buying me out, and wouldn't take no for answer, Mr. Drew."

Drew shrugged his shoulders.

"You was kind enough to warn me that galoots who refused to sell when the Con wanted to buy were liable to meet with accidents."

The agent smiled faintly.

"Now, you were sure some prophet," said the Kid agreeably, "for soon after that I came mighty near being crushed under a falling rock!"

There was a buzz in the crowded saloon. Drew shrugged his shoulders and gave the Kid no further heed. But the Kid's voice went on—not loud, but clear in every corner of the great building.

"After that a greaser took a pot-shot at me at the door of my house, and it was sure a close call."

No sign from Drew.

"Then this very day," went on the Kid, "a gunman laid for me on the trail, and I had to shoot him up or he'd have done mischief."

Drew's eyes gleamed.

"So I figure it out that you was some prophet, Mr. Drew," said the Kid lightly. "You told me accidents would happen, and they sure did. I've come to Los Pinos to tell you that I'm fed-

up with these accidents—fed-up to the back-teeth, Mr. Drew."

"You are not accusing me of knowing anything about your accidents, Mr. Carfax?" asked Drew contemptuously.

"Just that, feller."

"If you think so, there's law in Los Pinos," said Drew. "The town marshal's yonder, and he will sure give you a hearing. If you can prove up your charges—"

The Kid laughed.

"I guess no galoot has ever been able to get the goods on the Arizona Con, Mr. Drew, so far as legal proofs go. The facts are enough for me. You put a man to leave a donick on my cabez, you hired a greaser to shoot me up in my own camp, and you sent a gunman on my trail. You're a double-crosser, Jas Drew, and a yellow hound! Got that?"

The words were barely out of the Kid's mouth when there was a surging back of the crowd out of the line of fire. For a tenth part so much offence all Los Pinos knew that Jas Drew would shoot a man dead in his tracks. Astonishment at the defiance seemed to hold the agent dumb and still for a second. Then his hand flashed into the breast of his coat.

The hidden revolver came out, and was fired almost in the same moment. But the Kid knew what was coming to him.

He did not touch a gun. He had not come to the Red Eye for gun-play. His quirt flashed up, and the gun went spinning from the agent's hand even as the trigger was pulled. The bullet crashed into the ceiling; the gun clanged on the floor. For a moment the agent stood disarmed, panting, glaring at the Kid, his mask of calmness completely dropped, his features convulsed with fury. The next moment the Kid's grip was on him, and the agent was struggling. But the grip of the puncher from Texas was like iron, and the agent crumpled up in it, and the heavy quirt in the Kid's right hand rose and fell with fierce lashes.

Lash, lash, lash!

Jasper Drew squirmed and struggled and fought like a wild-cat, but the fierce rain of blows continued without a pause.

There was a roar in the Red Eye.

Poker and faro, even the drinks on the bar, were forgotten now. With staring eyes the Los Pinos men crowded round, gazing spellbound at the scene. Jas Drew, the most powerful man in the Los Pinos valley, the boss of the town and the district, was crumpling and squirming in the grasp of a cowpuncher, shrinking and howling under a rain of blows from the cowpuncher's whip.

The Kid was not smiling now; his handsome face was hard and set. He lashed and lashed again without mercy. The heavy cattle-whip fairly rang on the squirming, yelling man. Cassidy stared across the bar like a man in a dream. The crowd had fallen silent; they gazed on with eyes almost bulging. McCoy's hand sought a gun, but he did not draw it. It would have been difficult to shoot without as much risk of hitting the agent as the Kid; and even the town marshal, too, dared not outrage public opinion too far. There was little law in Los Pinos; but there was lynch law for a man who shot down a pilgrim unawares. McCoy looked on grimly. Mingled with the amazement in many faces was a grim satisfaction; Jas Drew was feared, and no man dared to cross him, but he had more secret enemies than friends in the crowd. There were many who were glad to see



HORSE-WHIPPED IN PUBLIC! The next moment the Kid's grip was upon the agent, and the heavy quirt lashed through the air. Lash! Lash! Lash! Jasper Drew struggled and squirmed like a wildcat, but in the Kid's iron grasp he was powerless. (See Chapter 1.)

the puncher "beat up" the man who held Los Pinos in the hollow of his hand.

Jas Drew was screaming now, helpless in the puncher's iron grip, dazed and tortured by the rain of blows from the heavy quirt.

The Kid flung him away at last, and he crumpled up against the bar, panting, exhausted, white as a sheet, helpless.

The Kid's eyes were fixed on him.

"I guess you've got what was coming to you, Jas Drew," he said quietly and clearly. "If you want gun-play you know where to find me, and you'll find me at home. I guess I've warned you now not to set any of your hired killers after me; and you can chew on it that you'll never get hold of the Gambusino Mine; I guess I'd blow it sky-high before I'd let the Arizona Con get a grip on it."

The Kid's quirt was under his arm again now; his hands hung loose near the walnut butts of his low-slung guns. He was ready for gun-play if Drew's friends chose to chip in. But not a hand was raised. It was remembered only too well how Two-gun Peters had gone down under the Kid's fire in the Red Eye. The Kid glanced round and smiled.

"Gents, the circus is over! I want all Los Pinos to know that that lobo-wolf Drew sent his hired killers on my trail, and I've quirted him as a warning to let up on that game. Gents, there's the bar—and the drunks are on me."

The Kid tossed a bag of gold-dust on the bar, and there was a crowding up to accept the invitation. Jas Drew staggered to his feet, his face colourless, his eyes burning, his mouth twitching. McCoy made a movement; his impression was that the agent wanted to borrow a gun. But Drew did not heed him. Under the stare of all the saloon he limped to the door, and a buzz of amazement followed him.

"Taken water?" breathed Cassidy. "Jas Drew's taken water—afore a kid puncher from Texas! Waal carry me home to die!"

And the Rio Kid rode homeward to his camp under the stars, humming a tune, and wondering whether the trouble with the Arizona Con was over, or whether it was only just beginning.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Trouble at the Mine!

JUD CLAY, foreman of the Gambusino Mine, tramped into the Kid's frame house, with a deep frown on his brow.

The Rio Kid, seated in a rocker by the window that gave a view of the camp, was cleaning a six-gun.

He glanced up at Jud and smiled.

"What's wrong at the mine, Jud?"

Jud Clay slumped into a seat.

"Trouble," he said briefly.

"You looked it," smiled the Kid.

"Vein petering out?"

The foreman shook his head.

"I guess you can tell me, if my ten-

strike isn't so all-fired rosy as I figured," grinned the Kid. "I guess I know that these surface strikes don't always pan out good at depth."

"There's nothing wrong with your mine, Mr. Cartfax," said Jud. "It's the richest strike ever made in this part of Arizona, and the deeper we drive, the richer the vein."

"You sure sing a good tune, feller," said the Kid.

"It ain't that," said Jud. "It's the hands."

"Trouble with the miners?"

"Yep."

The Kid looked from the window.

In a few short weeks a camp, almost a town, had grown up facing the Gambusino Mine. A hundred or more log cabins and shacks, two saloons, a store, and many other buildings, ranged along the canyon, where a few short weeks before all had been solitary, and the Kid had fought with the thief-Apaches from the Red Desert. A "boom" town in the mining country does not take long to grow; and the Gambusino boom was at its height. Already the camp had a name, and was on its way to becoming a town rivaling Los Pinos itself. A stamp mill was in the course of construction; the Kid aimed to do his own crushing, all the more because he knew that Jas Drew had the power to close the Los Pinos stamp mills against him if he cared. Gold Brick was the name of the camp—an allusion to the rich nuggets that were constantly taken out of the Gambusino Mine. Fifty men worked in the mine now, and of all the half-hundred not one had any cause of complaint. Miners' wages were high in the sierra; but the Kid, growing richer day by day, paid higher rates than any other mine; twice the men had demanded higher pay, and the Kid had conceded it. Now he wondered if the trouble meant a fresh demand; which he did not intend to concede. Careless good-nature was very easily mistaken for weakness; and the Kid did not mean to have his mine run by anybody but himself.

The Kid noticed now that the miners were not at work; they were gathered in a crowd before the Gold Brick Hotel, and a man in a red shirt, mounted on a

barrel, was haranguing them. There was trouble brewing, that was clear; but the Rio Kid did not seem concerned. Sometimes he thought that he thrived on trouble.

His glance turned back to the troubled brow of the foreman.

"Spill it, Jud!" he said cheerily.

"I guess it's a strike."

"What do they want now?" smiled the Kid. "They're drawing two dollars a day more than any mine crowd at Los Pinos."

"It's the greaser."

"The greaser!" repeated the Kid.

"That's it. They sure allow they won't have a greaser in this camp."

"Feller that does the chores here?"

"Yep!"

The Kid laughed.

"That's thin," he said. "They want to give trouble, and they're hunting for an excuse."

"Sure," assented Jud Clay. "They've been got at, of course. A man was beat up last night and robbed, and they allow that your greaser did it."

"Jose hasn't the grit to beat up a jack-rabbit," chuckled the Kid.

"That's a cinch. But they want trouble; and they allow that they won't handle a singlejack in the mine again till the greaser is fired!"

The Kid's jaw squared.

"Who's stirring up the trouble?" he asked.

"The ringleader's Big Hank Carter; but I guess there's a man behind him pulling the strings."

"Jas Drew?"

"For sure."

The Kid looked through the window again at Jose the Mexican, who was rubbing down a horse. He smiled grimly. Jose did the chores in the Kid's frame house, and he was the most in-offensive greaser that the Kid had ever seen.

"They're coming to see you about it, Mr. Cartfax," said Jud Clay. "They allow you've got to fire the greaser. And if you fire him there'll be something else to-morrow. Drew's pulling the strings, and he's out for trouble. I guess half the hands are in his pay already; and the other half's led by the nose. Work's stopped at the mine."

The Kid nodded thoughtfully.

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THE KID CLOSES HIS MINE! "This mine is closing down, Jud," said the Kid. "Put up the notice on the wall!" The notice was pinned up for all Gold Brick to see and read: **SHUT DOWN! NO HANDS WANTED!** (See Chapter 5.)

Since he had quitted the Arizona Consolidated agent at Los Pinos there had been no more accidents, no more trailing of Kid Carfax. Open hostility seemed to have ceased. But tampering with the hands that worked at the Gambusino Mine was a new move, and it was easy enough to stir up trouble there.

"They're coming!" said Jud, with a dispirited glance from the window.

"Let 'em come!" said the Kid.

The Gambusino men were coming across to the house in a straggling crowd. Big Hank Carter, the man in the red shirt, led them.

The Kid lounged out into the porch to meet them.

"Hallo, you-uns!" he called out cheerily, as the strikers came to a halt before the porch. Jose the Mexican, with one scared look at the crowd, bolted into the house like a rabbit into a burrow.

The Gambusino crowd eyed the Kid as he stood in the porch, smiling and good-tempered.

"Spill it, fellers!" said the Kid.

"What's the trouble now?"

Carter strode forward.

"You've got to fire that greaser of yours, Mr. Carfax!" he said.

The Kid's eyes gleamed.

"Got to?" he repeated.

"That's the ticket! We allow that he beat up a man last night, and we ain't gone on greasers, anyhow. We don't want the man in camp, and we sure ain't letting him stay! You get me?"

"I got you!" assented the Kid.

"Well, I ain't sacking Jose, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it."

There was a growl from the crowd.

"Jose never beat up a man in his life," said the Kid. "But if you've got any evidence, hand it out."

"I guess he never called in any galoot to see him doing it," snorted Carter.

"He's a greaser, anyhow, and he's going."

"I guess not!"

"You hear that, boys?" roared Carter. "He's keeping on that greaser who beats up white men after dark!"

There was another growl.

"You mean that, Mr. Carfax?" demanded Big Hank.

"Sure!" said the Kid contemptuously.

"Then not a man handles a pick in the mine agin'!"

"I guess you're not the only crowd of singlejack handlers in Arizona!" said the Kid coolly. "Get out, if you choose; I can sure get a fresh crowd from Los Pinos."

"You won't get nary a man from Los Pinos," said Carter. "That's all fixed up on you, Mr. Carfax!"

"Los Pinos isn't the only town in the sierra," said the Kid. "I'll get a fresh crowd, if I have to bring 'em in cars from Tombstone!"

There was a roar at that. The rough crowd surged nearer to the porch, and threatening glances were cast on the Kid.

The Kid stood without flinching. A scornful smile played over his handsome face.

"Say, you, Carter, what has Jas Drew paid you for stirring up trouble at my mine?" he asked coolly.

"Is that greaser going?" roared Carter.

"Nope."

"Then no man in Gold Brick handles a pick again in the mine, and we sure won't let any new crowd handle a pick, either!" said Carter. "You bring your fresh crowd from Tombstone, Mr. Carfax, and there will be shooting in this camp. You hear me shout!"

"Search me!" said the Kid cheerily.

"I guess I could hear you if I was way

back in Texas. Carter! Now you've told me the news, get out! And chew on this—if there's any shooting in Gold Brick, I can sure handle a gun myself, and I shall be there when the fur begins to fly. Now git!"

"What?" roared Big Hank.

"Git!" repeated the Kid, with a gleam in his eyes. "You sure make me tired. Vamoosed the ranch, the whole bunch of you!"

The Kid's hands dropped on his guns and his eyes flashed fire. More than one hand in the rough crowd had dropped on a weapon; but the flashing glance of the Kid daunted them, and slowly the angry crowd surged back, across the street to the Gilt Edge Saloon.

The Kid went back into the house, his brow thoughtful. The Rio Kid was a man of resource; but for the moment, at least, he did not see how he was going to counter this new move of the Arizona Con.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Kid Puts His Foot Down!

"JOSE!"

The Kid shouted, but he shouted in vain.

Jose, the greaser, always industrious at his chores, prompt to obey his master's call, did not reply.

It was time for the Kid's dinner; and he shouted thrice. Then he went to look for the Mexican.

He did not find him.

The kitchen was vacant, the stove cold. He looked in the Mexican's room, and saw signs there of hurried packing, but no other sign of Jose. The Kid burst into a laugh.

"Vamoosed. I reckon."

The Kid cooked beans and bacon for his dinner with his own hands, as he had often done on the trail. Jud Clay came in to dinner and found him thus engaged.

"What's the matter with your galoot?" he asked, in surprise.

"He's beat it!" grinned the Kid. "I guess that mob this morning scared him stiff; he figured that there would be a necktie party if he stayed. I reckon he's half-way to Mexico by this time."

Jud whistled.

"I guess if he's gone, that lets down that crowd over at Gilt Edge," he said.

"I'll put 'em wise after dinner," grinned the Kid.

And after dinner the Kid strolled across the street to the Gilt Edge saloon, the headquarters of the strikers. He found Big Hank Carter haranguing his followers there, mounted on the barrel outside the saloon. Carter was a skilful hand at stirring up labour troubles, and the Kid easily guessed that Jasper Drew had hired him for that very reason.

Dark looks were turned on the Kid as he came up. Many of the crowd were in Drew's pay; but the greater number were led away by the agitator's rough eloquence. Kid Carfax was a man who backed up murdering greasers was the burden of his song, and it was a popular topic.

That the Kid would submit to dictation in his own household Carter knew was very unlikely; and for that reason he fancied that he had the Kid in the hollow of his hand. The Kid nodded and smiled in response to the black looks that greeted him.

"I guess you-uns don't want my greaser in Gold Brick," he remarked. "I've moseyed in to tell you he's gone."

"Gone!" repeated Carter.

"Lit out like he was sent for!" smiled the Kid. "If you-uns are tired of trouble, you can get back to the mine. That greaser sure will never be seen in Gold Brick again!"

Big Hank stared at him, quite taken aback. But the sullen looks of his followers were clearing. The bone of contention was removed; the pretext for the strike was gone. Carter, with a single glance round, saw that his hold on his dupes was weakening.

"I guess you knew you had to toe the line, Mr. Carfax!" he jeered. "I guess I knew you'd sack the greaser and come over to talk turkey to us!"

"You knew a lot, didn't you?" said the Kid pleasantly. "You-uns lining up at the mine again?"

"Sure!" said a dozen voices.

"We got to have this straight first," said Carter. "You don't have no more greasers in this camp, Mr. Carfax. That so, boys?"

There was a shout of assent.

"That goes," said the Kid, with undiminished pleasantness. "No more greasers—if you boys want me to cook my own bacon and beans, I'll sure do it to oblige you."

There was a laugh at that.

"And no victimisation," said Big Hank. "Every man that came out goes back to his job."

The Kid paused for a second. His hands were aching to be on the paid agitator, to roll him off his rostrum, and beat him up. But it was only for a second that he paused.

"Every man!" he assented.

"Meaning me?" persisted Carter.

"Sure!"

The strike leader was at the end of his resources. He was left not a single pretext for trouble; and those in the Gambusino crowd who were his dupes, were already turning away from him. The dozen or so who, like himself, were in the pay of Jas Drew, looked to him for guidance. There was nothing doing, and he knew it; most of the crowd were already starting for the mine.

"It's a cinch, then," he said. "We only want fair play, Mr. Carfax."

"I guess I know what you want," assented the Kid, and he turned his back on Big Hank, and walked back to his house.

That afternoon, pick and shovel clanged again in the deep, golden-ribbed adit of the Gambusino Mine.

The trouble seemed to be over.

That it was not over, the Kid knew only too well. Big Hank had lost the first round; but he was not beaten. A strike at the Gambusino Mine was the card that Jas Drew was playing, from his office on Main Street at Los Pinos; and he was not likely to give up at the first rebuff.

But for several days there was peace at Gold Brick; the picks rang cheerily in the adit, the waggons stacked with ore trundled away down the canyon to Los Pinos and the stamp-mills.

The Kid wondered what the next move would be; and in the meantime, he waited patiently. The next move was not long in coming. From Jud Clay, he learned that Big Hank was giving trouble in the mine; more and more trouble and more and more insolence; till breaking point came at last, and one morning Big Hank left the mine office sprawling, with Jud Clay's heavy boot behind him, and was kicked all the way across the street before the enraged foreman let up on him.

"I guess I had to fire him, Mr. Carfax," said Jud. "He asked for it a round dozen times afore I let fly at him."

"I guess so," assented the Kid. "That's the next move in the game. Man howls for trouble, and when he gets it, it's victimisation, and then the whole bunch roar for a strike."

"That's the ticket," said Jud ruefully. "Trouble's coming."

It did not take long to come. In the red sunset, a crowd of grim-faced men gathered before the Kid's frame house, and roared for him to come out. Carter was not with them this time; the lead was taken by one of his associates, Dirk Roper. The Kid stepped out cheerily.

"What's the worry now, boys?" he asked.

"You figure that you can put in a foreman to kick a galoot across the street?" demanded Roper. "This bunch has decided not to work under that Jud Clay, not another stroke of a singlejack. We want you to fire Jud Clay!"

"That's the tune this time, is it?" said the Rio Kid.

"That goes! You fire Jud Clay, or not a man steps into the Gambusino Mine agin, and we sure won't let any other galoots step in either, Mr. Carfax!"

The Kid laughed softly. "I reckon I've given you-uns all the rope I'm letting out," he said. "Now you listen to me a spell. I ain't firing Jud Clay, not if I know it. Hank Carter's fired and he stays fired. You're fired too, Roper."

"Me!"

"You," assented the Kid, "and every man that isn't on time in the morning, in this bunch, will be fired the same. Got that?"

There was a roar of wrath. "Oh, get over to the Gilt Edge, if you want to howl like coyotes," said the Rio Kid contemptuously. "Chew on what I've said—every man who stands off to-morrow morning, stands off for keeps. I'll close the mine down before I go back on that. Now git."

With a deep growl of rage, the strikers surged away; and that evening the fire-water flowed freely at the Gilt Edge saloon, and Big Hank Carter and Roper harangued the strikers till their throats were husky; and at midnight a wild crowd gathered outside the Kid's frame house, and there was a roar of angry voices, and threats of burning him out. Five or six guns were fired, and bullets cracked the windows. The Rio Kid gave no sign; but his gun was ready if the mob should attempt to rush the house. But the strikers stopped short of that, and at a late hour they tramped away, and there was quiet at last in Gold Brick camp.

The Kid turned in then, and the noisy crowd still buzzing at the Gilt Edge saloon would probably have been surprised had they seen how calm his slumbers were. The noise died away at last; but before it died away, the Rio Kid was sleeping as soundly as he had ever slept in the old bunk-house at the Double-Bar ranch.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Gun Talk!

BRIGHT and early in the morning the Rio Kid turned out. After an early breakfast, which he ate with his usual good appetite, the Kid walked across to the mine.

The mine office, and Judson Clay's dwelling, were the same building; a timber shack at the mouth of the tunnel. The foreman greeted the Kid with a gloomy brow. Obviously, he had no expectation of seeing the hands turn up to work that morning; neither did he believe that the strike at the Gambusino Mine would be conducted peaceably. All this was new to the Kid, though he was adapting himself

to strange surroundings very rapidly. But Jud had been through gold-mine strikes before—he had seen crowds armed with revolvers and shot-guns attacking mine buildings; he had seen unpopular mine officials swung up at the branch of a tree; he had seen State troops turn machine-guns on roaring mobs of frenzied strikers. All that he knew of labour troubles in the wild West occurred to his mind now, and darkened his brow with gloom. Gold Brick was far from the realm of law—it was fifteen miles from Los Pinos, and Los Pinos was a wild town in the pocket of Jas Drew of the Arizona Consolidated; twenty miles away was the nearest sheriff who could have afforded protection, and that sheriff was not likely to ride thirty miles with his posse to keep order at the Gambusino Mine. Not that the Kid would have wanted it. He had had too much trouble with sheriffs in the old days, to think of calling on one for aid.

The cards were stacked against the Rio Kid. Jas Drew, in his office in Los Pinos, pulled the strings. In the wild camps of the Gila Mountains a strike mob was liable to turn into a lynch mob at a moment's notice, and well Jud knew it. He could not understand the smiling cheeriness of the Rio Kid as the latter walked into the mine office. Jud had little expectation of seeing the sun set that day, unless he turned craven and rode away for his skin, leaving his young boss to face the music alone. And that the Gambusino foreman did not think of doing.

"Any galoot on time, Jud?" the Kid greeted.

"Nary a galoot."
"Then they mean business?"
"You bet."

The Kid stood in the doorway of the mine office and looked on the sunny street. At a distance, outside the Gilt Edge Saloon, a crowd was gathering. Big Hank Carter was already on the orator's barrel. Miners and loafers, the workers and the scum of Gold Brick, were gathering round him, listening to fierce and fiery words.

He had been fired—so ran his tale—for standing up for the rights of labour. Were the men of Gold Brick going to stand by and see him wronged, victimised? An enraged roar answered him in the negative. More than half his hearers were honest, hard-working men. The word "victimisation" was enough to inflame their passions. Loyalty to a comrade engaged them to stand by a comrade who had been victimised. It was easy for a cunning trickster to play on the simple chivalric feelings of simple men. The Kid looked long and earnestly at the crowd across the street, and noted the growing excitement, and turned back at last to his foreman.

"They're sure gettin' their mad up, feller," he remarked. "But it's got to come to a grip. I gave them enough rope, and if I gave them more it would come to the same thing, with a darned skunk behind the scenes pulling the wires to make them dance. The poor fish reckon this is a strike. They'll never tumble that they're being used to help a big corporation get hold of this mine. Jud, old scout, if you want to light out while the going's good, I guess I shan't hold it against you."

The Gambusino foreman shook his head.

"If you fire me, Mr. Carfax, I'll quit."

The Kid chuckled.
"Nary a fire, old boss. Shucks! Why didn't I put a ball through Jas

Drew instead of quiring him? I guess I've always been too easy for my own good, Jud; but I sure hate to wipe out a galoot. I reckon I'll make it square with Mister Drew another time, though. You ain't quitting?"

"Nope."
"I guess we'll pull through all right," said the Kid confidently. "They can mosey out, and be darned to their hides! I'll get new men from Tombstone, and shut down the mine till they come. And if they want to damage the mine, Jud, I reckon they'll have to walk up my gun to do it."

"I'm with you, Mr. Carfax," said Jud. "And I guess I'm the only man in Gold Brick that is! Here they come!"

There was a roar from the crowd across the street, a cracking of half a dozen guns fired in the air, and then the strike mob came across towards the mine office in a surging crowd.

The Rio Kid stepped out to face them.

"You-uns coming back to work?" he queried, smiling. "I guess Jud Clay is waiting ready to sign you on."

There was a roar.
"You fired that Jud Clay?" shouted Big Hank Carter.

"Nope."
"You going to fire him?"
"Not by a jugful!"

"Then we'll have him out, and ride him on a rail over camp, and you arter him!" roared Carter. "Rush the office, boys!"

There was a forward swing of the crowd, more than seventy men, with a fringe of loafers behind, ready to enjoy the trouble, and join in any looting that was started. Up from his holsters flashed two six-guns in the grip of the Rio Kid, and over the levelled barrels his eyes gleamed like steel.

"Go slow!" he rapped.
"You burn powder here, and we'll lynch you and your foreman along with you!" roared Big Hank.

"Git!" said the Kid. "You're standing on my property, and if you ain't here to work you're trespassing. Git, before I pull trigger and let daylight through the whole bunch of you!"

Behind the Kid stood Jud, with a Winchester in his hands. But it was the flashing eyes and levelled guns of the Kid that daunted the mob. They ceased to surge on. They backed—and they backed farther. Their leaders could have led them on in face of the threatening guns, but their leaders were "wise" to it that they would get the first lead that flew, and they backed faster than their followers. There was a wild swaying, and furious hesitation, and then the whole mob surged away across the street, yelling as they went; and the Kid smiled and dropped his guns back into their holsters. He had stalled off the attack on the mine—for the present, at least.

"Them galoots sure don't like gun-talk, Jud," he chuckled. "This mine's closed down, feller. Put up the notice on the wall."

Ten minutes later there was a notice on the wall for all Gold Brick to read:

"SHUT DOWN! NO HANDS WANTED!"

It was oil to the flames, and all day long a wild mob paraded and roared in the camp; and every man knew that when night came there would be wild work in the Golden Canyon.

THE END.

(Next week's rousing story of the Rio Kid is entitled: "FACING THE MUSIC".)

THE RIO KID AT BAY! One desperate boy against a hundred fierce men—that's the situation in which the Rio Kid finds himself as a result of refusing to sell his gold mine to a ruthless company. But the Kid is not daunted by the odds, hopeless as they seem!

The RIO KID *By Ralph Redway*



ANOTHER ROARING WESTERN TALE, STARRING THE RIO KID,
THE BOY OUTLAW!

This Week:

"FACING THE MUSIC!"

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
The Strike at Gold Brick!

THE full round moon sailed high over the Gila Mountains and the Red Desert of Arizona.

It was long past midnight, but no one slumbered in the camp of Gold Brick.

The naphtha lamps of the Gilt-Edge saloon threw up a lurid light against the silver glimmer of the moon.

The saloon was swarming with excited men—growing more and more excited as the potent fire-water circulated.

Outside the building was another swarm, gathered round an upturned barrel, upon which stood an impassioned orator, in a red shirt, with a Stetson hat on the back of his head.

Across the wide, unpaved, rugged street stood the office and buildings of the Gambusino Mine, enclosed by fence and gate.

Within the gate was the Rio Kid, looking across at the flare of the saloon and the surging crowd, listening to the roar of voices, that grew every moment louder and more threatening.

There was a grim expression on the Kid's face.

He stood in silence, watching.

No man in Gold Brick was thinking of sleep that night—and least of all the Rio Kid, owner of the Gambusino Mine.

There was a step behind the Kid, and Jud Clay, the foreman of the mine.

joined him, with a Winchester under his arm.

He looked over the gate and knitted his brows.

"I guess they won't be long now," he said.

The Kid nodded.

"Any minute, I reckon," he drawled. "You're standing them off, Mr. Carfax?"

"You bet!"

"You don't reckon you'll get away with it?"

The Kid shrugged his shoulders.

"Quien sabe?" he said carelessly. "I guess no man puts a hoof on my ground without walking over my gun first! But look here, Jud, this isn't your rookus. If you're a wise man you'll hop over the fence while there's time, and go for your cayuse and vamoose the ranch."

Jud shook his head without replying. A roar from the crowd in the distance came loud and threatening.

"Burn 'em out!"

There was a movement of the swarm towards the mine, and the Rio Kid's hands dropped on his guns.

But the attack did not come yet.

"I guess they know there'll be shoot-in'," drawled the Kid. "They'll shift some more tanglefoot before they wade in, to get their courage up. I sure hope that galoot Carter will be in the lead!"

"He sure won't!" said Jud. "He's paid by Jas Drew, in Los Pinos, to stir up trouble; but I guess he ain't looking for hot lead. You won't see him when the rookus begins."

"I guess not!" sighed the Kid.

He continued to watch. Big Hank Carter was still addressing the mob from the top of the barrel. The Kid could have "got" him easily enough then, in the flare of light from the Gilt-Edge, and he was tempted to put an end to the paid agitator's eloquence with a bullet. But he would not be the first to pull trigger in the trouble that was coming.

And it was coming fast now.

Fifty men in Gold Brick had been on the Kid's pay-roll at the Gambusino Mine, and they were on strike—and a strike in a Western mining-camp does not run on peaceable lines. But in the

crowd in front of the Gilt-Edge there were not only the strikers, but a hundred more men. All the loafers and riff-raff that had drifted into the new mining-camp had gathered there in the hope of loot if the mine was attacked, and to share in the bootleg whisky that was freely circulating. And there was a crowd of strangers in the camp—men from Los Pinos—sympathisers with the strikers, as they gave it out. But the Rio Kid knew well enough that they had been sent into the camp by Jas Drew, the agent of the Arizona Consolidated Gold-Mining Co., of Tombstone. He recognised some of them—Bud Starbuck, the gunman, with his arm in a sling; Two-gun Peters, with a bandaged hand—both of whom had scores to settle with the boy puncher who owned the Gambusino Mine.

"I guess you won't think I'm taking water, Mr. Carfax," said Jud Clay slowly. "But when they come, the game's up. If there's shooting, they won't be satisfied with burning the mine office. It will mean lynching." He paused. "Jas Drew has worked the whole riffle, and I reckon it's not too late for you to get him to call it off. The Arizona Con sure mean to get hold of this mine, and they've planted this on you because you won't sell. I guess if you got word to Drew even now he would call off those bulldozers and make it a trade."

"Forget it, feller!" said the Kid lightly. "I'm not selling the mine to the Arizona Consolidated, or any other gang of gold-squeezers. And I guess Drew wouldn't come to terms, either—since I quitted him before all Los Pinos in the Red-Eye over there. He's sure got it in for me now, personal, as well as for his company. Forget it!"

The foreman was silent.

"Look at that crew," went on the Kid. "Fifty men are on strike here, and there's a hundred and fifty in that caboodle. Loafers and gunmen, most of them—and they're paid for their trouble. Somebody's paying for the bootleg stuff that's flowing like water yonder. I guess this rookus is costing the Arizona Con a heap of dollars. They figure on getting it back out of my bonanza."

The Kid's eyes gleamed. "Why, feller, if they beat us to it, and there's no other way of stalling them off, I guess I'll blow up the mine, and half the camp with it!"

He looked at Jud.

"I mean that, feller," he said quietly. "If we go up, the mine goes up, with every stick of dynamite we've got on hand. I guess I've cached the dynamite in the tunnel ready-enough to blow Gold Brick half-way across the desert to Mexico. That's the programme, Jud; and if you want to pull out before the band plays, I reckon you'll show boss-sense."

Jud's eyes gleamed.

"I guess I'm with you all the way," he answered.

"Here they come!"

There was a stirring in the crowd again. The men inside the saloon poured out, joining the crowd who surrounded the red-shirted orator on the barrel. Fists were shaken at the gate where the Rio Kid stood with Jud, and five or six revolvers barked into the air. There was a general forward movement, and Jud lifted his Winchester. But even yet it was not the attack. The mob started across the wide street towards the mine; but Big Hank Carter led the way, with a handkerchief tied to a barrel-stave by way of a flag of truce. And the mob halted and swayed within a dozen feet of the gate, while their leader waved the flag.

"Kid Carfax!" he roared.

"Here!" answered the Rio Kid coolly.

"Show yourself, if you ain't afraid!" shouted Dirk Roper.

The Kid stood on a bench inside the gate and looked over the top, with a cool, contemptuous face.

"I guess I'm to home, fellers!" he drawled. "I'll tell a man you're keeping me awake late with your darned jumboes! Anything wanted?"

And the roar died away to a murmur as the mob stared at the cool, handsome face that looked scornfully and fearlessly over the gate.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Attack on the Mine!

THE Rio Kid waited.

More than a hundred excited men faced him, all of them armed. At any moment some excited man might have loosed off a bullet, but the Kid seemed as unconscious of danger as of fear.

Big Hank, catching the gleaming eye of the Kid fixed on him, made a gesture with his white flag.

"This hyer is a flag of truce, Mr. Carfax," he hastened to say.

"If you want to chew the rag, Carter, you can sure get on with it," said the Kid. "What's the news?"

"The men who are on strike at this mine have elected me leader—"

"And that gang of gunmen from Los Pinos?" jeered the Kid. "What's their trouble?"

"I've come to talk turkey to you, Mr. Carfax. The boys here will give you a chance to come to terms."

"Let 'em wait till I ask for it," suggested the Kid. "My terms are the same as before—the men can sign on to-morrow, if they like. But not you, big Hank, or that other darned fire-bug, Roper. You can go back to Jas Draw in Los Pinos, and tell him you're fired from here!"

"Then you ain't coming to terms?" roared Carter.

"Burn him out!" yelled a dozen voices.

The Kid laughed.

"There'll be some shooting before you

burn me out, you pesky coyotes!" he said. "But you're sure welcome to try."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Big Hank, as several of his followers grasped guns. The agitator did not want the shooting to begin while he was in the front rank. "Flag of truce, boys! We've come here to give the man a chance. Now, you listen to me, Kid Carfax. First of all, you've got to fire Jud Clay—"

"Cut it out!" snapped the Kid. "I sure know that this game is being worked by Jas Draw from Los Pinos, and I might fire Jud a dozen times, and it would begin again. How much is Jas paying you for fooling those suckers, Carter?"

Big Hank did not answer that question.

"Next," he went on, "every man goes back to his job. This here crowd don't stand for victimisation."

The Kid's lip curled.

"Forget it," he answered.

"If you refuse—"

"Take it as read," suggested the Kid. "Then I'll tell you what this crowd is going to do," roared Carter. "We're going to take possession of the mine, and ride that Jud outer camp on a rail!"

"Pack a gun when you start, old boss. You'll want one."

"And if there's shooting," said Carter, "we'll string up on a tree any galoot that burns powder."

"You want to rope in that galoot first," said the Kid. "I'm sure waiting for you to quit chewing the rag and come down to cases."

"It's lynching if you shoot!" shouted Roper.

"Oh, snucks!" jeered the Kid.

There was a roar.

"Have him out!"

"I guess I've listened to your chin-wag," said the Kid. "Now, you listen to me. I give you one minute to get back across the street. After that I begin to burn powder. Now, pronto!"

And the Kid lifted his guns.

There was a swaying in the crowd as the two Colts looked over the gate, the Kid's gleaming eyes behind them.

Guns were grasped on all sides.

"Drop your flag of truce, and come on, Big Hank!" invited the Kid. "You're drawing the Arizona Con's pay for stirring up this rookus. Come on and earn it, you darned yellow coyote!"

Bang!

Two-gun Peters lifted a gun to fire at the handsome face over the gate. But nothing escaped the Kid's keen eye. He fired before the gunman could get a bead, and Two-gun Peters went down with a crash, his revolver exploding as he fell, and wounding a man beside him. The Kid stepped down.

He was only in time, for a roar of firing broke out, and bullets crashed on the gate and whizzed over it.

"Peters has got his!" exclaimed Big Hank, staring down at the gunman from Los Pinos. "Boys, that darned fire-bug from Texas has shot up Peters! Lynch him!"

"Lynch him!" rose a roar.

There was a wild and furious rush at the gate. The whole mob rushed to the attack.

"Have him out!"

"Lynch him!"

"Break in the gate!"

Crash, crash, crash!

Miners' picks and axes rang on the pinewood gate.

"I guess the trouble's coming, old pard," drawled the Rio Kid, as he walked across to the mine office. "We can't hold the gate. Get in here."

The gate was already giving, and the long fence that surrounded the mine enclosure was too extensive to be held against an attack in numbers. At various points, armed men were clambering over it, without waiting for the gate to fall.

The Kid and his foreman withdrew into the mine office—a log building close to the mouth of the deep adit of the mine. There was no shaft, sunk at the Gambusino. A deep tunnel ran horizontally into the canyon-side. That tunnel was a last refuge for the Kid and his comrade if the mob rushed the mine buildings. Already, deep in the tunnel, the Kid had stacked food and water, and the supply of dynamite that was used for blasting the rocks. He was prepared for a fight to the death, if it came to that; but he was not prepared for surrender, whatever might happen.

The gate fell crashing, and the mob rushed into the enclosure. Men were dropping inside the fence on all sides. Big Hank Carter was not to the fore now; he had done his work, and he was prudently keeping back from the storm he had raised. From the shattered windows of the mine office, the Kid watched the crowd, gun in hand. But he hesitated to shoot.

The yard swarmed with strikers; but, madly excited and vengeful as they were, he knew they were merely tools in the hands of his enemies, worked up to this pitch of fury for purposes of which they knew nothing. Reckless, misguided men were not the targets the Kid desired for the walnut-butted guns he gripped in his hands. But as Dick Roper came unwillingly into the line of fire, swept on by a rush of the miners, the Kid pulled trigger, and Roper went spinning over with a bullet through his chest.

"Have them out!" came a wild roar.

The mine office was surrounded—fierce blows shook doors and windows. The time of hesitation was past. The Gambusino miners were mixed and mingled with the hired gunmen from Los Pinos, and life and death were in the balance. Once that wild mob laid hands on the Rio Kid, lynch law would do the rest. And the Kid, reluctantly, but coolly, and with deadly aim, pumped bullets from his six-guns into the mob that roared and surged round the log buildings, and wild yells and shrieks and heavy falls followed.

From one window Jud Clay was pumping bullets from his Winchester; from another, the Kid's six-guns roared, and the hot lead poured through the mob. Bullets smashed and crashed on the walls; but the thick logs stopped them.

The beating on the door of the mine office ceased; there was a backward surge of the mob. The fire was too hot for them, and they swayed and backed, and at last broke and dashed for cover, leaving a dozen men sprawling on the ground.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

In the Tunnel!

"TURN him out!"

"Fire the office!"

"Lynch him!"

The attack had stopped for the moment; but blood was at boiling-point now. The enraged mob, more enraged than ever, had no thought of retreat. They crouched in cover behind fences and wagons and everything that could screen them from bullets, at the same time keeping up a heavy fire on the mine office. Over the wild scene the moon sailed bright as silver, in a dark blue sky flecked with light clouds.

From a little distance a flare of dancing flame rose wildly in the air. The Kid's frame house had been set on fire and was burning like a torch. And the mob were yelling to one another to fire the mine-office. The scene was now a carnival of hatred and fury.

"I guess they'll beat us to it, Jud," drawled the Kid. "They've got gasoline yonder."

"It's us for the tunnel!" muttered the foreman.

"Sure!"

"Your shebang has sure gone up, Mr. Carfax," said Jud, staring through a chink in a shutter at the blaze of the burning frame house.

"Let it go up," said the Kid indifferently. "I guess I'll get another shebang run up in short order, if we pull out of this. They sure won't be long in firing these logs, Jud."

There was a swishing in the air. From the cover of a stack of overturned mine-wagons, a bunch of strikers were pumping petrol, and the inflammable fluid dropped in a shower over the log building at the mouth of the tunnel.

It sounded almost like rain on the roof to the Kid and Jud as they listened.

"When they get a match to that, there will sure be some blaze," grinned the Kid.

A torch, soaked in petrol and lighted, soared through the air, describing an arc of flame.

It landed fairly on the roof of the mine office.

There was a wild rush of flame, soaring to the sky like a pillar of fire.

Fierce crackling came from the logs and planks; flame and sparks and smoke filled the air.

"I guess this is where we git!" remarked the Rio Kid coolly.

Bullets were crashing into the burning building; but the smoke and the flames and the fierce blaze of heat prevented a rush. The Kid quietly unbarred the door that gave on to the mine tunnel, and passed through, followed by Jud. He stopped to light a mine lamp—the tunnel was black as pitch. Behind them the fire roared and crackled, the roof of the mine office falling in amid streams of sparks. The Kid and Jud stumbled along the rails on which the ore trucks ran in the tunnel. Idle trucks were still standing on the rails, some of them loaded with ore ready for shipment in the wagons that went down the canyon to the stamp mills at Los Pinos.

At a good distance from the mouth of the tunnel the Rio Kid and Jud stacked ore trucks across the way, forming a barricade that would easily have stopped any rush of the crowd into the tunnel.

"I guess we can hold the mine till the cows come home, if we want," the Kid remarked. "I reckon those jaspers will cool down in the morning, Jud. I'm for bedding down."

The Kid rolled himself in his blankets and lay down to rest.

Jud stared at him in the glimmer of the miner's lamp.

The Kid's eyes closed, and in a few minutes he was sleeping peacefully. At the mouth of the tunnel the mine building, fence, and gates were going up in smoke and flame; and through the roar of the fire came the intermittent crackling of revolvers. The din was deafening; but it did not disturb the Rio Kid. But there was no sleep for Jud; his nerves were not of tempered steel like the Kid's.

He waited and watched in the

glimmer of the lamp, the rifle across his knees.

No attack came on the tunnel.

The blaze of the fire at the mouth of the tunnel kept the enemy off. Until it died down they could not follow on; and it was not likely to die down until every stick of timber was consumed to ashes.

The last hours of the wild night wore away.

Dawn was creeping over the Golden Canyon, when the fire died at last, and all the woodwork at the mouth of the tunnel had been reduced to smouldering, smoking ashes.

By that time many of the crowd had withdrawn, some tired out with the wild excitement of the night, others overcome by the "hooch" liquor that had been liberally served out at the Gilt-Edge.

As the sun rose higher, and a glimmer of daylight penetrated into the mine, the Kid opened his eyes and yawned.

He grinned cheerily at Jud.

"You ain't slept?"

"Nope."

"I guess you'd better snooze a spell while I keep an eye open for those rubes. You'll want it."

Jud nodded, and lay down on his blankets.

The Kid extinguished the lamp. Now that the timber was burned away, the great cavity in the hillside which was the mouth of the mine, was open and unsheltered, open to the sun and wind, and to attack.

Only a faint glimmer of light penetrated as far as the spot where the tunnel was barred with overturned ore trucks.

The Kid watched coolly.

If the enemy came on they would be in the full light, under his fire, and he would have undertaken to hold such a position against an army, so long as his cartridges held out. He had not the faintest misgiving that the barricade in the tunnel could be rushed. Neither could the defenders of the mine be starved out; the Kid had taken precautions against that. An attack in force was likely to cost the assailants so dear, that he had little expectation of it.

He wondered what the next move would be. The strikers had done their worst; they had wreaked their fury on the Kid's property. And the Kid was out of their reach; and they were very unlikely to sit down before the tunnel

to besiege him for days—or for weeks. The strikers, the Kid sagely opined, would throw the game up; but it was quite otherwise with the gang of gunmen who were backing them up. The men who were in the pay of the Arizona Consolidated were there to "get" the Kid, and they were sure not to let up. But the Kid, as he ate a cheery breakfast of cold flapjacks, washed down by cool water, wondered when and how they would come down to business.

It was close on noon before he knew. Then a shouting voice reverberated along the tunnel from the entrance.

"Say, Mr. Carfax!"

"Hallo!" chirruped the Kid.

"You don't want to burn powder—it's McCoy speaking—town marshal of Los Pinos."

A burly figure appeared in the opening of the tunnel.

"I guess I want a word with you, Mr. Carfax."

The Kid eyed him across the barricade.

"You can come on, Mr. McCoy—but come alone."

"Sure!"

And Rube McCoy, town marshal of Los Pinos, strode into the tunnel, and came along the rails to the spot where the barricade stopped him.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Goods on the Kid!

RUBE MCCOY halted, blinking in the dim twilight of the tunnel.

The Rio Kid sat on one of the ore trucks, and gave him a nod and a smile. Jud Clay rose from his blankets and picked up his Winchester. The Kid was not touching a weapon; but his eye was alertly on McCoy, and his hand was within easy reach of a gun.

"Morning, marshal!" he said cheerily. "I guess you heard in Los Pinos that there was a rookus going on here at Gold Brick?"

"I sure did," assented the marshal, eyeing the Kid keenly and curiously. "A good many galoots came loping into town for the doc."

The Kid laughed.

"Yep; I guess some of them must have wanted the doc," he agreed. "And you came over at once to restore order, marshal, and to put down that gang of gunmen who are running my camp."

The Kid smiled as he spoke. He was well aware—as all Los Pinos was aware—that the town marshal was in the pay of the Arizona Consolidated, and performed his duties—or left them unperformed—at the behest of Jas Drew.

"I've sure come to restore order," admitted the marshal. "You're safe under my protection, Mr. Carfax."

"I guess I'm safe under my own," drawled the Kid. "But thanks all the same, feller."

"There's sure been some rookus here," went on McCoy. "A hull crowd of galoots have stopped lead."

"Sure," said the Kid. "I guess you know there was a strike here, and the whole caboodle attacked the mine."

"That isn't how I've heard the story," said McCoy. "The men out there tell me that your side started the shooting."

"But you know better?" suggested the Kid, still smiling.

"Not a heap," answered McCoy. "According to what I hear, a man named Peters got his first pop, and it was you dropped him."

"He was pulling on me, marshal."

"The other galoots didn't see him

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pull," said the marshal. "But if you're giving me the straight goods, you've sure got plenty of witnesses. There was a hundred galoots on the spot, or more."

The Kid's eyes danced with amusement.

"I guess they won't feel like witnessing in my favour, marshal, as they and Peters were all in the gang attacking the mine."

"That's your say-so," said McCoy. "It ain't for me to judge; I guess I'm here to restore order. I want you to come to Los Pinos with me, Mr. Carfax."

"You do?"

"Yep."

"And you want me to hand over my guns?" suggested the Kid.

"Sure."

"And you'll sure see that when I've handed them over, and stepped out of the mine, those galoots don't make a rush and string me up to the branch of a cottonwood?"

"Rely on me, Mr. Carfax, to see that you come to no harm."

"I guess I'd rather rely on my guns," smiled the Kid. "You mightn't be able to keep off a lynch crowd, McCoy, you sure mightn't. Even if you wanted to, feller."

The marshal compressed his lips.

"I guess you savvy, Mr. Carfax, that I represent the law here?" he snapped.

"I sure opined that you represented the Arizona Con," jeered the Kid. "I sure reckoned you was sent here by Jas Drew to get me where he wants me!"

Rube McCoy flushed crimson.

"That sort of talk won't help you, Kid Carfax," he rapped, "I guess I order you, as town marshal of Los Pinos, to hand over your guns and come along. If you fired in self-defence, as you allow, you can sure prove it—the whole camp witnessed the rookus. I've got an affidavit from Hank Carter that you shot down Two-Gun Peters when he was looking on peaceable, you having had some old trouble with him at the Red-Eye in Los Pinos. You've got to answer that charge, Kid Carfax."

The Kid chuckled.

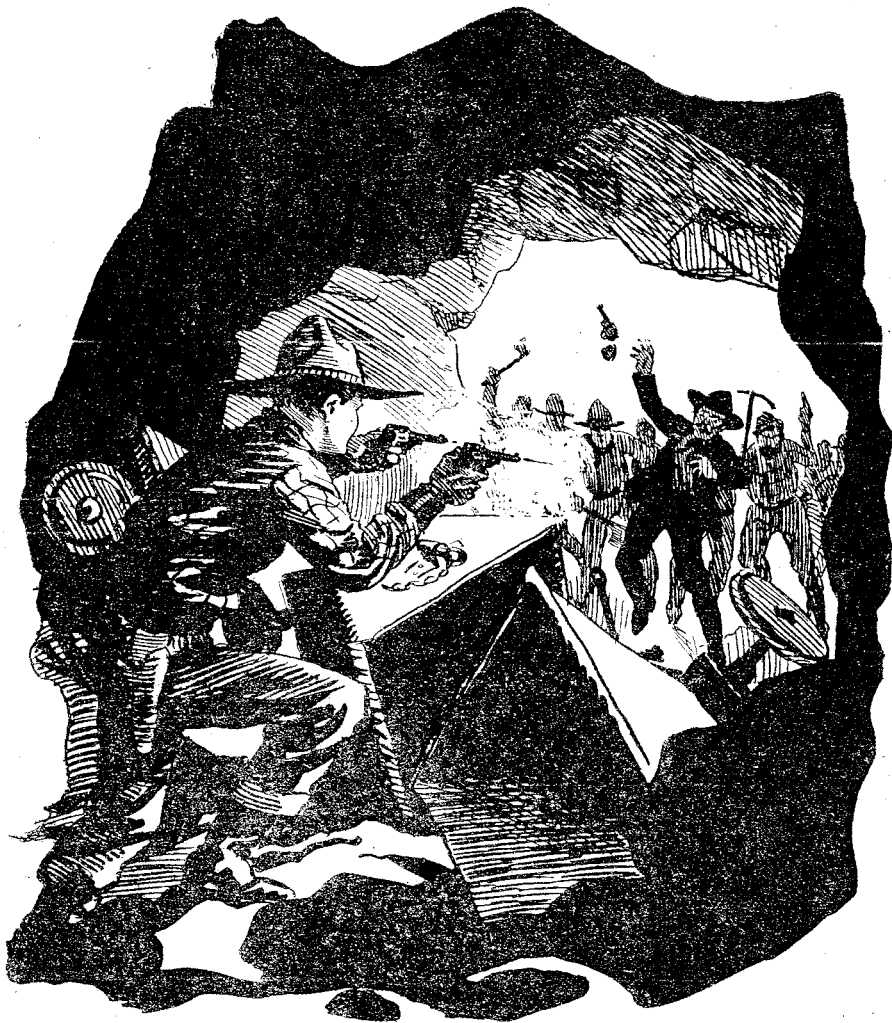
"I sure do admire Jas Drew," he said. "He's some hombre when it comes to laying out a gun-game. If I hadn't burned powder last night I'd have been lynched by that crowd, and the Arizona Con would have snooped up this mine while I was ornamenting the branch of a tree. And if I burned powder I was to be charged with shooting down a galoot and hanged, according to law. I guess all the law there is in Los Pinos is in Jas Drew's pocket, marshal. I allow he's laid it out well. Why, you durned pesky coyote, do you figure that I don't know you're hand-in-glove with Jas Drew, and that you've come over to hook me out of the mine because your rough-necks slipped up on it last night?"

McCoy's eyes glittered.

"That's enough, Kid Carfax! You're my prisoner."

"I guess not!"

"Watch out!" said the marshal of Los



HOLDING THE MINE! There came a sudden rush, and the mouth of the tunnel was black against the sunlight with the crowd of gunmen and strikers. They fired as they came. Bang! Bang! Bang! The Kid's guns rang out from behind the barricade, and bullets tore through the rushing crowd. (See Chapter 5.)

Pinos. "I'm bound to take you, and I promise you protection."

The Kid snapped his fingers in the marshal's face.

"That for you and your protection!" he answered.

"If you don't surrender," said McCoy, in a grinding voice, "I'll swear in every man in the camp as a member of my posse, and if you pull trigger when they come for you, you'll be pulling trigger against the law, Kid Carfax. You want to think first."

"I guess I've answered you," said the Kid contemptuously. "What sort of a sucker do you take me for? If I walk out of this mine with you, and without my guns I guess I shall have about ten seconds before I go up a branch. And you'll tell Los Pinos that you were rushed by a mob and couldn't save me. Forget it, feller!"

The marshal gritted his teeth.

"I give you one hour to come out and surrender," he said. "After that the mine will be entered by my men; and if you pull trigger you'll be an outlaw."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Kid.

That Kid Carfax had been an outlaw on the Rio Grande, in far-off Texas, was unknown to any man in Arizona. The marshal stared at him, puzzled and angered by his amusement.

"You Jud Clay!" McCoy peered over the barricade at the foreman of the mine. "You've backed up your employer, and no galoot is going to blame you for that. But if you back him up any further you'll be breaking the law, and you'll be outlawed along with him. Step out, while the stepping's good."

Jud shook his head.

"That's good advice, Jud," said the Kid soberly. "They've got the goods on me, old-timer—they sure have!"

"It ain't yet too late to sell out to the Con, Mr. Carfax," breathed Jud. "They've got the goods on you, like I warned you they would have."

"I guess I ain't selling."

"You can hold the mine," whispered Jud, "against a mob of strikers and gunmen, yes; but when the marshal's sworn them in they ain't gunmen any more—they're special constables, and if you drop a galoot of them it will be called murder."

"I'm wise to that, Jud."

"It ain't good enough, sir," said the foreman earnestly. "An outlaw can't own a mine and work it—you know that. The mine goes derelict, and the Con will get a grip on it. That's been the

game all along. Take what you can get and step out, Mr. Carfax."

"I guess I'm not selling the mine, Jud. But they're going to make me an outlaw, sure, for sticking to my own property; and I don't want you to be in the soup with me. You walk out pronto. They've nothing against you if you don't back me up, and you can't help me further."

Jud did not answer.

"That's sure good talk, Jud Clay," said the marshal. "I'll see you safe to your horse if you step out."

"You're fired, Jud!" grinned the Kid. "The way things are shaping, I sure don't want a foreman any longer. You're fired, feller! Now step out!"

Jud Clay laid down the Winchester. "I'll stand by you to the last, marshal or no marshal, if you say the word, Mr. Carfax," he said.

The Kid shook his head.

"What's the use, feller? I tell you you're fired!"

"That goes, then!"

Jud climbed over the barricade of ore trucks. He shook hands with the Kid and walked away with the marshal of Los Pinos to the mouth of the tunnel and disappeared with him.

The Rio Kid was left alone.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Kid Faces the Music!

THE Kid stood very still, his eyes on the patch of daylight at the mouth of the tunnel.

He was glad that Jud had gone.

In the abyss that had opened before him the Kid did not want to drag another man down.

There was a sardonic smile on his handsome face.

Jud and many others had warned him that the Arizona Consolidated would be too strong for him, that if he defied that powerful company they would get the goods on him.

They had got the goods on him now, with a vengeance.

In other days the Rio Kid had been driven into outlawry in his own country by unjust suspicion, injustice piled on injustice. He had ridden a long trail from Texas, throwing the past behind him, determined that in a new country he would lead a new life. But fortune had given him another fall. By no fault of his own he was to be made an outlaw in Arizona. His mind was quite clear on that point. They had got the goods on him. If he abided by the law, as represented by Rube McCoy, he would be lynched as soon as he set his foot outside the Gambusino Mine. If he defied the law, as represented by Rube McCoy, he was an outlaw, his hand against every man's and every man's hand against him. The Arizona Con had been too strong for him. He had been warned, and he had scoffed at the warnings—though had he heeded them the outcome would have been the same. He had set out to fight a powerful and unscrupulous company, and they had beaten him to a frazzle. The quirt had lashed Jas Drew, the agent of the company, as a warning to step clear; and the result was that the agent aimed at his life, as well as his mine—and was getting away with it. The town marshal was his paid tool. In his office at Los Pinos the agent of the Arizona Con pulled the strings and all danced to the tune—including the Rio Kid himself.

What McCoy had threatened, he could and would make good. The gang of gunmen and the crowd of disgruntled miners would be sworn in as special constables to assist the marshal in securing a law-breaker. In any law-court the Kid would have had no fear of the result; and for that very reason he would be lynched out of hand. Los Pinos would talk and whisper of one more gold-finder who had bucked against the Arizona Con, and had been broken by them. Outside the Los Pinos country nothing would be known, unless it was a tale told by his enemies, figuring him as a reckless gunman, who had been lynched for his wild deeds. They had got the goods on him, and the Kid knew it. He had set out to fight a power that was too strong for him, and he had been beaten to it.

Harder and grimmer grew his face. He was beaten to it—but they had not got the mine yet. They never should get the mine! He had sent his last friend away, to save him. He wanted to be alone at the finish, to face his wild fate singly. They had beaten him to it; but the Rio Kid was a bad man to crowd.

Sixty minutes passed, and promptly, when the hour of grace was up, a figure appeared in the mouth of the mine, holding a white flag. It was the marshal of Los Pinos.

Rube McCoy did not advance into the tunnel. He shouted to the Kid from where he stood, and his voice reverberated like thunder through the hollows of the mine.

"Carfax!"

"Hallo!"

"Your last chance!" shouted the marshal. "A safe escort to Los Pinos if you step out—without your guns."

"Forget it!" jeered the Kid.

"Then you'll be taken by force."

"I guess I'll be to home when it's done," replied the Kid. "I give you one second to hop out, marshal!"

One second was enough for the marshal of Los Pinos. He vanished from sight with a bound.

"Now for the rookus!" murmured the Kid.

He stood behind the barrier, a six-gun in either hand, a gleam in his eyes. Minute followed minute; the Kid watched and waited. Then there came a sudden rush, and the mouth of the tunnel was black against the sunlight with a crowd of gunmen and rough-necks. There was a roar of firing as they rushed into the tunnel.

Bang, bang, bang!

The Kid's guns rang, and the bullets tore through the rushing crowd. Men reeled to right and left. The Kid was in cover, and the assailants, with the daylight behind them, were an easy prey to the guns that never missed. For two or three wild minutes the tunnel was pandemonium, booming with wild cries and the cracking of firearms, thick with smoke from the guns. But the wild rush did not reach the barricade behind which the Rio Kid stood pumping out bullets. It failed and broke, and the assailants fled frantically for the open, yelling and panting. Behind them sounded the roar of the Rio Kid's six-guns till the tunnel was clear. And at the mouth of the tunnel, still and silent, lay Rube McCoy, town marshal of Los Pinos, shot through the heart.

THE END.

(Will the Rio Kid save his mine, or will he lose it to the enemy? See next week's roaring tale of this amazing Boy Outlaw.)

THE MERRY CHUMS OF ST. FRANK'S!

This is Archie
Glenthorne—
doesn't he look
a nut?



STARTING
in
next Tuesday's
Bumper Issue!

Do you know Nipper & Co., of St. Frank's? And Nelson Lee the famous detective who has become a master at this well-known school? Do you know Edward Oswald Handforth, the prize chump of the Remove? And Sir Montie Tregellis West—and his noble chums? They are NEW CHUMS to the "Popular," and they will be making their bow in next week's issue. Many of you may have read of their adventures in our Companion Paper, the "Nelson Lee," and will know what ripping chaps they are. Those of you who do not know them will be introduced in a **SPLENDID SERIES OF STORIES DEALING WITH THE EARLY ADVENTURES OF THE BOYS OF ST. FRANK'S** starting in next week's issue. The First story is entitled:

"How Reggie Pitt Came to St. Frank's!"

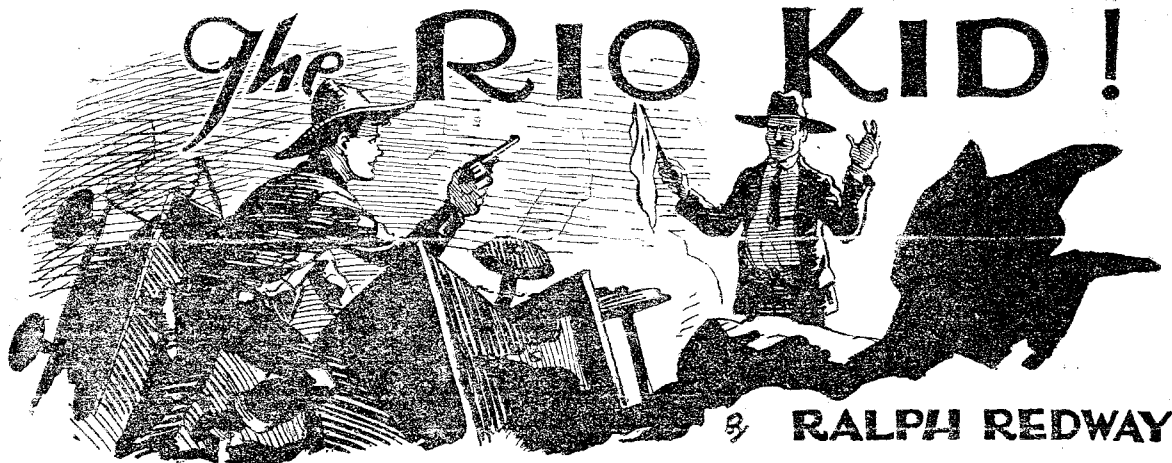
By Edwy Searles Brooks.



Don't Miss This Treat, Boys!

THE END OF HIS BONANZA!

The Rio Kid vowed he would never let his gold mine fall into the hands of his enemies—much rather would he blow it sky-high! And when the moment of final decision comes, the Kid keeps his word!



A ROARING LONG WESTERN TALE, FEATURING THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW!

THE FIRST CHAPTER. At Bay!

THAT the game was up, that the remainder of his young life might be counted in hours, if not in minutes, would have seemed a sure thing to anyone but the Rio Kid. And even the Kid doubted, though without the slightest slackening of his nerve, or diminution of his courage. The Kid had always held life lightly, in the old days, on the llanos of Texas, and now in the gold mountains of Arizona. All he knew for certain was, that he was going to fight to the last cartridge, and the future was on the knees of the gods.

Deep in the tunnel of the Cambusino Mine, in the Golden Canyon of the Gila Mountains, the Kid watched and waited. He was hemmed in by unnumbered foes; but they did not seem in a hurry to come to grips. Almost a day had passed since the gang of gunmen from Los Pinos had attempted to rush the tunnel, and had broken and fled before the Kid's barking six-guns. The Kid was confident of stalling off any attack, regardless of the numbers; but getting out of the mine and making his own escape was a different matter. Neither was he willing to hit the trail and leave the mine to the greedy clutches of his enemies. It was his bonanza; he had found it, he had fought almost to the death with the apaches of the desert in finding it; and he had no thought of surrendering it. He was grimly determined not even to save his life by escaping and leaving the mine to his foes.

From where he watched behind a barricade of stacked ore-wagons across the tunnel, the Kid could see the opening of the adit far in front of him, with a glare of sunshine there, contrasting with the shadow of the deep tunnel where he was camped. Every stick of timber had been burned away; the mine buildings lay in ashes; the tunnel was open to the hot wind from the Red Desert. Occasionally a bullet whizzed in from some restless rifleman, and ricocheted along the walls, and dropped, spent, among the ore that had been dug out when the mine had last been working. But a random bullet had little chance of finding the Kid. He did not waste his own powder on random firing; his guns

This Week: "THE RIO KID'S TRUMP CARD!"

were silent till he should see a target. The solitude of the tunnel did not trouble the Kid; he had spent many solitary days and nights on the llanos and in the chaparral, but he had never been in a tighter corner than he was in now, as he well knew. But when a voice hailed him from the mouth of the tunnel, the Kid answered, in tones that rang as cheery and care-free as of old.

"Kid Carfax!"

"Hallo!" called the Kid.

"Will you respect a flag of truce?"

"Sure, if you don't try to put anything over."

A slim, well-dressed man in store clothes stepped out of the blaze of sunshine into the shadow of the tunnel. The Kid's eyes gleamed, and he half repented of his promise to respect the white flag that the man carried in his hand. For the black-coated man in the spotless white shirt was Jas Drew, the agent of the Arizona Consolidated Mining Company of Tombstone; the man who had pulled the string behind the scenes, and brought about the disaster that had overwhelmed the owner of the Cambusino Mine. But the Kid was a slave to his word; and though he grasped a gun he did not lift it, and the agent of the Arizona Con walked up the avenue towards him, holding the white flag, unharmed. And the Kid admired his nerve a little, too; only the Kid's word stood between Jas Drew and sudden death, and he trusted his life to the Kid's word.

"Halt right there!" said the Kid, when the agent was within a dozen feet of the barrier. "I guess that's near enough for chewing the rag."

The agent stopped.

In the dim twilight of the mine tunnel he stared and peered at the Kid, whose handsome face looked coolly over the stacked wagons. Drew's face was cool and calm; scoundrel as he was, he had a nerve of iron.

"Well, what's the news, feller?" drawled the Kid. "Have you come to tell me that you're letting up on this racket?"

Drew smiled faintly.

"Hardly that! I've come to talk turkey."

"You can wade in."

"We've got you exactly where we want you, Mr. Carfax," said the agent calmly. "I guess any galoot in Los Pinos could have told you that we'd get the goods on you; but you couldn't see it. A few weeks ago I made you an offer from my company of fifty thousand dollars for the mine."

"I kind of remember," said the Kid.

"That offer's still open."

"Gee!"

"I mean it," said Drew. "You're cornered here, Kid Carfax. You don't reckon you'll beat off a hundred gunmen?"

"Nope!" grinned the Kid. "But I guess I can hold this tunnel against all the gunmen in Arizona."

"For how long?" asked Drew. "I'm wise to it that you stacked up food and water here ready for the rookus. But they won't last for ever."

"You've said it."

"You've put yourself on the wrong side of the law," continued Drew.

"You've shot up Rube McCoy, town marshal of Los Pinos. That means the rope when you're corralled."

"When!" agreed the Kid.

"You're an outlaw already—proclaimed an outlaw through all the section. If you get out of this, you could never work the mine again—with a price on your head and the sheriff hunting you."

"That's a cinch," agreed the Kid. "You've played a dirty game on me, Jas Drew; but I allow you've played it mighty well."

The agent smiled.

"I reckon I offered you good terms at the start," he said. "You refused to sell, and you shot at the gunmen I put on your trail. You asked for what you've got."

"And I quirted you, Mr. Drew," said the Kid coolly. "I sure thrashed you like a dog in the Red-Eye at Los Pinos, with half the town looking on."

Drew's eyes glowed for a moment. He had not forgotten the lashing of the quirt; the marks were still deep on him.

"That was a mistake, Kid Carfax," he said coldly.

"I guess so. I sure ought to have put a bullet through you instead!" answered the Kid scornfully.

"I guess that wouldn't have made any difference. If I got shot up by a wild puncher from Texas the Arizona Con would have put a new man in my place, and the game would go on."

The Kid nodded.

"Yep; I guess you're only a tool, like the durned galoots who kicked up a rookus here," he admitted.

"The Arizona Consolidated want this mine," said Drew. "They've got the goods on you now. I guess you know that I worked the strike at the mine—and forced the fighting—and sent Rube McCoy to chip in. And if he'd brought you in a prisoner you'd have been strung up out of hand; and if you shot him up, as you did, you'd be on the wrong side of the law—an outlaw. I guess you know all that."

"I guess so," assented the Kid. "I ain't denying that you've played your cards like a durned clever card-sharp. But what's it coming to? You didn't mosey in to tell me what I know."

"No. This game of yours, skulking in the tunnel and stalling off my men, wasn't in the programme," said Drew. "I reckon we can starve you out all right, long as it may take; but I'd rather come to terms. You're an outlaw now—nothing can wipe out the fact that you've shot up the town marshal of Los Pinos. But I'm willing to let you come out, take your horse, and ride away with fifty thousand dollars. That's better than dying like a hunted coyote in a hole in the ground, Kid Carfax."

"A durned sight better!" smiled the Kid.

"It's a square offer. Make your own conditions for safety, and I guess I'll take them as read."

"I'm not selling," said the Kid coolly. "I told you so when you put the proposition up to me weeks ago. You sure want a lot of telling, Mr. Drew."

"You're not selling—now?"

"Sure not."

The agent stared at him blankly.

"You don't hope to get out of this mine alive?" he exclaimed.

"Quien sabe?"

"If you do, you sure don't figure on taking the mine along with you on your back?"

The Kid laughed.

"Nope."

"The best you can look for is to sneak out some dark night when my men aren't on the watch, and get clear," said Drew.

"Correct."

"You leave the mine—and I guess it doesn't matter a Continental red cent to us whether you are shot up here, or whether you take to the hills. We get the mine!"

"I guess not," drawled the Kid. "I guess if you was so sure of getting the mine, Mr. Drew, you wouldn't be here talking turkey to me this minute. I reckon you're wise to it that I've stacked up the dynamite in the tunnel, ready to touch off when I durned choose. And I reckon you know that before I give up my bonanza to the Arizona Con I'll blow it up into chips, and half the canyon along with it." The Kid's eyes glinted. "That's on the programme, Jas Drew—if I go up, the mine goes up. There's enough dynamite stacked here to blow the mine half-way to Mexico. I've got the fuse laid all ready, and I'll let you know it's a short

fuse. You don't get the mine. There won't be any mine after that fuse burns down."

Drew gritted his teeth.

The Kid laughed again.

"You've sure played your cards well, Mr. Drew," he said banteringly. "You've got the goods on me, and turned me into an outlaw in Arizona. You've sure lost me my bonanza. But you ain't roped it in for your company. I guess you thought you was dealing with a kid puncher from Texas, and could put it across him easy. You've slipped up on it, feller."

Drew's face was white with rage now.

"If you blow up the mine, you go up with it!" he snarled.

"I'm sure wise to that," nodded the Kid, "and I guess a lot of your gang will go up about the same time. The explosion will bring down thousands of tons of rock from the canyon wall. There won't be much of Gold Brick Camp left afterwards."

"You're mad!" muttered Drew. "I'm offering you life and freedom and a sack of dollars—"

"Keep 'em till I ask for 'em," suggested the Kid. "I sure told you at the beginning of this rookus that I wasn't selling, and I ain't a galoot to change my mind. This mine belongs to me, and I guess it never will belong to the Arizona Con. It's going up in smoke, Mr. Drew, and I guess if I get clear of this I'll make the Arizona Con pay for the damage."

He made a motion with his gun.

"You can hit it lively, Jas Drew! I'm sure tired of you! Get out of the tunnel!"

"I tell you——" began Drew.

"Git!"

The Kid's gun came up.

"Beat it lively, or that white rag won't save you!" he said grimly.

And the agent of the Arizona Consolidated, with white rage in his face, tramped out of the tunnel.

The Kid's mocking laugh followed him.

The Arizona Con had put the goods on him, and he had lost his mine, but the Con had not won it. The Rio Kid still held the trump card.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Rainy Face Talks Business!

RAINY FACE, the Apache, stalked in his tattered blanket in the street of Gold Brick, his bronze face expressionless, his ears open. The Apache had sampled the fire-water at the Gilt-Edge saloon, but the "hooch" liquor that was sold over the bar at the Gilt-Edge had not affected the hardened old sinner from the desert. Sober and stolid, the Apache stalked an oddly dignified figure in his tattered blanket. Few gave him any attention. Tattered Apaches from the Red Desert were not uncommon in the mining-camps, and the days of Indian raids were long over. No doubt the camp of Gold Brick held some interest for the Apache. It was but a few weeks since the Golden Canyon had been a barren desert, never echoing even the clang of a prospector's pick. In that lonely canyon the thief-Apaches had attacked the Rio Kid when he came seeking the bonanza; but no thief-Apache would have ventured to raise a war-whoop in the canyon now. The camp had grown up there, and hundreds of white men swarmed in the camp, and every man packed a gun. If Rainy Face felt hostility towards the palefaces who had torn yet one more strip of territory from the Redskins, he gave no sign of it. The fierce chief of

the desert was left behind when Rainy Face entered the camps of the whitemen, and to white men's eyes he was nothing more than a tattered loafer.

Gold Brick was seething with excitement. The Gilt-Edge was crowded, and groups of men talked in the streets, staring often towards the mouth of the Gambusino tunnel in the opposite hill-side.

The miners on the Rio Kid's pay-roll, who had been deluded into a strike, had already repented of their folly. The strike had served its purpose, and the strikers were of little account in Gold Brick now. The camp was being run by the gang of gunmen in the pay of Jas Drew, and Bud Starbuck, one of Drew's right-hand men, had been appointed town marshal of Gold Brick. Many of the strikers had gone, and those that remained would gladly enough have resumed their work at the Gambusino Mine had it been possible. But the Gambusino Mine was now the fortress of the Rio Kid, held by him single-handed against all comers; and the Kid's intention of blowing up the mine rather than surrender it was rumoured through the town. Saloon-keepers and storekeepers, and others whom the "boom" had brought along to Gold Brick, heard that rumour with consternation. The boom town had sprung up like a mushroom, and if the Gambusino Mine was destroyed it was the end of Gold Brick as a settlement. Deserted cabins would be left to mark the spot where the camp had once stood—if indeed the whole place was not gutted by the explosion. The Gambusino Mine was tunnelled horizontally into the canyon wall, and the explosion was certain to bring down a great section of the rocky wall, thousands of tons of rock thundering down in the catastrophe. And there were few in Gold Brick who doubted that the Kid would keep his word. The Arizona Consolidated had beaten him in the struggle for the mine, but the Kid was a bad man to crowd. Once the store of dynamite was touched off in the tunnel the bone of contention would cease to exist. And the Kid was the man to do it.

Rainy Face, stalking silently in his tattered blanket, heard the excited talk of the groups in the street, giving no sign. He saw the gun-men who watched the mine—hard-faced men, in cover, gun in hand, in a semi-circle facing the mouth of the tunnel. It was certain that the Rio Kid could not make a break without being riddled by bullets. Day and night the half-circle of grim-eyed men watching the tunnel watched and waited, constantly relieved by fresh men. Starbuck, the new marshal of Gold Brick, represented the law in the camp, and he had sworn in the gang as deputies; and the gun-men, accustomed to wild deeds and lawless brawls, grinned to find themselves for the nonce upholders of the law. Kid Carfax was resisting arrest after shooting up the marshal of Los Pinos, and he was to be taken alive or dead—that was the order. But the gun-men, as they watched the tunnel, listened uneasily for the first hint of an explosion, and were ready to run if it came. And the half-circle enclosing the mine was widely flung, to keep clear of falling rocks if the Kid made good his threat.

For hours the tattered Apache hung about the crowded street of Gold Brick, listening to talk which he appeared to pass unheeded. It was late in the afternoon when he stalked into the Gold Brick Hotel—a lumber building—where Jas Drew had his headquarters. And in

the bar he asked to see the chief. The bartender, when he understood at last that the Apache was referring to the agent of the Arizona Consolidated, grinned.

"I guess you can't see Jas Drew, Injun," he answered. "You better go into the barn and sleep it off."

Rainy Face made no reply, but withdrew, and leaned in tattered dignity on the doorpost, and waited. He had to wait an hour before he saw the agent coming out. Evidently he knew Drew by sight, for he stepped forward and saluted him. Drew stared at the Apache.

"Beat it, Injun!" he snapped.

"Rainy Face serve big white chief," said the Apache. He made a gesture with a bronze hand towards the Gambusino Mine.

Drew stared again, and then gave attention. There was a reward offered in Gold Brick of a thousand dollars for any man who could get the Kid, and it came into Drew's mind that the savage from the desert had heard of it.

"Step in here, Injun," he said curtly, and he led the Apache into a room where Starbuck and two or three others were in consultation. They stared at the tattered Apache.

"What's this, boss?" asked Starbuck.

"I guess the Injun may be useful," said Drew, with a gleam in his eyes. "He says he's willing to get Carfax."

"Injun got 'um!" said the Apache quietly. "Injun creep like snake in grass, little white chief no hear, Injun kill."

"By gum!" muttered Starbuck. "That's the goods, boss! There ain't a white man in camp would put his nose inside the Gambusino Mine, with Kid Carfax on the shoot! But an Injun—"

"You've said it!" muttered Drew.

The agent's face was bright now. In the very hour of success, he was threatened with the destruction of all his hopes. Whether the Kid lived or died was a matter of little moment, but if the mine was blown up, all Drew's plotting and scheming went for nothing. Indeed, it was likely enough that he would be "fired" by the company he served. The Arizona Consolidated had no use for failures. Drew had cudgelled his brains for a scheme to handle the desperate puncher in the mine tunnel, and had had to confess that there was no way. The chances of an attack were doubtful; and even a successful attack could not prevent

the Kid from touching off the dynamite. If he had the nerve to carry out his threat, the Kid was still master of the situation; and Drew knew that he had the nerve. The Indian's offer came to the agent like a gleam of light in a dark sky. What a white man could not do might be done by the cunning stealth of a desert Apache.

"Speak!" he said curtly.

"Injun creep at night like snake," said Rainy Face. "Injun no afraid. Go soft and make no sound. Catch little white chief asleep maybe—catch him anyhow. Kill."

"By gum!" repeated Starbuck. "An Injun could do it."

As likely as not, the Kid would be on the watch, too keenly on the watch for the Redskin, and a bullet from a six-gun would stretch the Apache dead in the tunnel. But the Apache's life was nothing to Jas Drew; he would have risked his own for a chance of success. For it was ruin that stared him in the face if he failed to save the Gambusino Mine for the Arizona Con. If the Redskin failed there was nothing lost but his life, which mattered nothing; if he succeeded—and the stealthy cunning of the Redskin had a good chance of success—Jas Drew breathed deep at the thought.

"Get the little white chief, as you call him, Injun, and name your own reward," said Drew, almost husky with eagerness. "There's a thousand dollars to be picked up for it."

The Indian shook his head. "No want dollars," he answered. "Want hoss."

"The Kid's horse?" asked Drew.

"The chief has spoken. Mustang with black nose," said the Apache. "Rainy Face see little white chief ride him horse with black nose. Rainy Face want little white chief's hoss."

"I guess I remember the critter," said Drew. "I've sure seen Carfax riding it. He's not got it in the tunnel with him. Where is it, Starbuck? One of your gang roped it in, I suppose?"

Bud Starbuck grinned. "I guess I've got it," he answered. "It's in the stable behind this hyer shebang now. A savage beast, too—the stableman doesn't like going near it. But it's a good hoss."

"You shall have the hoss, Injun," said Drew, turning to Rainy Face again. "Dollars, too, if you get the Kid."

"No want dollars; want hoss."

"It's a cinch," said the agent. "And when—"

"When light go," said the Apache. "Injun creep in dark like cascabel. Little white chief no hear, no see till Injun's knife find um. Injun go to camp in desert for war-paint and knife—no can go on warpath without war-paint. Come back in dark."

"It's a cinch!"

And a few minutes later the Apache rode out of camp on his horse, and Jas Drew and his confederates waited eagerly for his return. If there was anything in an Apache's skill and stealth and cunning, the solitary defender of the Gambusino Mine would perish in the darkness of the tunnel; perish before he had a chance of touching off the dynamite. And the Gambusino Mine would be saved, and Jasper Drew along with it.

Drew's only fear was that the Apache might repent of his bargain, and fail to return from the desert. But that fear was unfounded. Late in the night the Redskin arrived at the Gold Brick Hotel.

By that time most of the camp was sleeping; though a score of watchful, armed men, guarding the tunnel against the escape of the Kid, did not dream of closing their eyes. The Gilt-Edge saloon was still open, and a crowd was there at the bar and round the faro lay-out. At the bar of the Gold Brick Hotel, too, men were drinking "hooch" and discussing the situation at the Gambusino Mine. But Jas Drew and Bud Starbuck stood outside the frame building, under the stars, waiting for the Apache; and they exchanged a glance of satisfaction when the tattered chief rode up. Rainy Face had a bundle on his bony broncho, which the white men guessed was his fixings for the warpath. The Apache alighted from his broncho, and saluted the two men gravely, with an inclination of his feathered head.

"Injun on time," he said. "Injun ready! Rainy Face dress in war blanket and war feathers, take scalping-knife—wah! I have spoken!" He glanced round. "Injun bring scalp of little white chief, and Big Chief give hoss with black nose."

Drew shuddered slightly. "I guess I don't stand for scalping a white man!" muttered Starbuck. "You can sure give that a miss, Injun!"

"Injun scalp um, show big chief prove um dead," said the Apache.

"It's a cinch," said Drew. "Give me proof that you've laid him out, and the hoss is yours."

"But—" began Starbuck again. Ruffian as the gunman was, he revolted at the thought of the scalping. Drew interrupted him roughly:

"Can it! Let the Injun have his way."

"Injun no see hoss," said Rainy Face.

"I guess it's in the stable hyer!" growled Starbuck.

In his own mind the gunman had resolved to drive a bullet through the Redskin's heart, if he came back with a white man's scalp from his expedition.

"Injun see um," persisted the chief. He hitched his bony broncho to the rail outside the lumber hotel. "Tie um here; Injun see."

Starbuck muttered an oath, but Drew signed to him fiercely to obey. The Apache was worth more to the agent of the Arizona Consolidated, at that hour, than all the gunmen in his pay. He would have given the Redskin a

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whole drove of horses for getting the Rio Kid before the dynamite could be touched off. And the black-muzzled mustang, though a good steed, was scarcely worth the thousand dollars the agent had already offered as a reward for the Kid, and which he would have been glad to see any man earn. Starbuck, with a scowling brow, led the Kid's mustang from the stable, and hitched it to the rail beside the Indian's broncho. Rainy Face looked at it with a keen eye and nodded.

"The hoss is yours. Injun, and a bag of dollars, too, if you like, if you get the Kid!" said Drew, in a tense voice.

"Easy to get him," answered the Apache. "Rainy Face can creep on the panther and the prairie fox and they no hear. Rainy Face big chief. Big White chief come tell him young men to let Injun pass." "This way," said Drew.

He walked towards the mine with the Apache, Starbuck following. The night was dark—heavy banks of clouds hiding the moon. Drew stopped at the wide-flung semi-circle of men watching the tunnel for cover. He whispered, and his order was passed along the line, and all the guards learned that an Indian was to make a stealthy attempt to surprise the Kid, and that the Redskin was to be allowed to go and come. The Apache, with his bundle of war-trappings, passed the line and disappeared in the darkness of the wide, rough stretch of ground that separated them from the tunnel in the canyon-side.

Drew set his lips.

"I guess it's the last throw of the dice, Starbuck!" he muttered.

"The Injun will get him!" granted Starbuck. "They're like snakes, darn their red hides. The Injun'll get him in the dark. I guess he's sticking on his filthy war-paint now, yonder—we've got to wait." He touched the butt of his gun. "I guess he won't carry off a white man's scalp to his tepees in the desert, though—not while I've got a gun."

Jas Drew made no reply. He was listening intently, with bent head, in deep anxiety, while minute followed long minute.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
A Friend in Need.

"**L**ITTLE white brother!" The Rio Kid started violently.

He was not sleeping. If he had closed his eyes in the last twenty-four hours it had only been in brief cat-naps.

Sleeping or awake, the Kid was on his guard.

He was fully alive to the possibility

that some stealthy foe might creep into the shadowed tunnel in the dark; but he had no fear of being surprised. Even if a creeping foe came so silently that the Kid did not spot him, the ore wagons stacked across the tunnel would stop him, and the Kid must hear any attempt to clamber over the barricade. But he doubted whether the cunningest of the enemy could have got so far without giving him the alarm.

That soft whisper from the blackness of the tunnel startled him. For he knew the voice, softly whispering as it was—the voice of Rainy Face, the Apache he had befriended once at Los Pinos, and who had saved him from the knives of the Redskins on the day he had located his bonanza.

"Little white brother!" The whisper came again.

It was quite close to the Kid—only a truck between, turned on its side. Not the faintest sound had betrayed the approach of the Apache. The Kid caught his breath before he answered: "Rainy Face, old hoss. You?"

"The chief of the Apaches comes to his little white brother," murmured the Redskin. "Come save little chief."

"Gee-whiz!" murmured the Kid. "How the thunder did you get through that caboodle yonder, Rainy Face?"

There was a husky chuckle in the darkness.

"Injun fool um plenty," said Rainy Face. "Big white chief Drew say big reward any brave that get little chief."

"And you put in for the reward?" "Little white chief speaks the truth." "Oh gum!" said the Kid.

"Rainy Face speak with double tongue," said the Apache. "Rainy Face he say take back scalp of little white chief, and Big Chief give Rainy Face hoss with black nose for reward. Apache tell plenty lie."

"Oh!" said the Kid. "No take scalp of little white brother. Big Chief Drew no savvy little chief brother of Rainy Face."

"I guess you'd be a dead Injun if he savvyed that, old timer," chuckled the Kid. But he wondered as he spoke. The thief-Apache of the desert, stained with the murder of many a lonely prospector, drenched with the foul liquor of the saloons, was not the "brother" the Kid would have chosen. But his service to the Apache had won his gratitude, and he could not but wonder that the old red ruffian remembered that service so well and rated it so high. That he could trust the Apache—savage and faithless as he was



THE MINE GOES UP! As the disguised Kid reached his horse there was a fearful roar and a rolling echo of thunderous crashes—then the whole of the hillside seemed to rise in the air, and the night was lit with blinding flashes. "He's done it!" came the yell from the miners. "He's blown up his mine!" (See Chapter 4.)

By nature—the Kid knew, from his last experience of Rainy Face. The Apache had saved his life then, and now he was seeking to save it again.

"How did you know?" he began.
"Much talk in white man's camp," said the Apache. "Let my little white brother listen. Many men guard with guns—no can get out. Rainy Face come and go easy. The Big White Chief has spoken to his men. Listen! Rainy Face bring Injun blanket, leggings, moccasins, feathers, war-paint—little white chief dress and paint all same Injun."

The Kid whistled softly.
"Big white chief tell um men let Injun pass," went on the cunning old Apache. "Rainy Face creep out one way—one side of tunnel—little chief look like Injun creep out other side. Same men no see both—all think one Injun, Rainy Face. Is it good?"

"Injun, you've sure got a headpiece on you," said the Kid admiringly. "It's as easy as rolling off a log, I guess."

"Rainy Face glad. Little white brother's boss with black nose tied up outside Gold Brick—get um in dark, ride with Rainy Face to the lodges of the red men in the desert—is it good?"

"Like thunder it is," agreed the Rio Kid. "I guess I shan't forget this, Rainy Face. Wait till I get to you."

The Kid, who seemed to be able to see like a cat in the dark, busied himself for a minute with the fuse to the dynamite, so that he could reach it from the other side of the barricade, lengthening it to the required extent. Then he crawled quietly over the barrier of ore trucks, and dropped beside the Apache in the darkness. Only a gleam of the Indian's eyes was visible to him. But after a few moments he made out the shadowy figure of the Apache in the deep gloom.

"Little white brother no lose time," muttered the Apache gutturally. "Big white chief waiting."

The Kid grinned in the darkness.
"Pronto!" he said.

In a few minutes the Rio Kid was draped in the Apache blanket, the fringed leggings were drawn on, the moccasins took the place of his boots. The Stetson hat was discarded; feathers were stuck in his hair, and the Indian daubed his face with the war-paint of the Apaches. The disguise would have been good, even in the daylight; in the darkness of the night it was perfect. Under the Apache blanket the Kid hid the belt and holsters that held his six-guns.

The cunning Indian had planned well. If he crept out from the right of the tunnel mouth, and the disguised Kid from the left, they would strike different sections of the semi-circle of watchers; and the watchers had been ordered to let the Redskin pass. Not till they compared notes afterwards would the guards know that two Indians instead of one, had left the tunnel.

The Rio Kid's eyes were gleaming. He had hardly hoped to save his life from this desperate adventure, and now the way was easy. It had seemed likely enough that he must perish in the explosion when he blew up the Gambusino Mine, as he had resolved to do. Now he would be clear and safe when the mine went up. To save the mine for himself was no longer possible; to save it from falling into the hands of Jas Drew and the Arizona Consolidated required only a match to the fuse.

"Little white brother come?" whispered the Apache.

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"Hold on a spell," said the Kid. "I guess I ain't finished here yet, Injun. You go first; I've got a fuse to light."

The Indian understood; he had heard the talk of the camp on the topic of the Kid's threat to blow up the mine.

"How long him burn?" he asked.

"Two minutes."

"Wah! It is good. Injun wait."

The Kid drew a deep, deep breath. For a moment, perhaps, he hesitated. The fuse once lighted, nothing could save the mine; as soon as it burned down to the powder the whole canyon-side would be rent by a frightful explosion, and the untold riches of the Gambusino Mine would be scattered and destroyed for ever. But if the Rio Kid hesitated it was only for a moment. The mine was his, but it was lost to him for ever; if he fled with the Indian and left it, the grip of the Arizona Consolidated would close on it. If the Kid, as owner of the mine, had failed in his struggle with the Consolidated, he was not likely to succeed when he fought them as an outlaw, an associate of the thief-Apaches of the Red Desert. His hesitation, if he hesitated, was brief. There was the glitter of a spark in the blackness.

"I guess we want to step lively now, Injun," chuckled the Kid. "In two minutes the mountain will be falling on us."

And they hurried along the tunnel, while, in the opposite direction, the spark hurried on its way.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Last of the Bonanza!

"INJUN!" One of the guards, on the extreme left of the half-circle enclosing the mouth of the tunnel, half raised his gun as a creeping figure approached, and lowered it again as he discerned the blanket and head-feathers and painted face of a Redskin. "All O.K., Injun; you can pass!"

The Rio Kid grinned under his paint.

"Did you get him, Injun?" breathed the gunman.

"Injun get him," said the Kid in a guttural voice. "Go take scalp show Big White Chief."

"By gum! I guess Jas Drew will be sure glad to see it."

And the gunman allowed the Redskin to pass.

Beyond the circle of gunmen the Rio Kid hurried on in the gloom. He was anxious to get away before the explosion roared out. He crossed the rugged street, and passed unconcernedly in the light of the naphtha lamps of the Gilt Edge saloon, and went on to the Gold Brick, where he stopped beside the horses that were hitched to the rail. The black-muzzled mustang gave a low whinny; he knew his master under the blanket and feathers and Apache paint. The Kid stroked the black muzzle fondly. Standing by the horses, which he unhitched from the rail, he stared back anxiously towards the tunnel. The fuse was timed to burn two minutes, and the time had almost elapsed. Had Rainy Face got clear? He had turned to the right on leaving the black tunnel, and there was no reason why he should not have passed the guards as easily as the Kid—more easily, as he was the Indian who had entered. The Kid heard calling voices, and as the moon showed a silver glimmer from behind the banks of clouds he sighted the

rugged street. Drew, in his eagerness, had laid a hand on the Indian's blanket.

"Did you get him, Injun?"

In the silence the words came clearly across to the Kid. There was no need for the Apache to answer. Suddenly, like the crash of the end of the world, came a frightful roar from the tunnel, with red, blinding flashes; a roar that was like the rolling of thunder in the depths of the mine, and the high, rocky side of the canyon split like a curtain—the very ground shaking under the fearful force of the explosion. Great rocks and boulders hurtled in the air, many of them falling far across the street; one great rock crashing through the roof of the Gilt Edge saloon, and sending the crowd there scurrying forth in terror. A wild, rumbling, thundering roar, and screams of terror as the guards at the mine came racing away, stumbling and falling in their panic-haste. There was a yell from Starbuck: "He's done it! He's blown up the mine!"

Jas Drew did not speak—did not move. He stood transfixed, heedless of the rocks and stones raining round him. His face was white and drawn; he gazed at the yawning gulf torn in the canyon-side with haggard eyes, seeing there the end of his scheming, the ruin of his plots, utter ruin for himself. Howls and yells of terror filled the camp; frantic men rushed past the agent, who still stood there rooted to the ground. The wind of the fearful explosion caught the Kid, distant as he was, and made the horses plunge. Rainy Face joined him in two bounds.

Without a word the Apache flung himself upon his broncho, and the Kid mounted the black-muzzled mustang. Side by side they galloped down the street, down the canyon, heading for the desert. Behind them rose a wild uproar—cries of men, squealing of horses, crash on crash of falling rocks. The madness of terror and panic reigned in Gold Brick—hardly an eye noted the two Redskins who galloped away into the night. And still Jas Drew stood motionless, his face white, his eyes haggard. This was the end of his scheming—the end of the Gambusino Mine. The Rio Kid was a bad man to crowd. Starbuck, bleeding from a crashing stone that had struck him in the face, breathed curses.

"The mine's gone up, but the Kid's gone up with it, Jas. Kid Carfax has gone up with the mine, for sure!"

It was all the solace that remained to Jas Drew. The Gambusino Mine was gone for ever, but the Kid who had defied him and defeated him lay shattered under the wreck of the rent and gashed hillside. In Gold Brick there was no one who doubted that the Kid was dead. But Jas Drew, and others who had played that lawless and desperate game for the Kid's bonanza, were destined to learn that the Rio Kid was not dead.

THE END.

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RALPH REDWAY

ANOTHER ROARING YARN OF WESTERN ADVENTURE—FEATURING THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.**The Hold-Up!**

THE Rio Kid bent his head to listen.

From afar, through the clear mountain air, came faintly the throb of an engine.

"I guess she's coming."

The car was distant as yet, far out of sight on the winding mountain road. But the Kid's keen ear picked up the throb of the engine. He glanced round him, to make sure that all was in readiness.

It was a lonely road, from Flynn up to Los Pinos, on the edge of the Red Desert—as lonely a road as any in Arizona. It was but seldom that the hum of a motor-car was heard on that road. The traffic was mostly on horseback or burro. But horse or burro would not have suited Eli Robinson, the president of the Arizona Consolidated Gold-Mining Co., of Tombstone. It was but seldom that Eli Robinson visited Los Pinos, but when he came he came in state. And urgent business called Eli to Los Pinos now, though he was not likely to reach that town in the Gila Mountains if the Rio Kid could prevent it. And he guessed that he could.

Across the road lay the trunk of a great cottonwood, felled by the machetes of Rainy Face and his Apaches, barring the road from side to side. Among the boulders by the roadside lurked half a dozen Apaches, in war-paint and feathers. Rainy Face, the chief, stood by the side of the Rio Kid, a wild and savage figure in his blanket and fringed leggings, and head-dress of eagle plumes.

"She's coming, old timer," said the Kid.

Rainy Face nodded.

"Injun hear," he said.

"You'd better hunt cover," drawled the Kid. "Keep your men out of sight, Rainy Face. We've got to let the driver go, and I guess I don't want him to talk about a Redskin raid in Flynn."

"No talk if kill," said the Apache, touching the knife in his girdle.

The Kid shook his head.

"This is my say-so, Injun! No killing!"

Rainy Face nodded, and disappeared among the rugged boulders. The Rio

Kid stood alone in the road, awaiting the car.

The throb of the engine sounded nearer and clearer.

The Kid's face was dark and clouded as he stood waiting. Fortune had played him a cruel trick in making him an outlaw in Arizona, as he had been in the old days in Texas, and the associate of the thief-Apaches of the desert. And the man who was responsible was the fat, prosperous mine president from Tombstone, now approaching in his car. The Kid's handsome, sunburnt face grew grimmer as the throb of the engine sounded closer, and the car came into sight at last round a bend in the mountain road.

The gradient was steep, but the big car came on swiftly. There was a grinding of brakes, as the chauffeur sighted the great tree levelled across the road. The car halted within a few yards of the felled cottonwood.

Within the car sat a fat, hard-faced man, in store clothes and a plug hat, and gold-rimmed glasses. He got up from his seat and stared angrily at the fallen tree.

The Kid lounged forward to the car. He raised his hat in mocking politeness to the president of the Arizona Con.

"I guess you're Robinson?" he remarked.

The fat man eyed him sharply.

"Is this a hold-up?" he rapped out.

"Jest that," assented the Kid.

"Don't figure on pulling a gun. It will be sudden death if you do!"

The Kid had not drawn a gun, but his hands were fouching the walnut butts in the holsters low-slung from his belt. The chauffeur gave him one keen look, and then sat motionless. Eli Robinson drew a hard, deep breath, and his eyes glittered at the Kid through his gold-rimmed glasses.

"I'm not pulling a gun," he said icily.

"I guess you could beat me to it, whoever you are. But I warn you that if you hold up my car, I'll have you hunted down and sent to the pen, if it takes ten years and ten thousand dollars."

"Sho!" said the Kid. "You sure make me tremble, feller. I reckon you're a big shout when you're to home."

"I am Eli Robinson, president of the Arizona Consolidated," said the man in

the car, in the same icy tones. "If you've heard of me—"

"I sure have."

"Then you ought to know that you're playing a dangerous game," said the mine president. "You'd better clear the road and let my car get on, if you know what is good for your health."

"Maybe I don't, then," smiled the Kid. "This car has reached the end of its journey, feller. Get out!"

The mine president set his lips.

"If you're aiming to rob me—"

"Not at all. I've told you to get out of the car."

Eli did not stir.

"You'd sure better mind your eye, Mr. Hold-Up Man," said the driver, his eyes turned curiously on the Kid. "Mr. Robinson ain't the man to let you off light. You're asking for a lot of trouble."

"I guess I thrive on trouble, feller," drawled the Kid, with a smile.

"Thanks all the same. You hop it lively off the car, and hoof it back to Flynn. You ain't wanted here any more."

The man stared.

"It's twenty miles back to Flynn," he said.

"Then I sure hope you're a good walker," said the Kid. "The car stays here with Mr. Robinson."

The man hesitated, and the Kid's guns flashed out. One of them was levelled at the chauffeur, the other at the fat man in the car.

"I guess we're wasting time. Light down, both of you, before I drill you full of holes."

The chauffeur leaped down with almost ludicrous suddenness. More slowly Eli Robinson opened the door of the car and stepped out. His hard face was white with rage. Eli Robinson was a great man in the city of Tombstone. He was accustomed to giving orders, not to obeying them. It went sorely against the grain with him to obey the orders of the boy puncher who had held up his car on the mountain road, but he knew that he had no choice. There was death in the levelled gun, death in the gleaming eye that looked over the barrel. Almost the president of the Arizona Consolidated made up his mind to take the chance of drawing a gun. But he did not. He stepped into the road, and, at

a sign from the Kid, put his hands above his head.

"Keep 'em up!" drawled the Kid. "Now, you beat it back to Flynn," he added to the chauffeur. "You're leaving the car here. Beat it lively. I guess if you're in sight in two minutes from now, I shall chip off your ear to hurry you up. You get me?"

The chauffeur looked doubtfully at his employer; but an impatient motion of the Kid's gun decided him, and he started down the road on foot.

"Pronto!" rapped out the Kid.

Bang!

He fired in the air, the bullet whistling a foot from the man's head. That was more than enough. The chauffeur broke into a run, and banished down the road at top speed.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Blow for Blow!

ELI ROBINSON stood with his hands up, his eyes glittering with rage. It was the first time the president of the Arizona Consolidated had ever been held up, and even now he could scarcely believe that any outlaw had the temerity to do so. As he stood, with set teeth, he was scanning the handsome face of the Kid, memorising his features savagely, and bitterly determined that the hold-up man should not escape his vengeance. The Rio Kid slid his guns back into the holsters. The chauffeur's footsteps had died away now; the man was far out of sight.

"Show up, Rainy Face!" called out the Kid.

Eli Robinson started convulsively, as the gang of Apaches suddenly appeared from the rocks. It was the first intimation he had that the hold-up man was not alone.

"Indians!" he muttered.

"Sure!" smiled the Kid.

"If you want to rob me, you are wasting time," said Eli, between his teeth.

"Who's wanting to rob you, feller?" jeered the Kid. "I guess it's the other way round. Go through his rags, Rainy Face, and see if he's heeled."

Rainy Face searched the mine president, and took possession of a silver-mounted revolver. To Eli's surprise, nothing but his weapon was taken from him.

"I guess you can sit down till you're wanted, feller," said the Kid, indicating a rock by the roadside.

"What does this mean?" snarled Eli. "I've got to get on to Los Pinos on important business."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Kid. "I guess your business can wait, Eli. I've sure got some important business with you, and you won't see Los Pinos in a hurry, nor Tombstone, either. Sit down!"

With an angry glare, the mine president sat on the boulder to await the pleasure of the hold-up man.

He gave one sharp glance round him, as if calculating the chances of making a run for it. But the Apaches were round him, and there was no chance.

The mine president was completely puzzled. He understood now that he was not to be robbed. And what else the hold-up man could want with him was a mystery. He had plenty of enemies. His methods of business had made him many. But he had never seen the Rio Kid before. There were many mining men in Arizona who had been ruined by the "Con," but the Kid looked like a cow-puncher, and Eli's unscrupulous dealings had not been

extended to the cow country; he was a mining man. He could only wait and wonder who his enemy was, and what he wanted.

The Kid proceeded coolly to drench the president's car with petrol, and then a match was tossed into it.

Eli gritted his teeth with helpless rage.

The car was quickly a glaring, flaming mass, soon to be reduced to cinders.

Having set fire to the car, the Kid came across to the mine president. He took a seat on the low rock beside him.

"I guess you want to know," he remarked. "I'm going to put you wise, feller. You don't savvy whom you're dealing with yet."

"No!" muttered Eli.

"Ever heard of Kid Carfax?"

Eli started.

"You—"

"Sure," nodded the Kid. "Kid Carfax, the owner of the Gambusino Mine at Gold Brick. I'm sure that very galoot—"

Something like fear came into the hard face of the mine president.

"You're wise to it now," smiled the Kid. "You was going to Los Pinos on that very business, feller. You found that your man Jas Drew, in Los Pinos, slipped up on it. He had your instructions to get hold of the Gambusino Mine by fair means or foul, and he obeyed his orders. The Gambusino Mine has gone up now; they had me cornered, and I blew up the mine. I guess the gold vein is scattered, and will never be located again, even if you could shift the thousands of tons of rocks piled over the adit. I guess I blew up the mine to keep it out of your grip."

Eli breathed hard.

"Jas Drew worked a strike at the mine," went on the Kid quietly. "He played his cards well. He had the town marshal of Los Pinos in his pocket, and I shot up the marshal in defence of the mine. And after that it was just pie to Jas Drew. I guess I'm an outlaw now, and they've offered a thousand dollars for me alive or dead in Los Pinos. But they ain't roped me in yet!" added the Kid, with a grin.

The mine president panted.

"Kid Carfax was blown up in the mine," he muttered. "You cannot let he. He was killed in the explosion."

"I guess not," grinned the Kid. "I guess I was safe out before the dynamite exploded, feller. And here I am to talk business with you."

"Of course, I know nothing of all this!" muttered the mine president. "If my agent at Los Pinos did anything outside the law, it was done without my knowledge."

"Sho!" ejaculated the Kid.

"My instructions to him were to buy the mine," explained Eli. "Beyond that, he had no orders. You cannot suppose that—"

"That a galoot like you had anything to do with handing out the rough stuff?" grinned the Kid.

"Exactly."

"I guess that's jest what I suppose, Mr. Robinson."

"A mistake, I assure you," said Eli.

"In fact, Jasper Drew has already been sacked. As soon as I heard that there was bloodshed at Gold Brick, I turned him off, guessing that he had exceeded his orders."

"Sho! And you didn't fire him because he had failed to get hold of the mine?" said the Kid, with grim banter. "You didn't boot him because he'd let me blow up the mine instead of roping it in for the Arizona Con?"

"No!" muttered Eli.

"You're sure some liar," said the Kid. "Jas Drew was your agent at Los Pinos, and you sure pulled the strings from Tombstone. You knew that the Gambusino was the biggest bonanza ever struck in the Gila sierra, and you wanted it for your company. I guess I heard a good many stories in Los Pinos about the Con roping in prospector's claims, and all sorts of accidents happening to galoots who wouldn't sell. I guess you sat in your office at Tombstone like a pesky spider in a web, with Jas Drew on the spot hyer to do your dirty work. I reckon it was bad news for you when you heard that the Gambusino had gone up the flume, and you beat it lively for Los Pinos to see whether anything could be done. Say!"

Eli compressed his lips.

"I tell you I knew nothing."

"And I tell you you're a liar!" said the Kid coolly. "And I tell you there's nothing to be done with the mine. It was a big bonanza, but now it's nothing but a pile of rocks. I blew it up to keep it out of your hands, Mr. Eli Robinson—and you owe me for the damage."

"What?"

"I'm asking you a hundred thousand dollars for the mine," said the Kid. "I guess I can't afford to throw away my bonanza. You are going to hand over that little sum, feller."

The mine president stared at him.

"Are you mad?" he exclaimed.

"I sure hope not."

"I will not give you a cent," said Eli, between his teeth—"not a red cent. The mine is a wreck now, and if, as you say, nothing can be saved from the ruin, it is worth nothing to me."

"Nothing at all," agreed the Kid. "But you've got to pay for the loss to me, Mr. Robinson."

"Not a cent."

"I guess we'll talk about it again, feller," said the Kid, rising to his feet. "Here, you Rainy Face."

The Apache came up.

"Put him on the bronco."

"My little white brother speaks well," said the Apache. He signed to his braves, and they surrounded the man from Tombstone.

"What do you mean?" panted Eli. "You dare—"

"Oh, can it!" interrupted the Kid.

"I guess you're coming for a little pasear with me."

"Where?" hissed Eli.

The Kid waved his hand towards the desert.

"That's where you and your gang have driven me," he said. "That's where you're coming, feller. I guess your friends won't find it easy to pick up your trail in the Red Desert—even if they want to look for you, of which I ain't sure. It's you for the desert, hombre."

"I—I—"

"Put him on the bronco!" said the Kid.

And the president of the Arizona Consolidated, grasped by the Redskins, was lifted to the back of a shaggy, bony bronco and bound there with a lasso. Then the Kid called to his mustang, and mounted, and the Apaches followed his example. Leaving the car still burning on the road, the party struck into a trail to the southward, an Indian leading the mine president's horse by a trail-ropo. Eli's face was as white as death. His eyes stared round him with a hunted expression in them. Many and many an unscrupulous deal had the president of the Arizona Con brought off success-

fully; many a mining man in the Arizona sierra owed his ruin to Eli Robinson. But never had the hard-faced mining man from Tombstone dreamed of retribution like this. The Rio Kid was a bad man to crowd, and the Arizona Con president was learning that—too late for the knowledge to be of service to him.

Even as the hoofs of the mustangs knocked up the dust of the desert, he could scarcely believe that this disaster had fallen upon him—that it was not some fearful dream.

mile after mile, league after league vanished under the galloping hoofs.

Behind, as the man from Tombstone looked back, the line of the Gila sierra was low and dim against the sky.

Before him lay the desert—illimitable to the eye—sand and dust, cactus and yucca; arid, waterless, trackless.

The Red Desert—of which even hardened plainsmen spoke with bated breath—the desert, dry and deadly, given over to the thief-Apache, the coyote, the rattlesnake, the vulture. He was penetrating into the heart of the desert.

His face was haggard now.

He glanced many times at the Rio Kid; but the Kid, riding with the Apaches, did not look at him.

mile after mile, league after league! The dust blinded him, as it was kicked up by the dashing hoofs. He ached with fatigue, with heat, with misery. The despairing thought was in his mind that even if he escaped from his captors he could never find his way through the trackless desert unaided. Escape meant certain death from hunger and thirst in those fearful solitudes.

With his chin sunk on his breast, haggard despair in his face, the mine president of Tombstone rode on, and on, and on into the heart of the Arizona desert.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. The Kid Sells!

STARS were gleaming in a sky of darkest blue, arched over the boundless expanse of the desert, when the cavalcade halted. How many hours had passed Eli Robinson did not know; it seemed to him that for days and days he had been in the saddle—aching, blinded by sun and dust, saddle-sore.

He was too dazed even to look about him when he was untied from the broncho, and bronze hands lifted him to the ground; but he heard a muttering of guttural voices, and saw the gleam of black eyes, the glimmer of bronze skins in the starlight, and knew that he had reached the Indian encampment. Against the starry sky close at hand rose a dark mass, but he was too dazed with fatigue even to wonder what it was. He felt himself dragged away and thrust into an evil-smelling shelter of some sort, and then he slept, on the bare ground, the sleep of exhaustion.

The sun was high in the sky when the president of the Arizona Consolidated opened his eyes again. He was aching, and stared about him with dizzy eyes, wondering. He was not in his handsome house at Tombstone, he was not in the hotel at Flynn. Where was he? Recollection came with a rush, and the man from Tombstone sat up with a cry.

He rubbed his eyes and stared about him. He lay in a skin jacal, of which one side was open, giving him a view of the desert. Other jacals and tepees were in sight, lounging Indians, squaws and papooses, horses, and dogs. It was the encampment of the Apaches.

The mine president had heard of the gangs of thief-Apaches of the desert, THE POPULAR.—No. 490.

who preferred the wild, hard life of the waterless wastes to Indian reservations, but he had never dreamed of seeing them in their camps. And he was a prisoner here—a prisoner of the wild Apaches of the desert.

Only the previous morning he had left Tombstone in a luxurious Pullman; at Flynn, where the railway ended, he had stepped into a handsome motor-car; and now—now he was in the desert, where life was red and raw, where the savages were still as savage as in the days before Columbus sailed to the west. A day had made that change, and the change was overwhelming.

He dragged himself to his feet at last, stepped wearily to the opening of the jacal. The great mass against the sky, which he had dimly noted the previous night, was now before his eyes, clear in the sunlight.

It was a vast circular mound, rising in steps, or, rather, terraces—gigantic steps suitable to the feet of a giant. He gazed at it in wonder, dimly into his mind came remembrance of tales he had heard of the remnants of ancient Aztec civilization in the desert. It was a "teocalli," an open-air temple of the Aztecs, that race long-vanished from the earth, but whose blood still flows in the veins of the Mexicans. Close by the teocalli, the Apache camp was pitched, and the shadow of the vast mound fell across the camp.

On the summit of the teocalli he made out a figure—a boyish, active figure, in cowboy chaps and Stetson hat, a strange figure on that spot, among the wild Apaches of the Red Desert.

He knew that it was Kid Carfax, once the owner of the Gambusino Mine at Gold Brick; now driven to the desert, a fugitive, his mine blown up to save it from the greedy grasp of the Arizona Consolidated.

His eyes gleamed with hatred at the sight of the young puncher. The Kid, standing on the summit of the teocalli, was staring to the northward, scanning the level plains and the distant horizon, and Eli guessed that he was watching for a sign of pursuit.

He moved at last, and descended the teocalli to the camp. Eli could see in his face that he had discerned no sign of an enemy on the arid wastes that stretched northward to the Gila sierra. The sierra, in whose shadow lay the town of Los Pinos, was a mere blur on the horizon—many a long mile distant from the Apache camp.

Pursuit there was not likely to be; Eli knew that. No doubt his chauffeur would tell the story at Flynn; there would be search along the mountain road, the wreck of the burnt car would be found. But no track remained to tell what had become of the president of the Arizona Con. The chauffeur's description of the Kid would be enough to tell into whose hands he had fallen; but none could tell whither the Kid had taken him; the sands of the desert told no story.

There were many who would rejoice to hear of his disappearance—many who would hope that he would never be found. But even those who would have sought him had no clue, they would not even guess that he was a prisoner; they would conclude that he was dead, and that his body had been thrown into some arroyo or barranca.

Eli Robinson realised it, and realised that there was no hope of rescue, no hope of escape. He was at the mercy of the man he had robbed and driven into outlawry.

The Rio Kid, as he came down from the teocalli, sighted the man from

Tombstone standing in the opening of the jacal, and came towards him.

"Morning, president!" he said.

Eli looked at him with gleaming eyes.

"A thousand curses—"

"Cut it out!" said the Kid derisively.

"I guess you can be glad that you're not tied to the stake, feller. Do you reckon those injuns would have let you have your sleep out if I hadn't been here?"

Eli shuddered.

Many of the Redskins were glancing at him, and he understood only too well what their glances meant. Only the Kid stood before him and the savage cruelty of the Apaches.

"You, a white man, in league with Apaches!" he muttered.

The Kid coloured a little.

"I guess I've always said that Injuns is pizen," he admitted. "But I sure reckon that beggars can't be choosers! I did the chief a good turn, and he saved me from your gang; and I guess I'm safer here in the desert with the reds than I should be in Los Pinos with the whites now that you've loaded the dice against me, Eli! But I reckon I ain't hanging on here—only till I've sold you my mine!"

Eli gritted his teeth.

"You sure allowed you'd buy the Gambusino mine, whether a galoot wanted to sell or not," grinned the Kid. "That is why it was blown up, because your crowd had me by the short hairs. Now I reckon I'm going to make you buy whether you want to buy or not. You get me?"

"Not a cent!" muttered Eli.

The Kid laughed, and pointed to the teocalli.

"You see that chunk?" he asked.

"That's where the Aztecs used to sacrifice prisoners of war, hundreds of years ago, when this desert was peopled. That's where these Apaches deal with their prisoners, Eli. I guess if I wasn't around you'd have been tied to the stake already on the summit of the teocalli, feller! The Apaches haven't changed; I guess they're not like the tame Injuns on the Reservations. If I mount my mustang and ride, leaving you here, you're a gone coon!"

"And you'll leave me to the Indians?"

"Why not?" said the Kid coolly. "I guess I'm not hanging around here for long! I'm a cow-puncher, and I guess I don't like Injuns; and I've got only one friend in the gang—Rainy Face, the chief. His word goes; but if anything happened to him in the desert these bucks would turn on me like a crowd of wildcats, and I reckon my guns wouldn't save me! I sure don't mean to stay here till that happens!"

"And you will leave me at their mercy?"

"Sure!" said the Kid grimly. "You've asked for it, Eli, and you've got it. You've made an outlaw of me with your gun-games; my bonanza has gone up the flume; I've nothing left but my cayuse and my guns, that I brought with me when I lit out of Texas. The Gambusino Mine is worth nothing now—to you or to me, and you're going to buy it for that very reason! You'll hand out a hundred thousand dollars for it. I guess it was worth a good deal more than that; I'm letting you off cheap. And if you refuse, you've got till to-night to think it over. At sundown I ride—alone!"

"Where am I to find a hundred thousand dollars in this desert?" muttered the mine president.

"I guess you could find five times as much in Tombstone."



IN CAPTIVITY! "You see that?" said the Kid, pointing to the huge mound looming in the distance. "That's where the Injuns sacrifice their prisoners—and that's where you'll go unless you sign that draft!" (See Chapter 3.)

"You'll let me go—"

The Kid laughed.

"Forget it, feller. I'll trust you as far as I can see you with both eyes; not farther. You'll give me a draft on Tombstone."

"It would never be paid."

"I'm sure sorry for you in that case; because, unless I draw the dollars, I shall leave you to the Apaches."

"Do your worst," muttered the mine president. "I will not hand over a cent for a ruined mine."

The Kid shrugged his shoulders.

"Please yourself, feller. If you change your mind give me a hail—I shall be within hearing till sundown. After that I shall be gone, and once I hit the trail I'm gone for good."

And the Kid lounged away, humming a tune.

The mine president stepped back into the jacal. Food and water were brought to him by a Mexican peon; evidently some prisoner of the Apaches who had been made a slave by the wandering tribe.

The hot day wore on.

Once the president of the Arizona Con stepped out of the jacal; and in a moment a dozen or more Apaches drew towards him, with ferocious looks. He was glad to step back out of their savage sight. It was clear to him that only the authority of the chief, Rainy Face, saved him from the torture; and only Rainy Face's friendship for the Kid caused him to protect the prisoner. Once the Kid was gone, nothing could save him from the cruelty of the savages; that was quite clear in his mind. But for the Kid, Rainy Face would have been as eager to lift his scalp as any of the dirty, savage-faced braves in that outcast camp. His life hung on a thread—even with the Kid in the camp outside the teocalli. And when the Kid was gone—

Black and bitter thoughts passed through the mind of the man who was accustomed to coaling ruthlessly with others, but who had always, hitherto, defied the hand of vengeance. He

cursed his folly in venturing into the sierra; and yet he had believed that Kid Carfax was dead, that he had perished in the wreck of the Gambusino Mine; and never for a moment had he dreamed of danger from a wandering gang of Apaches. It was a Roland for an Oliver; he had used the gunmen of Los Pinos to gain his ends, and the Kid, in his turn, was making use of these thieves of the desert. In Tombstone he was a powerful man; in the desert he was a helpless prisoner, with the knife almost at his throat.

As the sun sank to the west, and the shadow of the teocalli lengthened on the plain, it was borne in upon the mind of Eli Robinson that he was a beaten man; that the mine for which he had plotted and schemed was to be his, at a price, now that it was no longer a mine, but a worthless stack of shattered rocks.

He had started for Los Pinos when he learned from Jas Drew that the mine had been blown up, in the hope of yet saving something from the wreck—but from what the Kid had told him, he knew that there was nothing to be saved; the bonanza was gone for ever. And he was to buy the wreck of it, and pay for the ruin he had caused—or else—From the jacal he could see the wolfish eyes of the Apaches turned towards him, and those glances told him only too plainly what he had to expect, if the man he had wronged ceased to stand between him and the outcasts of the desert.

In the west the rim of the red sun touched the desert; and the prisoner in the jacal heard the muttering voices of the Indians. The opening of the jacal was darkened by the figure of the boy puncher, booted and spurred. The Kid was ready to ride. Eli gave him a haggard look. The Kid smiled grimly.

"Chewed on it?" he asked. "I guess I'm ready to hit the trail, feller. You want to make up your mind, pronto."

"A thousand dollars—" muttered

"Cut it out. You've wrecked my bonanza; and I'm selling you the wreck for a hundred thousand dollars. I guess I wouldn't take ten cents off," said the Kid. "Yes or no?"

There was a brief pause, while the president of the Arizona Consolidated struggled with himself. Defeat rankled more bitterly in his breast than the loss of money. But he knew that he had to yield.

"Yes," he breathed.

"The mine's yours, then," grinned the Kid. "I guess I was told from the start that the Arizona Con would force me to sell—and I'm selling. But I sure reckon the Con never knew what they would be buying, feller. You want to make out a draft that will be paid on sight at the bank in Tombstone—and you don't want to play any tricks with it, Mr. Robinson. It will sure be had for you if anything happens to me in Tombstone. If I ain't back here in three days, Rainy Face will know that I ain't coming back—and I guess you will want a new scalp on the fourth day. And while I'm gone, feller, you'd better lie low in this hut and sing small; if you try to get away the Indians will get you sure—and Rainy Face won't be able to save you. I guess I'm waiting for that draft, feller!"

Half an hour later the Rio Kid was riding the black-muzzled mustang under the stars of the desert; and the president of the Arizona Consolidated, crouching in the jacal with the murmuring voices of the Redskins in his ears, was hoping and praying that the Kid would ride back safe and on time.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Kid Hits the Trail!

FOR three days the president of the Arizona Consolidated Gold-Mining Company lived with terror for his daily companion, and his bed-fellow at night. In those three days his looks grew haggard. Through the long hot days he watched the desert, hoping for a sign of the Kid's return; through the nights he scarcely closed his eyes, fearing every moment to hear the savage yells of the Apaches, hungry for a victim. Squaws and paposes came to the jacal to jeer and mock him; dark and threatening looks were cast on him by tattered braves who stalked by; more than once he heard loud and excited voices, and

the commanding tones of Rainy Face scolding the truant.

The fear was deep in his heart that Rainy Face would not keep faith with the absent Kid; that even if he kept faith he might fail to control the savage Apaches; that the Kid might be delayed on his journey; that an accident might prevent his return on time.

Three days passed on leaden wings, and when once more the red sun sank towards the edge of the desert, and the Kid had not returned, the mine president's heart was heavy with despair.

From the jacal he watched a number of the Apaches taking bundles of brushwood to the platform on the teocalli, and he knew what the fuel was for—to be piled round the torture-stake when the hour came. In the red sunset the tall figure of Rainy Face, draped in his blanket, stood at the opening of the jacal, and the chief's black eyes fixed malignantly on the cowering prisoner.

"The little white chief no come!" said the Apache in his guttural voice. "No return to the lodges of the Apaches."

He pointed to the sinking sun. "When sun him touch the desert, the paleface will be bound to the stake. I have spoken!"

And the Apache stalked away.

Eli groaned aloud in his terror. His baggared eyes swept the desert to the north, the way by which the Kid would come—if he came. Then he looked to the westward; the rim of the round, red sun was almost touching the plains. In those terrible moments perhaps the wretched man repented of the evil he had wrought, and which had brought upon him so fearful a retribution.

Gallop, gallop!
The sound of hoof-beats from the plain came suddenly to his ears, and he

started. Gallop, gallop! It might be only some Apache returning to the camp, but— Suddenly he sighted a Steeple hat far out on the plains, and gave almost a sob of relief. It was the Kid, and he was returning on time!

The black-muzzled mustang, covered with dust, galloped into the camp, and halted in the shadow of the teocalli. The Rio Kid slid from the saddle. Eli's eyes sought the west again; the sun's rim was touching the horizon. The Kid had returned only just in time to save him!

From the jacal he watched with beating heart. There was something like disappointment in the dark features of Rainy Face, and from the mob of tattered Apaches there rose a deep murmur. The sun slid behind the edge of the desert, and darkness fell on the Indian camp. Louder and deeper through the darkness came the murmur of the savages, and the heart of the prisoner sickened with the fear that the Kid, after all, might not be able to save him.

"Feller!" It was the Kid's voice. "I guess I've put it through—the Gambusino Mine is yours, for what it's worth!" He chuckled softly. "I reckon I've sure touched the dollars, and the mine's yours. That's what you sure wanted, ain't it?"

"For mercy's sake get me out of this!" muttered Eli huskily.

"Sure! I've got a bronc waiting, and we're hitting the trail, pronto, if some buck don't drop us with a bullet in the back; I reckon they're sure mad about losing you!" chuckled the Kid.

He grasped the arm of the mine president, and drew him out of the jacal in the darkness. Behind the jacal stood the black-muzzled mustang and a broncho saddled and bridled. Eli climbed dazedly into the saddle; the Kid took the bridle and led the way. As the hoofs rang on the plains there

came a yell from the Apache encampment that told of the disappointment of the savages; but Rainy Face held his braves in check, and there was no interference and no pursuit. Twice the Kid looked back. The fires of the encampment twinkled in the distance, but died away at last; the great mass of the teocalli was merged in the dark plain.

"Faster, faster!" breathed Eli. "I guess we're safe now, feller!"

Through the starry night they rode on, side by side. All was dark, trackless, unknown to the man from Tombstone, and he marvelled that the Kid could find his way; but the Kid rode on without a fault and without a pause. Under the rising sun they were still riding; at high noon they rode into a deep canyon in the Gila sierra, and there the Kid pulled rein.

"I guess we part here, feller," he said. "You want to ride on, and in three miles you'll hit Gold Brick. I guess your mine is there—and you're welcome to it!"

Eli looked at him. "And you?" he said.

The Kid shrugged his shoulders. "I guess I'm hitting the trail—I'm done with Arizona." For a moment his hand lingered upon a gun. "I was an outlaw in Texas, feller, and I lit out for Arizona to leave it behind me; but I reckon trouble dogs the trail of the Rio Kid. I'm sure tempted to let drive a bullet through your cabeza; but ride on, feller, ride on!"

And the Rio Kid wheeled his mustang, and dashed away, without a backward glance at the man who sat in the saddle watching him go, with a strange expression on his face.

THE END.

(You'll meet the Rio Kid in another roaring Western yarn next week, chums. Don't miss it!)

The Serpent of the College House!

(Continued from page 7)

"You're sensitive on the subject, of course. I don't wonder at it. But, fairly and squarely, isn't it a fact that the Ancient House leads the way in nearly everything?"

Bob Christine frowned. "Well, what about it?" he growled. "Do you think you can alter it?"

"That's just the idea!" exclaimed Pitt. "The fact is admitted, isn't it, that the College House takes second place at St. Frank's? Well, I don't exactly see why it should be so. Why can't we buck things up and create a hum?"

"A—a which?" asked Yorke, staring. "Why can't we show the Ancient House that we're not going to stand any of their old buck?" said Pitt calmly. "You're the leader of the Monks, Christine, and I'm only a new kid—I know that well enough. Don't say I've got cheek. As a matter of fact, I have. Plenty of cheek is a good quality."

Christine & Co. stared at Pitt rather helplessly. Somehow, he always seemed to disarm them. He forestalled them by his remarks concerning cheek, and they hadn't anything to say.

"Well, since you don't seem to be capable of making the Ancient House sit up, I'm willing to take the job on," said Pitt coolly. "How does the idea strike you?"

"You cheeky rotter!" roared Yorke. "You ain't goin' to stand this, I suppose, Christine?"

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"Let him finish!" said Christine coldly.

"I can see well enough that you're all getting wild," remarked Pitt, rising to his feet. "That's silly. I didn't come here to have a scrap with anybody. As I was saying, I'm willing to show you how matters can be altered. Just give me a chance, and I'll make Nipper and all the rest of 'em bite the dust. I want a free hand!"

"A—a free hand?" repeated Talmadge dazedly.

"Exactly!"

"You wouldn't like a free boot, I suppose?" suggested Yorke. "I've got one here, and there's a good kick behind it—"

"Oh, don't start any violence!" said Pitt testily. "I'm not afraid of your boots. If it does come to a scrap, I shan't be pitched out easily. But where's the sense in scrapping? My motive is a good one, isn't it? I don't want to dispute your leadership. I'm a College House chap, and I've got the honour of the College House at heart. Why shouldn't we soar above our rivals? Just a few wheezes, and we can make the Fossils hide their heads in humiliation. That's my idea."

Christine took a deep breath.

"I'm not going to get wild with you, Pitt," he said. "Shut up, you far-heads!" he added, turning to his indignant chums. "Pitt came here to suggest an idea, and he's done it. Now he can clear out!"

Reginald Pitt sighed. "I'm sorry," he said frankly. "I thought you'd be broader-minded, Christine. And I've got some jolly fine wheezes, too!"

Christine's temper gave way at last. "Prove it!" he shouted hotly. "Anybody can jaw like this. Substantiate your words by deeds—and then I'll believe you! Hang it all, I'll give you a free hand!"

"What?" roared Talmadge and Yorke. "A free hand?" repeated Christine grimly. "You can give us a proof of your marvellous methods, Pitt. I'll allow you just one week. Understand?"

"You—you silly ass!" yelled Yorke. "Do you mean to say that you're going to let Pitt step into your shoes?"

"I didn't say that!" interjected Christine. "He's got a free hand, that's all. He can work some marvellous wheezes of his own, and prove that he's worth his salt! If he hasn't worked the stunt within a week, we shall know that he's all jaw!"

Pitt nodded serenely. "Good enough!" he said. "A week's all I want, Christine. You'll find that I'm not a boaster. The College House will be cackling over the diddling of the Ancient House before to-day week!"

And Reginald Pitt strolled out of the study.

But neither Bob Christine nor anybody else knew Reginald Pitt yet! He was destined to spring quite a number of surprises on the College House, and the whole of St. Frank's generally!

The Serpent's venom had yet to be revealed!

THE END.

(There will be another topping long story of the boys of St. Frank's next week, entitled, "Pitt the Mysterious!")