

A GENEROUS ENEMY!

Men have been heard to say that they'd rather face a pair of tigers than the Rio Kid's guns. But the Kid has proved, on more than one occasion, that he can be as generous as he is dangerous to an enemy!

The RIO KID!

By **RALPH REDWAY**



ANOTHER GRIPPING LONG COMPLETE WESTERN TALE, FEATURING THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
A Meeting on the Trail!

THE bandage across the Rio Kid's handsome face covered a deep gash from the knife-like edge of a yucca*. The black-muzzled mustang had stumbled with his foot in a gopher hole, and the Kid had hit the yucca before he knew it. It was not a serious hurt, neither was it very painful; but the Kid had stopped to bandage it, to keep off the pressing attentions of flies and mosquitoes.

The Kid grinned at his reflection in his little pocket-mirror when he had finished. The bandage left little of his sunburnt face to be seen, from his mouth to his dark, keen eyes. It reminded the Kid of old days in Texas, when on certain occasions he had swathed his face in his neck-scarf to hide his identity—occasions which had led to great activity on the part of Texan sheriffs.

Those days were not long past, but they were over and done with; the Rio Kid was finished with outlawry now, if only folks would let him.

He wondered whether they would, in the new country for which he was riding through the enveloping hills in the north of Arizona, north of the Great Canyon of the Colorado. Fortune often favoured the Kid—in many ways he seemed the spoiled child of fortune—yet he had never been able to set himself right with his fellow-men. Fortune always failed him there, somehow.

The Kid was riding for Nevada. He was done with Arizona and the gold country, and he did not fear pursuit—the Great Canyon lay behind him now, between him and the enemies he had left. He rode with a pride on his head, but that was no new experience to the Kid; and the swiftness of the grey mustang, and the accuracy of his six-guns, guaranteed that the price would never be earned.

As for foes from his own country of Texas, the Kid never dreamed of them. He was hundreds of miles from the Lone Star State. In his dreams, in his lonely camps in the sierra, his fancy often traversed those long miles,

THIS WEEK:

The Man from Texas!

and brought vividly to him the shining waters of the Rio Frio, the wide-stretching grass-lands, the old bunkhouse at the Double Bar ranch, the cheery bunch of which he had once been a member. But no Texas sheriff was likely to ride so far in quest even of the Rio Kid; and the Kid had left no sign for a foe to follow on his devious wanderings westward.

And yet, though the wary Kid did not suspect it, it was from far-off Texas that danger was dogging him.

The Kid was riding along a deep, wide canyon in the afternoon sun, when he sighted the weary horseman ahead of him. The Kid's hand dropped mechanically to his gun. He was in a lonely country, and his destination, Horse-Thief, was still twenty-miles or more ahead of him. And at his last stopping-place the Kid had been told that the Judson gang were out on the trails.

The Judson gang, from what the Kid could learn, were horse-thieves and rustlers of cows, and there were six or seven of them—information which did not make the Kid hesitate to ride onward through the hills.

The Kid's way had been wild; but he had a true cowpuncher's hatred for a cow-thief, and he had no great desire to avoid the Judson gang, if they chanced to come in his way. But he was keenly on his guard, and on the alert at once at the sight of a rider.

The horseman ahead of him looked weary, and his horse was limping. Some tenderfoot who had lost his way in the trackless sierra, the Kid figured, at the second glance, and he smiled and released his gun. He gave the black-muzzled mustang a word, and changed his easy trot for a gallop, rapidly overhauling the man who rode ahead.

The stranger turned to look round at the clatter of hoofs on the rocky trail. The Kid saw a young man, scarcely older than himself, with a

dusty, tired face under the shadow of the Stetson hat. The stranger's hand was on the rifle at his saddle, and the Kid smiled and waved his hand.

"Leave it alone, stranger!" he called cheerily. "You don't want it."

The young man halted, watching the Kid as he rode up, and evidently on his guard. His rifle was ready; though it would not have been of much use to him had the Rio Kid been hunting trouble. A fraction of a second would have sufficed for the Kid's six-gun to leap from the holster, and the stranger would never have brought his rifle to bear. But the Kid was not hunting trouble; he was trying to leave trouble behind him, persistently as it dogged his steps. His only thought now was to help a stranger who was plainly on hard tack.

"You don't want that gun, stranger," grinned the Kid good-humouredly. "Leave it where it is. I guess it wouldn't help you none, even if you did want it, feller."

The stranger eyed him. His glance rested curiously on the bandage that almost hid the Kid's face.

"You been in trouble, too?" he asked.

"Only a scratch from a yucca, I guess," answered the Kid. "But I reckon you've been hitting trouble?"

"Sure!"

"You're from Texas?" asked the Kid, quick to detect the lazy drawl of the Texan in the stranger's voice, and his heart warned to the man.

His longing for his own country was sometimes like an ache in the Kid's heart; and anything that recalled Texas to his mind was a passport to his good graces.

"Yep! How did you know?"

"I guess I had you spotted," smiled the Kid. "You're a long way from your country, stranger."

"I guess I'm looking for a man who's as far, or farther," answered the rider. "You from Texas?"

"You've said it."

"Lost here, same as me?"

The Kid chuckled.

"Not on your life," he answered. "I guess I figured out you was lost, and rode up to put you wise. Where you heading?"

*A sub-tropical American flowering plant, with rigid lanceolate leaves.

"Red Rock. Far from here?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Kid. "I guess you want to ride twenty-five thousand miles, that-a-way, to hit Red Rock."

"Oh, gophers! Meaning that I'm riding away from the shebang?"

"Sure! I left Red Rock behind me this morning," said the Kid. "You want to ride back twenty miles. You've got your back to it."

"I guess my cayuse won't do it—he's lame," said the stranger. "It's camping in the hills for me. I lost my way riding away from a gang of fire-bugs, and I reckon I was too glad to get clear, to worry any about the way I went. A bullet clipped my horse, and he fell lame. I figured you was one of the gang when I saw you riding up, with that rag across your face. They was all fixed like that."

"Rustlers," said the Kid. "Likely the Judson gang that they told me about at Red Rock. You was lucky to get clear." He looked at the stranger's weary horse, with the eye of one who had nothing to learn about horseflesh. "You want to give that cayuse a rest, feller. You won't hit Red Rock this side of sundown—or at all on that cayuse if you keep on. What's the matter with camping?"

The stranger's eyes searched the Kid, and the one-time puncher of the Double Bar laughed.

"Forget it, feller!" he said. "I ain't a rustler, and if I was I guess you wouldn't be sizing me up this minute—you'd be on the ground with a bullet through your cabeza. I guess I could put three pills through you before you could get that Winchester going. Look!"

Like magic a six-gun seemed to leap into the Kid's hand, levelled at the stranger from Texas.

The young man stared at him with bulging eyes.

"Gee! I never saw a man so sudden on the draw!" he exclaimed. "You sure know how to handle a gun!"

The Kid laughed, and slipped the six-gun back into its holster.

"Does that make it plain?" he asked.

"Sure!"
 "Light down, then, and let me look at your cayuse's leg. I ain't in any hurry to get on to Horse-Thief, and I guess I'll camp here, and set you on the right trail at sun-up. Is it a cinch?"

"You're a white man," said the stranger; and he dismounted from his weary horse.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Man Who Trailed the Kid!

UNDER the westering sun the Rio Kid picked a camp, where a tiny rivulet trickled down the rocky side of the canyon. He unshipped his slicker pack, fed and watered his horse, and shook out his bed-roll. Then he gave his attention to the stranger's horse. The hurt was slight, and the Kid doctored it with a skilled hand. The man from Texas sat on a boulder and watched him.

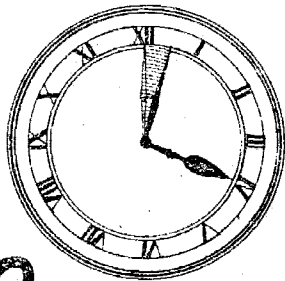
The Kid was humming the merry tune of a Mexican fandango, his face bright and cheery where the thick bandage allowed it to be seen. He was in a cheery mood. For days the Rio Kid had been riding a lonely trail, and it warmed his heart to find himself in company with the pilgrim who spoke in the soft drawl of his own country.

The fellow was a stranger; nothing to him. But the Kid was always ready to help friend or stranger in distress; and he liked the young fellow's looks. And it was plain to the Kid, though not to his new acquaintance, that the Texan was not likely to get out of those barren hills alive without help.

If the Judson gang had thought him worth their while, they were not likely to loose up on him; and at that very moment it was more likely than not that the gang were hunting him in the sierra.

"I guess I'll be building a fire," the young man said at last stretching his weary limbs. "There's brushwood here a-plenty."

The Kid glanced at him.



**2 MINUTES
WITH A**

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"Did you ride all the way from Texas to look for a grave in the north of Arizona?" he asked.

"Meaning?"

"Those fire-bugs you got away from won't be long in leavin' their cards, I reckon, if they see the smoke of a camp-fire," answered the Kid.

"Sure, I forgot that! It's cold flapjacks for supper, then."

"I guess I've got bacon and beans a-plenty," said the Kid. "But we ain't starting nary fire; these hills are as full of thieves as a Mexican dog of fleas. We ain't asking for trouble."

"Sure!" assented the man from Texas.

The sun dipped behind the mountains, and darkness thickened in the canyon. Through the gloom came the faint musical murmur of the little rivulet dropping on its steep way down the rocks.

Sitting at ease with his back to a rock, the Kid ate his supper, and shared cheerily with the man from Texas. All

the while his sharp ears were keenly on the alert.

"I guess we might swap names," the man from Texas remarked. "Mine's Casey."

"Casey?" repeated the Kid.

The name had associations for him.

"Yep. And you—"

The Kid laughed.

"I guess I'm travelling under the name of Smith," he answered. "This is a country where a galoot sure doesn't always carry the name he started with."

"That's so," said Casey, with a laugh. "Smith goes."

He helped himself to bacon and beans.

The Kid nodded and smiled. This man was from Texas, which meant that he surely had heard of the Rio Kid. And the Kid did not want to send news of himself back to his own country—the arm of the law was long. And it would not have comforted the young stranger to know that he was camping in company with the Rio Kid, once an outlaw on the banks of the Rio Grande. The Kid was not so black as he had been painted; but he had been painted black enough.

"Ever rode the Fric country?" Casey asked.

"I've sure seen it," said the Kid.

"Then I reckon you've heard of the Rio Kid?"

The Kid stared at Casey, and for a second his hand touched the walnut butt of a gun. For that second it seemed to him that he was known, and that this man from Texas meant trouble. But Casey's face was quite unconscious, and the Kid laughed.

"I've heard of him," he assented. "I guess there ain't a galoot in Texas that hasn't."

"You've said it. According to all accounts, the Rio Kid's cleared out of Texas."

"Sho!" said the Kid.

"They nearly got him when he was riding across the Staked Plain," said Casey. "But he has the demon's own luck that young fire-bug, and he gave them the slip and sure vanished. Some galoots say he went north into the sheep country, and some allow that he lit over the border into Mexico; but I figured it out from his trail that he was hitting for Arizona."

"You sure seem interested in the hombre," remarked the Kid.

"I sure am," said Casey. "He's the feller I'm hunting."

"You don't say?"

"I guess it's him or me for the great divide when I hit his trail," said Casey.

"That's why I'm in Arizona, hunting for the Rio Kid, and I reckon I'll raise his trail sooner or later."

The Kid looked at him, under drooping eyelids, curiously. The man from Texas was there hunting for the Rio Kid—hunting for the puncher who sat eating bacon and beans with him in the shadowy canyon. The situation struck the Kid as entertaining. But he was curious, too. He had a good memory for faces, and he was assured that he had never seen this pilgrim before, so his enmity was a little difficult to account for. True, the name was familiar—only too familiar.

"You got a feud with the Rio Kid?" he asked.

"Sure!"

"He's trod on your toes some time?"

"I've never seen him yet," said Casey. "But I got a good description of him, and a picture of him, that I got from the sheriff of Fric. I guess I shall know the galoot when I set eyes on him."

The Kid grinned under the bandage. It was that gash from the yucca thorn, and the bandage that covered it, that had prevented gunning when he first chanced upon this stranger. The Kid understood that now, and he was glad that his face was hidden. He did not want to have to shoot up the man from his own country, though he came as an enemy.

"You've never seen the galoot, but you're trailing him to shoot him up?" queried the Kid.

"It's a blood feud," said Casey. "If you know the Frio country in Texas, you may have heard of Two-gun Casey."

"Sure," he was a gun-man," said the Kid.

Casey flinched a little. "Well, I reckon he wasn't no saint," he admitted. "If the Kid had wiped him out in an even break, I guess I'd have sat tight and said nothing. But it was a gum-game, sabe, and Two-gun Casey was my uncle."

The Kid's eyes gleamed. "I've heard a lot of talk about the Rio Kid," he remarked casually. "But I never heard that he shot any man except fair and square."

"So they say," assented Casey. "Perhaps you never heard the way Two-gun Casey went up?"

"If I did, I kinder disremember." "He was after the Kid," said Casey. "Every man in the Frio country was after him more or less, if you come to that. The Kid got him, somehow, and roped him up at a camp fire, tied like a turkey, and gagged. He put his own hat on the man's head—and the Kid's Stetson was known all over Texas; he had a band of silver puggets round it. The sheriff of Frio came on the camp, figured it out from that Stetson that it was the Rio Kid sitting there, and pumped him full of lead. That's the way Two-gun Casey went up."

The Kid nodded. "Well he remembered that incident in the chaparral, back in Texas, when the man he had saved from death had sought to sell him to the Frio sheriff, and had been left to the fate he had intended for the Kid.

The Kid had no regrets on that score; the gun-man had received his due, and no more than his due, from the intended victim of his treachery.

But the younger Casey was evidently a very different kind of man; and the Kid wanted no trouble with him if he could help it.

"You reckon the Rio Kid was to blame in that deal?" he asked.

"Sure," said Casey. "If he'd shot the man up in an even break, I guess I'd say nothing; but leaving him tied up to be pumped full of lead by the sheriff—I reckon I don't stand for that!" He set his lips. "I'm after the Kid, and I'll follow him across to California, but what I'll get him, Say, have you



HIT! "Lie low, I keep on telling you," hissed the Kid. "You're asking for it by showing yourself—!" Bang! A sobbing moan, and Casey sank down behind the rocks, heavily against the Kid, his rifle slipping from his hands. (See Chapter 3.)

seen a galoot in these parts wearing a Stetson with a band of silver nuggets?"

The Kid shook his head with a grin. That adornment, by which the Kid had been known on the grasslands of Texas had been discarded when the Kid rode away from the Lone Star State to find a new life in a new country. The Kid was not likely to have left so easy a clue to possible pursuers.

"I reckon I'll get him, sooner or later," said Casey, rising from the boulder upon which he was seated and stretching his limbs. "The darned coyote can run as hard as he likes, but I'll sure get him!"

The Rio Kid's eyes glittered. It was upon his tongue, at that moment, to proclaim his identity, and draw his gun. But he checked the impulse. He had no fear of the avenger—the thought made him smile—but he had broken bread with the man from Texas, and that consideration kept his gun in his holster, so long as the Kid could leave it there. Not for a second did it cross Casey's mind that he was talking to the man he was hunting—that only the bandage hid from him the features he knew well from the Kid's picture.

"I guess we may as well turn in," said Casey.

"I reckon so," assented the Kid. "I'll sure put you on the right trail at sun-up, pardner. And we'll part friends."

"Sure!" Casey stepped across to his bed-roll.

As he did so the Kid made a sudden movement. He reached across and gripped the man from Texas by the ankle, and with a sudden jerk brought him down on the rocky ground.

"What the thunder—" panted Casey.

But he did not need to ask. A bullet struck the rocks, and dropped flattened, and the roar of a gun followed from the darkness.

"Holy smoke!" gasped the man from Texas.

The bullet had passed exactly where he had been standing; and only the Kid's prompt action had saved him from being shot through the heart.

"Cover!" breathed the Kid.

And he dropped out of sight among the boulders, his six-gun in his grip.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. A Fight in the Dark!

BANG, bang, bang, bang! From the darkness the shots rang fast, almost like one report, but the Kid's ears picked them out. Four rifles were blazing away at the camp among the boulders, and bullets crashed right and left.

The Kid lay low, in secure cover, unalarmed for himself. But he was not so sure of Casey. What sort of a fight the nephew of Two-gun Casey was likely to put up in these sudden circumstances the Kid did not know. He was obviously no gun-man such as Two-gun Casey had been, and the Kid doubted whether he was the man to keep his end up in a fight like this. In the darkness there were four savage foes, shooting to kill, and the darkness wrapped them as in a cloak.

In the camp it was dark, and the Kid guessed that the enemy had been guided by the sound of voices. The shot that Casey had so narrowly escaped had been well-aimed, yet the marksman could scarcely have seen him. Only a glimmer in the darkness had warned the Kid that the shot was coming, and given him time to save the Texan's life.

The Rio Kid lay, hardly breathing, every sense on the alert, his gun in his hand, ready for a rush of the Juuon band. There was a stirring close by him, and he whispered tensely:

"Keep close, Casey! I guess they'll be shootin' at a sound—"

"I guess I'm in cover," murmured Casey. "Say, feller, that was a close call; you pulled me over jest on time. I felt the wind of the bullet."

His voice was a faint whisper, but it was unshaken. The gun-man's nephew had pluck.

"Keep close!" breathed the Kid. The Rio Kid moved a little, with infinite caution. Bullets, crashing on the rocks round him, and against the canyon wall behind him, came incessantly. The Kid, in the darkness,

watched for a flash, and fired when he spotted it, and dropped instantly into cover again.

A wild, hoarse yell answered his shot; a hoarse yell suddenly broken off in the middle. The Kid smiled grimly.

"I guess that galoot's got his!" he muttered.

There was a shout of rage from the blackness.

"Say, you 'uns," yelled a hoarse voice—"say, you pesky coyotes, that's Hank Judson you've got! We'll cut you to pieces for that!"

"It's the Judson gang!" grinned the Kid. "Four of them here, I reckon—and the king-pin has got his ticket for scup. Keep in cover, feller—they know how to shoot!"

"So do I, if I get a chance!" muttered Casey. "You figure that that galoot you've plugged has got his for keeps?"

"I sure do; he ain't saying anything more about it, no-how," said the Kid. "Lie low, feller; lie low!"

Casey had raised himself, looking along his rifle, watching for a chance to return the fire.

"Lie low, I keep on telling you, hombre!" hissed the Kid. "You're asking for it! That darned gun-barrel has got a shine on it—"

Bang!

A sobbing moan, and Casey sank down behind the rocks, heavily against the Rio Kid. His rifle clanged down. From the darkness came a yell; the marksman knew that he had found his billet.

"Oh, shucks!" muttered the Kid, in disgust.

There was a groan beside him.

"You've got it!" muttered the Kid.

"Yep!" murmured Casey.

"Where you got it?"

"Right shoulder."

"Bad?"

"Feels bad."

"You sure did ask for that, feller!" growled the Kid. "You can't take chances with these pizen rustlers. Roll over to me, and I guess I'll fix you up with my neck-scarf."

There was no reply.

"You hear me shout?" muttered the Kid.

But Casey did not answer; and the Kid realised that he was either insensible or dead. He gritted his teeth hard.

The man from Texas lay silent and inert—dead, for all the Kid knew to the contrary; severely wounded, at least. To tend him meant moving from cover, and such a move meant fearful peril, under the fire of three watchful, cunning rustlers. Yet if he still lived the Kid could not let him bleed to death. Bullets still dropped about him, and many of them dropped close. Alone, the Kid would have shifted his cover; the rustlers had the range too well to suit him. But he could not leave his companion—the man who had been hunting him for his life, and whose life now depended on the Kid.

Cautiously the Kid moved, sheathing his six-gun, taking the chance of a rush from the darkness finding him without a weapon in his hand. He groped over Casey, and his hand was wet with the blood that flowed from the wound.

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The Kid felt over the injury, bending over the insensible man; a faint moan came from Casey, and that was all. The Kid tore off his silken neck-scarf, and made shift to bind up the wound and stop the flow of blood. It was all that he could do, and he did it under terrible peril. He felt, rather than knew, that the Judson gang were creeping closer—only one rifle was cracking now, which told the experienced Kid that the other two of the gang were seeking to get to closer quarters, creeping like lynxes among the rocks. But he had to take the chance or let the Texan bleed to death; and he took it.

The clink of a pebble, an almost im-

Kid's keen ear, its own story, and he wormed round the bush, and his six-gun touched a creeping form, and crashed out as it touched.

There was a groan, as a heavy figure slumped down in the black shadow of the mesquite.

"Three!" snarled the Kid.

Crack, crack, crack! The rifle was still ringing out at short intervals; the last man of the Judson gang was still firing, to cover the creeping advance of his associates, not knowing yet that they had been accounted for. The Rio Kid crept on, his eyes shining, and his teeth set. From the camp came the shrill squeal of a stricken horse. It was not the black-muzzled mustang—the Kid would have known his cry. And he knew, too, that his horse was in good cover. Casey's steed had been struck by the bullet, and the Kid heard the animal squeal, and squeal again, till the squeals were hushed in silence.

The Rio Kid crept on, winding like a snake among the rocks, well to the right of the man who was firing, cautious and patient as a panther. The man was keeping in good cover from the front; but he was not aware of the Kid's advance. Long minutes passed—the Kid was patient; but at last the flash of the rifle gave him his prey. The six-gun roared again, and the last of the Judson gang shrieked, and fell forward on his rifle.

The Kid leaped to his feet then.

The Judson gang were wiped out; a task that had long baffled a dozen Arizona sheriffs. The Kid stood watchful, waiting, listening; but there was no sound of other foes—if there were more to the Judson gang, they were not on the scene—four had been tracking the man from Texas in the desolate hills, and the Kid had accounted for four. He slipped fresh cartridges into his six-gun, sheathed it, and hurried back to where he had left Casey.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. The End of a Feud!

DAWN flushed up over the mountains, and the man from Texas, stirring uneasily in his blankets, opened his eyes. He stared

round him dizzily.

"Keep still, pard!"

It was the Kid's cheery voice.

Casey stared at him.

"Where are they?"

"Who?"

"The Judson gang!"

The Kid grinned.

"Ask the turkey-buzzards," he answered carelessly. "I guess I shouldn't be sitting around so free and easy if they were still gunning after me."

"You wiped them out?"

"Just a few."

"Gee!" said Casey. "Look here, am I bad hurt? I see you've fixed up my shoulder, and it hurts something fierce. How about it?"

"I guess I got the lead out clean as a whistle," said the Kid. "You want to get to a bed and a doc; but you're

perceptible sound, was enough for the Kid; his six-gun leaped to his hand.

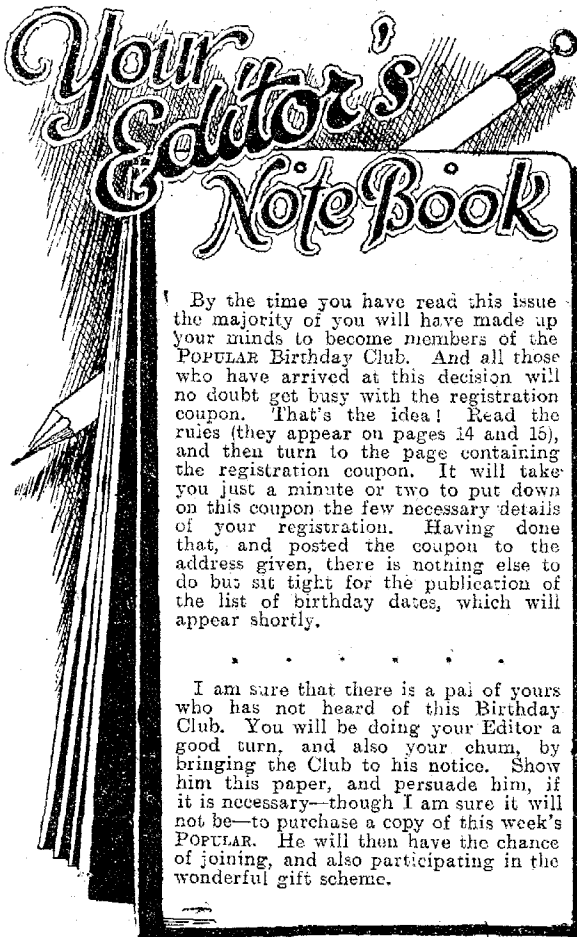
Bang!

Within ten feet of him, a black, shadowy figure yelled and rolled over, and lay still. The Kid had not missed.

"Two!" muttered the Kid grimly.

Casey lay motionless, silent, his face glimmering white as chalk in the gloom. The Kid could do no more for him—no more, so long as he was still beset by watchful enemies. There was a gleam of blue flame in the eyes of the Rio Kid as he moved to deal with those enemies.

Leaving the insensible Texan, the Kid crept away among the boulders, cautious, silent as a cougar, worming his way, every sense on the alert. A rifle was still banging from a distance; but one man at least was seeking the Kid among the rocks—and now the Kid was seeking him in turn. The faint rustle of a dragging mesquite told the



By the time you have read this issue the majority of you will have made up your minds to become members of the POPULAR Birthday Club. And all those who have arrived at this decision will no doubt get busy with the registration coupon. That's the idea! Read the rules (they appear on pages 14 and 15), and then turn to the page containing the registration coupon. It will take you just a minute or two to put down on this coupon the few necessary details of your registration. Having done that, and posted the coupon to the address given, there is nothing else to do but sit tight for the publication of the list of birthday dates, which will appear shortly.

I am sure that there is a pal of yours who has not heard of this Birthday Club. You will be doing your Editor a good turn, and also your chum, by bringing the Club to his notice. Show him this paper, and persuade him, if it is necessary—though I am sure it will not be—to purchase a copy of this week's POPULAR. He will then have the chance of joining, and also participating in the wonderful gift scheme.

all right. You'll be riding the trails again in a few weeks."

"A few weeks!" muttered Casey. "And when'll the Rio Kid be by that time? This is sure hard luck!"

The Kid laughed, and fingered the bandage on his face.

"You figure on gunning after the Rio Kid when you get going?" he asked.

"Sure!"

Again the Kid laughed. "You've saved my life, feller, twice over," said Casey earnestly. "I ain't forgetting a thing like that. I reckon you've got to save it again—I'll never get out of these hills without help." He glanced at the motionless body of his horse. "I'm on foot now, I reckon."

"Nope!" said the Kid. "I guess I'm putting you on my cayuse, to hit the trail for the nearest camp. I guess Red Rock is the nearest shembang where you can get a doctor. They say cow-punchers can't walk; but I reckon I've got to hoof it twenty miles alongside my critter. You'll sure have to hold on to the saddle."

"You're the whitest man I ever met," said Casey.

"Oh, shucks!" said the Kid laughing. In the rising sunlight, he fixed the wounded man in the saddle of the black-muzzled mustang. Casey was weak, and a little dizzy, but he was able to hold on and ride. The Kid walked beside the horse, as they moved down the canyon, back the way the boy puncher had ridden the previous day. A true cow-man hates to walk, and the Kid hated it as much as any other puncher; but he stepped out cheerily and briskly. Hours on rocky trails passed on leaden wings; the Kid was fatigued, though he did not show it; and the wounded man swayed in the saddle, and only the Kid's sinewy grip, time and again, kept him from falling.

The noontday sun was blazing down on the hills, when the Kid led the grey mustang at last into Red Rock, and the wounded Texan was carried into the shack hotel, and the camp doctor sent for.

Leaving Casey to the doc, the Kid strolled out into the camp.

When he came back to the shack hotel, he went to Casey's room and found the man from Texas looking pale, but evidently better. Casey gave him a rueful look.

"Doc says I'm fixed here for a week at least," he said. "I guess I owe it to you that I ain't fixed for keeps, feller. I guess I ain't grumbling, but it's sure hard luck."

The Kid nodded absently.

"You hitting the trail?" asked Casey.

"Yep! Arizona ain't healthy for me," explained the Kid. "I've been mixed up in a rookus down in the Gila Mountains, and there are sure a lot of pilgrims gunning after me. It's me for Nevada and the cow country. I reckon you're fixed all O.K. here?"

"That's all right," Casey hesitated. "I'd sure like to know the name of the galoot that pulled me out of the claws of the Judson gang. You've let on you're travelling as Smith; but—"

THE FAMOUS COMPANION PAPERS!

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"I guess I'm going to tell you," said the Kid soberly, "and then, if you want, I'll tell you where to look for me in Nevada. I'm sure going to put you wise about the Rio Kid and Two-Gun Casey. I brought you into this camp wounded on my horse, and I'm telling you that the Rio Kid did the same thing for Two-Gun Casey, back in the Frio country in Texas. The Kid picked him up in the chaparral, badly hurt, and toted him to camp, and cared for him and brought him round."

"Shucks!" said Casey incredulously. "Frozen truth," said the Kid quietly. "There had been trouble between them before, in a cattle camp on the Pecos. The Kid was ready to forget it, but your uncle wasn't. He was sure a bad hombre. He sold the Kid to the sheriff of Frio, and fixed it up for the sheriff to find the Kid sitting by his camp-fire, and rope him in or fill him with lead."

Casey's pale face grew paler, and his eyes fixed on the Kid with a curiously intent stare.

"That was the how of it," went on the Kid. "I'm giving you straight goods, pardner. The Kid was wise to the game; and he fixed up Two-Gun Casey, put his silver-nuggets on the galoot's head and left him to take his chance with the sheriff—same as he meant for the Kid. I reckon that was a fair break."

"I ain't believing it," muttered Casey. "I know he was a bad man, but he wasn't that pizen mean." His eyes gleamed at the Kid. "How do you know? Spill it!"

Slowly, quietly, the Kid unpeeled the bandage from his face.

Casey's eyes gleamed at him. The handsome, sunburnt face, with the scratch of the yucca thorn across it, was revealed.

Casey panted.

"The Kid!" he breathed huskily.

"The Rio Kid!"

"That very galoot!" said the Kid quietly. "The galoot you was gunning after, pardner, on account of a pizen

mean coyote who got just what he wanted from the sheriff of Frio."

Casey's hand groped along his belt. "Forget it," said the Kid. "If you're still for trouble, I'll tell you where to pick me up in Nevada—when you're fit and well, and can handle a gun. You couldn't shoot now worth a Continental red cent."

Casey licked his dry lips.

"You've said it," he muttered. "And you're the Rio Kid—the fire-bug I've been trailing all the way across New Mexico—the outlaw that's wanted by half the sheriffs in Texas. And you've saved my life, and stood by me like a white man." He breathed hard. "Why, I reckon a word to the hombres in this camp would bring a crowd on your back—"

The Kid laughed. "You ain't spilling that word!" he remarked.

"You'd shoot me up to stop me—"

"I guess I ain't shooting up a wounded man that can't handle a gun," said the Kid disdainfully. "Shout out all you want—I guess there ain't enough galoots in this camp to keep me from hitting the trail."

There was a long silence. "I guess if your face hadn't been covered, there would have been shooting on sight, when I met you in the hills yesterday," said Casey, at last. "But— You're a white man, and I'm believing what you tell me."

He held out his hand. The Rio Kid gripped it. "I reckon you was white," he said. "I'm sure glad you don't want to know where to look for me in Nevada."

Casey grinned faintly. "I'm hitting the trail back to Texas when I get fixed for riding," he said. "And I reckon I shall forget to tell the galoots there that I met the Rio Kid in this country. You're a white man, Kid, and I'd sure be glad if you could ride back to Frio with me."

The Kid smiled and shook his head. "I reckon it would be the long jump for me," he said. "When you get back to Frio, feller, don't believe all they tell you about the Rio Kid. He sure ain't the bad egg they make out along the Rio Grande."

The Kid's boots and spurs clattered out of the shack hotel, and he unhitched the black-muzzled mustang from the rail and mounted. From a window a hand waved him farewell—the hand of the man who had trailed him from Texas to hunt him for his life. The Rio Kid waved back cheerily as he rode down the street. The man from Texas, with a strange look on his face, watched the graceful rider, till he vanished in the folds of the hills; hitting the trail once more for Nevada and the camp of Horse-Thief.

(You'll meet this amazing Boy Outlaw, the Rio Kid, in another breathlessly thrilling tale of the roaring Wild West next week, entitled: "The Hired Man at Horse Thief!")



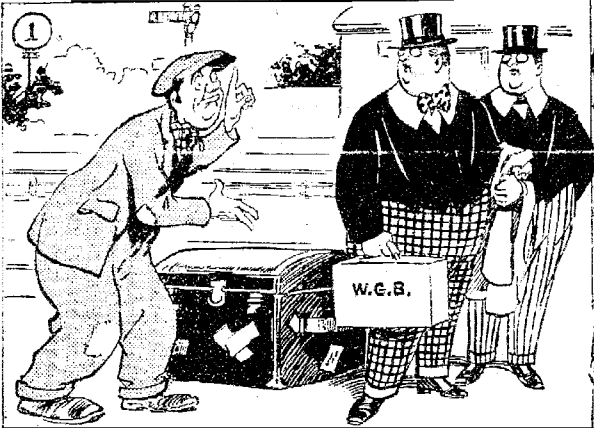


The BUNTER BROTHERS

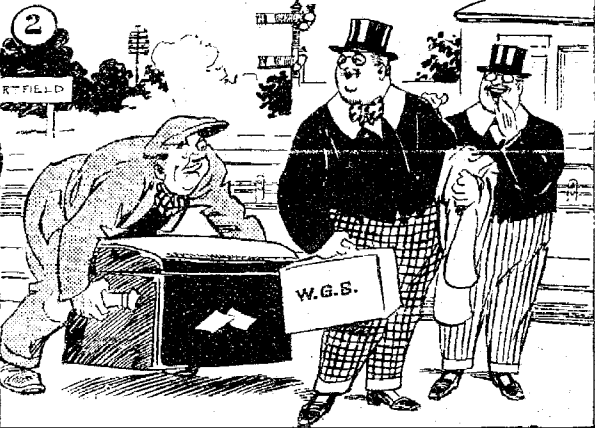


— Merry Mirthmakers. —

THE MAN WHO WOULDN'T TAKE "NO" FOR AN ANSWER!



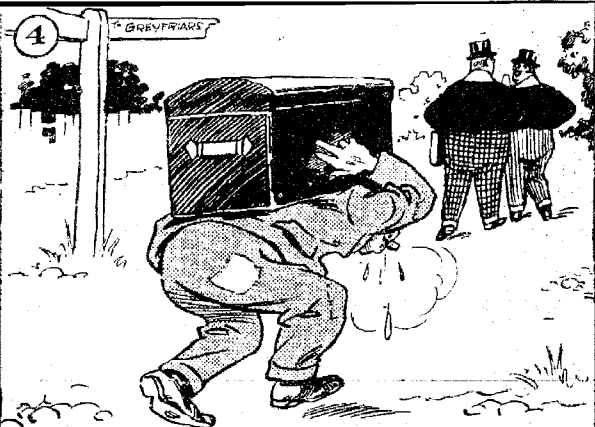
"Let me carry yer trunk, mister," said Jerry the odd-job laddie to Billy and Sammy Bunter. Those two worthies had just embarked from the slow-motion express at their little, old station. "Trunk?" said Billy. "Oh, I see, that trunk!" "Yus, do let me carry that there trunk," persisted the man.



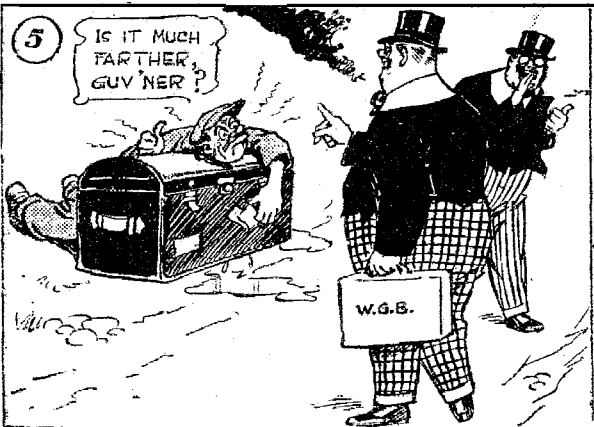
"Well, you can if you like," said Billy Bunter. "But I shouldn't if I were you." "Oh, you're thinking of the weight, eh?" grinned Jerry as he bent down and hoisted the hefty trunk. "Gee! This ain't 'eavy, bless yer." "But really, you know— Well please yourself!" said Bunter.



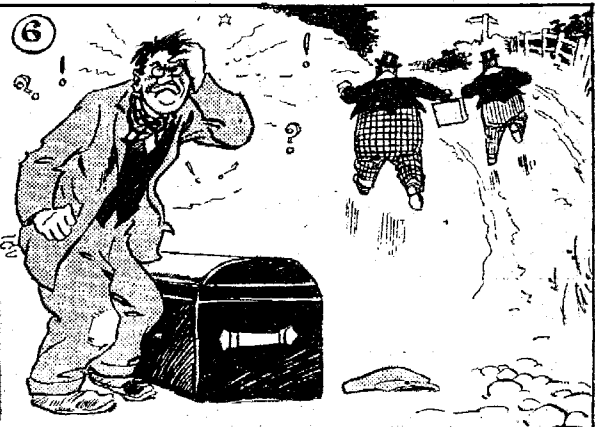
"Well, let's get going," said Billy, and he turned and left the station with Sammy. "Hope it ain't fur," muttered Jerry as he trudged along the road behind the Bunter Brothers to Greyfriars. "This 'ere is getting 'cavier and 'eavier."



One mile passed and the odd-job Johnny began to bend almost double under the weight of that big, black trunk—and still the Bunter Brothers trotted along, chuckling loudly. "Wonder what them himps are cackling about," mused Jerry.



Crash! "Ow! Can't go another linc!" groaned Jerry, and the trunk went with a crash to the ground. "Is it much farther, guv'ner?" "Ha, ha, ha! Miles!" chuckled Billy. "But really, I warned you not to come, didn't I—



"Because, you see, that trunk isn't mine at all!" "Wha-a-a-at!" Then the trunk-carrier remembered Bunter's warning at the station, and he ground his teeth with rage. And Billy and Sammy, noting danger signals, beat a hasty retreat down the lane.

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The RIO KID!



by **RALPH REDWAY**

ANOTHER ROARING LONG COMPLETE TALE OF THE WEST, FEATURING THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Lodging for the Night!

WHEN the Rio Kid rode down the hill to Horse-Thief, he looked as much unlike the handsome, natty Kid, as it was possible for a fellow to look unlike himself. The Kid had roughed it in the hills of Nevada; but that was not the reason. He had roughed it often enough in the old days on the llanos of Texas, and had turned out handsome and neat and as clean as a new pin, in spite of the dust of the plains and the grime of the chaparral. But the Kid had hit a heap of trouble on the trail to Horse-Thief, and the signs of it were thick upon him.

The half-healed scar of a deep scratch from a yucca thorn marred his good looks. He was clothed in mud as in a garment. There had been heavy rains in the Sierra Nevada, and the Horse-Thief River had overflowed its banks, and for miles the Kid had ridden through a mud swamp. Rain was coming down hard, and the Kid was drenched. Wet and muddy, tired, and not in the best of tempers, the Kid looked anything but the dandy cow-puncher of the Double-Bar Ranch.

He had allowed that he would ride into the town of Horse-Thief in the afternoon; but the rain and the swamping of the trail had washed out that programme. Long after the sun had disappeared over the sierras, he was still wearily following the trail down from the hills. He no longer hoped to pick up

the lights of Horse-Thief in the distance. It was long past the hour when all good citizens went to their bunks.

The black-muzzled mustang, with all his hardy endurance, was sorely fatigued, and plugged on slowly and stolidly through the rain. The night was as black as the skin of a Louisiana coon. Only the glimmer of rain broke the darkness. The Kid almost gasped with relief at the sight of a glimmering light far off in the night.

He knew that he was not near Horse-Thief yet. The light was burning in some outlying cabin or ranch-house. Whatever the place was, it was a shelter for the night, at least—a shelter from the drenching rain. The Kid pushed on more cheerily, and the grey mustang bucked up a little, the black muzzle no longer drooping so despondently.

Through the mud and the rain the Kid arrived at last at a gate in a wire fence, and halted. Gates and fences were anathema to the Kid, bred on the boundless plains, where a puncher might ride for sixty miles without dismounting. But the Kid was far from the Rio Grande now. He hitched the mustang to the fence, opened the gate, and strode up the path towards the building that

was hidden in darkness, from which the single light gleamed at midnight.

He found himself in a timber porch, beside which was the window from which the light shone through a thin curtain. He groped for the door in the gloom, and rapped on it with the butt of his quirt.

Knock!

Savo for the swish of the ceaseless rain the night was silent and still. The crash of the quirt rang almost like thunder on the solid pine-wood door.

There was a sound of movement within the building.

Footsteps—light footsteps, which the Kid knew to be those of a woman—approached the door from within.

The Kid heard a bolt withdrawn, and the door was opened.

Light glimmered out, and in the lighted doorway a slim and graceful girl stood.

"You've come back, then!" said a voice, naturally soft, but now sharpened by anger.

The Kid swept off his drenched Stetson.

The sight of the graceful figure in the doorway had startled him. He had expected to see some hard-featured settler's wife; some hapless woman worn into harshness and grimness by the hardships of the frontier. The girl was a great surprise to him. Before he could speak, the voice went on, in startled tones, as a pair of blue eyes scanned him:

"You! You're not Hank?"

The Kid could not help grinning.

"No, ma'am," he answered politely.

"I guess I'm not Hank!"



He made a backward step the next moment.

The girl had picked up a rifle from a hook on the wall beside the door, and it seemed to leap to her shoulder. The muzzle bore full upon the Rio Kid. The girl's finger was steady on the trigger, and the barrel was as steady as a rock.

"Stand where you are!"

The musical voice was very sharp now.

The Rio Kid grinned again. He was quick with a gun himself—too quick, some of the sheriffs in Texas had thought. He could admire the same quality in others. The girl in the lonely cabin had lost no time in getting him covered with the rifle.

"Your game, ma'am," said the Kid pleasantly. "Shall I put 'em up?"

And, without waiting for a reply, he cheerfully elevated his hands above his head.

The girl looked at him searchingly over the rifle. If she was alone in the lonely cabin, as the Kid guessed, she was on her guard.

"You're not Hank?" she repeated, scanning him.

"Nope!" agreed the Kid. "If you're expecting a galoot named Hank, miss, I'm sure sorry that my name ain't Hank. But it ain't."

"Who are you?"

"I'm generally called the Kid when I'm to home," answered the Rio Kid good-humouredly. "No cause for alarm, ma'am. I wouldn't hurt a fly, let alone a woman. You're sure handy with the rifle, miss."

"What do you want here?"

"Not a bullet from that rifle, miss, if it ain't troubling you too much," said the Kid. "I never allowed I should be disturbing a lone woman, or I sure wouldn't have knocked at your door. I guess I was going to ask for shelter from the rain; but I wouldn't advise you to take a stranger in, in this lonesome place. But if you ain't any objection, ma'am, I'll bed down in a shed or a barn."

The girl scanned him keenly.

"You're a stranger here?"

"You've got it in once, miss. From Arizona last," answered the Kid.

"Hoboes are not wanted around Horse-Thief."

The Kid started.

He knew that he must look considerable of a picture, wet, and splashed from head to foot with mud. But it was a shock to be taken for a tramp. Still, he could not blame the girl of the lonely cabin for her mistake. An untidy, muddy stranger knocking at a door at midnight had to expect to be regarded with suspicion. Certainly the Kid did not look like a man who had a fat roll in his belt, and a hundred thousand dollars tucked away in a safe place.

"Ma'am," said the Kid, "I ain't exactly a hobo. Jest a galoot looking for shelter from the rain. But if you're scared, miss, I guess I'll hit the trail pronto, and wade on."

The Kid stepped back.

"Stay!" said the girl.

The Kid stayed.

"You can bed down in the barn, stranger. You'll find the door on the latch. You can come around for breakfast in the kitchen in the morning. Good-night"

"Good-night, ma'am!"

The door closed on the Kid almost before he had replied. He heard the bolt carefully shot.

"Well, carry me hum to die!" murmured the Kid.

The Popular.—No. 492.

He walked back to his mustang, and unhitched him. In the darkness it was not easy to find the barn; but the Kid groped his way. Glad enough was the worn and weary Kid to hear the rain pattering on a roof above his head. In the darkness he found beds of straw for himself and his mustang, and that was all the Kid wanted.

For a few minutes after he had bedded down in warm straw the Kid wondered who the girl was, who Hank was, and in what strange quarters fortune had landed him. But only for a few minutes, then he was fast asleep, breathing steadily, to the accompaniment of the lashing rain on the roof of the barn.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Chance for the Kid!

THE Rio Kid stepped out of the barn into a world of sunshine.

He stood and looked about him, breathing in deep the keen air from the sierra.

The barn stood at some distance from the house; next to it was a horse corral, empty. Further on was a chicken-run, and fowls ran about cackling in the dawn. The house itself was a small building; a cabin built of timber, with not more than four or five rooms in it. But it was cleanly painted; there was a well-kept garden; all his surroundings, though poor enough, showed the attention of a careful hand. There were four fields under cultivation, though the Kid did not know enough about agriculture to know with what they were planted.

It was a small homestead, such as the Kid had seen hundreds of times up and down the West.

"Nesters!" muttered the Kid, with a grimace.

In Texas, where the "nesters" were creeping over the cattle country, fencing and wiring and planting, the Kid, like all true cow-punchers, hated them. But he was in Nevada now, and only a couple of miles out of a frontier town; and he expected to find fences, and gates, and barbed wire, and the whole bag of tricks. The Kid was only passing through, to reach the cow country further north, and he had been anxious to ride into the cow country. Now he was not sure that he was in a hurry. Somehow, he was not keen on hitting the trail and riding away from that lonely cabin—he hardly knew why!

There was no sign of the girl—no sign of anyone else. Hank—if the unknown Hank had returned after all—was not visible. The Kid washed himself at the horse-trough; he unfastened his slicker pack and performed his toilet in the barn, before his little hand-mirror—the Kid was very particular upon such matters as these. It still rankled in his mind that the girl had taken him for a hobo. The Kid was too fair-minded to blame her for the mistake; but he was keen to set it right. No one came near him while he was thus occupied; and it was a very different Kid who emerged from the barn—a handsome puncher who could not possibly have been mistaken for a hobo, even on a dark, rainy night.

The girl had told him that he could come around to the kitchen for breakfast; and as he had not supped on the previous night, the idea of breakfast was very welcome to the Kid. Besides, he wanted to see again the blue eyes that had scanned him so searchingly. Somehow, those eyes haunted the Kid's thoughts. He hardly knew why. The Kid greatly admired all women, even to a rugged old Indian squaw, chewing

tobacco, the Kid would have been kind and gentle; all women were to him a superior order of beings, whom it was a man's business to respect, and to defend with his life if need were. But his respect and admiration were given impartially to the whole sex; and no individual woman had ever drawn a special glance from him before. Now he was thinking of a pair of blue eyes, to his own great astonishment.

The kitchen door, at the back of the timber cabin, stood wide open to the sunshine.

The Kid approached it rather timidly.

Timidity was so new to the Rio Kid, that it further astonished him to realise that he was timid.

He glanced in, and raised his hat as a pair of blue eyes turned on him.

"Good-morning, ma'am!" faltered the Kid, still more astonished to hear his own voice falter.

The girl looked at him. For the moment she did not recognise him, thanks to the toilet in the barn.

"Oh!" she exclaimed suddenly.

"You're the hobo!"

The Kid coloured.

"A puncher, ma'am!" he said.

"You're late for breakfast!"

"I'm powerful sorry, ma'am. But——"

The Kid rather repented him of the time spent in the barn on his toilet, necessary as it had been.

"Come in!"

In the daylight, evidently the girl was not afraid. Her manner was quite matter of fact. The Kid stepped in, she gave him a stool at the table, and placed breakfast before him.

"I guess you've fed this morning already, ma'am!" ventured the Kid. He had hoped that the blue eyes would breakfast with him.

"Hours ago."

"Oh!"

"You're not eating your breakfast."

"Oh!"

The Kid ate.

The girl sat down on the opposite side of the table, scanning him. She seemed interested in the Kid; he could not help seeing that, and it gave him a strange little flutter that almost spoiled his appetite, good and substantial as the breakfast was. The improvement in his looks had obviously made a difference in the girl's opinion of him. But when she spoke, and revealed the cause of her interest, the Kid was abashed again.

"I can see you're not a hobo now," she said. "Excuse my mistake. You're a puncher?"

"Sure!"

"Not on a ranch at present?"

"Nope!"

"Looking for work?"

The Kid paused.

The hundred thousand dollars he had cleaned up in the Gila Mountains made cow-punching a matter of choice with the Kid. But it was not his cue to tell the story of his adventures in the gold country of Arizona. Trouble, as usual, had dogged the steps of the Kid, in Arizona as elsewhere; and the story of the Gambusino Mine was a closed chapter.

"I guess I'm heading for the cow country, ma'am!" he answered at last. "There's always room for a good man in the cow country."

"Have you ever worked on a homestead?"

The Kid breathed hard.

Such a question, to a cow-puncher, was almost enough to make his gun leap from the holster, if asked by a man. But the Kid answered with great politeness.

"I ain't, ma'am—not yet."

"I've a reason for asking," said the girl. "My hired man has deserted me—he cleared off suddenly, yesterday, without a word. That was why I was sitting up so late, hoping that he would come back."

"The durned son of a gun!" exclaimed the Kid indignantly. That any man, hired or otherwise, could have deserted those steady, clear blue eyes, seemed incomprehensible to the Rio Kid.

The girl smiled slightly.

"I guess I want to see that galoot," said the Kid hotly. "I guess his nearest relative wouldn't know his face when I was through with him. The dog-goned gink!"

"If you want a job as a hired man I can give you one," said the girl calmly.

The Kid's heart leapt so suddenly, that the boiled bacon almost choked him.

"You!" he ejaculated.

"Yes. Hank will not be coming back now—and if he did, I should fire him. I'm alone here until—until someone comes whom I'm expecting later. I can see now that you're not a hobo." She smiled, the most fascinating smile that the Rio Kid had ever seen. "Your face looks honest—"

"Thank you, ma'am!" said the Kid humbly; and wondering what Sheriff Watson, of Frio, would have said to that.

"I think I know a man who can be trusted," said the girl composedly. "If you care to take my hired man's place, I'll be glad. Labour is not easy to get in these parts, especially as the wages are not high—in this case."

"I sure don't care about wages much, ma'am," said the Kid eagerly. "Jest the barn to bed down in and food for a galoot and his horse—"

"I paid Hank three dollars a day!" "Suits me, ma'am!" said the Kid. Had the blue eyes said three cents, the Kid's answer would have been the same.

"Then I will try you for a week," said the girl, in a businesslike tone. "I guess you'll pan out better than Hank. He was a poor fish anyway. You can work?"

"Try me, ma'am!" said the Kid fervently.

"Come out as soon as you've finished your breakfast."

The girl went out by the doorway, light and graceful as a fawn. The Kid's eyes followed her till she disappeared; then returned to his unfinished breakfast.

The breakfast remained unfinished. The Kid was lost in meditation—wondering meditation.

Had any man on the Double-Bar Ranch ever suggested that the Kid would ever be working as a hired man for a nester, the Kid certainly would have pulled a gun on him, and made him eat his words.



THE KID CHIPS IN! There was the stranger—and Miss Janet was in his arms! The Kid grasped the man and dragged him back. He was a powerful man, but in the Kid's grip he sprawled backwards, and went crashing to the floor. "You dog!" hissed the Kid. (See Chapter 4.)

And here he was jumping with both feet at a chance of working as a hired man for a nester.

He was perplexed.

As a hired man he could stay within range of a pair of blue eyes; on any other terms he could not. That was why the Rio Kid had jumped at the unexpected chance. His hands, clean and white from the cowboy gloves, were to be hardened by rough toil— toil that was going to be a pleasure to him. He wondered and was perplexed. He was still wondering, staring at his unfinished breakfast, when a voice— sweet, but very firm and businesslike— broke in upon his meditations.

"Are you ready?"

The Kid jumped up so suddenly that the stool upon which he was seated went crashing.

"Yep, I guess so, ma'am."

"Come, then."

The Rio Kid came.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Hired Man!

THE KID leaned back on his hoe and mopped his brow. Perspiration ran down the brow of the Kid, and it damped his thick hair. Having mopped his brow, he looked at his hands. The Kid's hands had always been soft and white; the cowboy gloves had protected them; and now— After a week as hired man at Horse-Thief they were blistered, rough, and raw. The Kid wondered whether their present state would affect his shooting, if he had need to pull a gun. Not that he was likely to need to pull a gun now. His life at the homestead was peaceful—so peaceful that the Kid marvelled that it was he, Kid Carfax, who was leading that life. He was almost forgetting how to pull a gun—but he was learning how to pull weeds.

Miss Janet—her name was Janet Grango—was not a hard taskmaster; she was kindness itself. But she expected a hired man to earn his hire, as was only just. The Kid earned it by the

sweat of his brow; and sometimes as he laboured he laughed—laughed at himself. As he wielded the hoe, he wondered what the old bunch on the Double-Bar would have said could they have seen him now, hoeing like a peon. And was thankful that they could not see him—thankful for every long mile that lay between him and Texas. Hoeing was a man's job, but it was a job the Kid had never handled. He had lived in the saddle, and he hated to find himself afoot. And hoeing was a game of the nesters who were creeping over the cow country, eating up the plains with cultivation. And the Rio Kid was working as a hired man for a nester, because that nester was a girl with blue eyes, and the blue eyes had worked havoc with the Kid's unwary heart.

He realised that now.

He realised that if the blue eyes smiled upon him he would say a long farewell to the sierra and the llano, to the camp in the chaparral, to the long, long trails by blazing sun or glinting star, to the free, roving life—to all that had hitherto been his joy. Such power was there in a pair of blue eyes. But he realised, too, that to Miss Janet he was simply a hired man—just a hired man, and nothing more. A cleanly hired man, an industrious hired man, a respectful and reliable hired man; but just a hired man who worked on the homestead, and dug and trenched and pulled weeds, and hoed—hoed—hoed! Still, it was a long trail to a girl's heart, and the Kid did not expect to ride that trail in a day, or a week, or a month. He served Janet faithfully, and found kindness, at least, in her eyes; and he saw her every day—hours every day—and that was all that the Kid could ask, so far.

But it was a great relief when Hank and his friends came.

Miss Janet farmed that little holding capably. With one hired man to aid her, she farmed it well, and sold poultry and eggs and vegetables to the men of

Horse-Thief. Her father had been a farmer, the Kid gathered; she was an orphan now. She was clever and capable, and she made the homestead pay, while others larger in the vicinity were dismally impecunious. The Kid guessed that Miss Janet was "some" girl!

That her hired man had a fat roll in his belt Miss Janet suspected no more than she suspected that he had ridden out of Texas with half the sheriffs of the Lone Star State gnashing their teeth when he eluded them.

Heavy lay that knowledge on the Kid's mind now.

What would she think of the outlaw of the Rio Grande—the Rio Kid, whose hand was against every man, and against whom every man's hand was raised?

For, of course, if he spoke out, he would have to tell her.

The Kid was not the man to lie or delude. The truth came as naturally to his lips as the air he breathed. He would have to tell her; and he could tell her, in truth, that he had been driven into outlawry by no fault of his own; but he would have to tell her that he was outlawed. Still, the roll in his belt was a comfort. Much less than that roll, he figured, would square matters with the law. The Kid was young, but he had seen law bought and sold in Western courts. Let it all go, if need were, leaving him with his two strong hands to work—if the blue eyes smiled on him.

But the blue eyes met his every day clearly, unsuspectingly, without the slightest suspicion of the Kid's thoughts and feelings. But the Kid was patient in riding a long trail.

But he was glad when Hank came. He was leaning on the hoe, mopping his perspiring brow, when Hank and his friends came up the trail from Horse-Thief town. Once before Hank had looked in. Hank had had a three days' "bender" in Horse-Thief, and then he had come back to his job, to find his job gone, a pair of blue eyes eyeing him sternly, and a finger pointing to the trail. Hank had gone back to Horse-Thief empurpling the atmosphere with "ouss" words. Now he had come back with a couple of friends, picked up from the boot-leg saloons of Horse-Thief, to argue the matter out with the new hired man. Hank had no idea of harming Miss Janet. Moreover, Hank knew that all Horse-Thief would have risen as one man to lynch him had he harmed a hair of her pretty head. Hank had come to lay out the new hired man; and, having had a glimpse of the Kid in the fields, he had sagely brought a couple of friends to help him do it.

The Kid's face lighted up.

He dropped the hoe, and regretted for a moment that his gun-belt was hanging in the barn. In time of trouble the Kid was rather like a lost man without his guns. But there was no time to get the guns without running for them, and the Kid would not have run, under the eyes of the three galeots from Horse-Thief, to save his life, or a dozen lives. The Kid stood at attention, smiling—a rather wicked smile—as Hank and his friends came across the fields to him. From the house came Miss Janet, her eyes gleaming under the wide brim of her hat, and her rifle in her hand. Miss Janet knew that the three toughs had come to "soak" her new hired man, and she was prompt to intervene.

"Leave them to me, ma'am," said the Kid beseechingly. "I guess I want a change from the hoeing, miss."

"Three to one!" snapped Miss Janet.

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"I guess they'll be pie to me, miss," beseeched the Kid, quite dismayed at the idea of there being no "rookus," after all. "Don't you chip in, miss. I sure can handle the whole caboodle."

The Kid had to make good his words, for Hank and his companions, without stopping to parley, rushed right at him. Miss Janet stood uncertain, the butt of her rifle in the grass. But her uncertainty soon disappeared, and she smiled.

The Kid fairly let himself go. After a week of digging and hoeing, of mending fences and carrying water, feeding chickens and cutting cabbages, this was sheer joy to him.

If the three toughs expected the Kid to dodge or flee, they were in error. The Kid jumped to meet them. They closed round him; and had they been able to carry out their intentions, the hired man at Horse-Thief would have been left a broken wreck on the ground—punched, gouged, stamped, throttled. But a fist that seemed like a chunk of solid iron drove into Hank's face and lifted him off his feet, and laid him on his back, half-stunned at the start; and he lay staring up at the Sierra Nevada, while the other two piled on the Kid and dragged him down.

The Kid's eyes were blazing with the joy of combat. This was life again, after a week as a hired man.

Two powerful toughs, known all around Horse-Thief as "bad men," had the Kid in their grip; but the Kid did not crumple in their grip as they expected. It seemed to the two toughs of Horse-Thief that they had corralled a panther wild from the sierra. The Kid gave grasp for grasp, blow for blow. A man dropped at his feet, gasping and dazed; the other swung off the ground, with a yell of terror, in the Kid's powerful arms, and earth and sky reeled about him, till he was flung to the earth across his comrade.

Hank was sitting up in the soil newly hoed by the hired man, blinking. He did not seem to know what had come to him. His friends lay panting on the earth—panting, gasping, groaning. They picked themselves up at last, and ran for the trail. They did not even give the new hired man a look; they lighted out wildly, and the dust of the trail swallowed them up. They had had enough of the hired man.

Hank staggered up. He did not run—his hand was groping for the revolver at the back of his trousers.

The Kid laughed. Hank was not quick on the draw. Had the Kid been belted with his guns, and had he thought it worth while to pull, Hank might have been riddled with lead before he got his gun out. But the Kid had no gun, and Hank's revolver was in his grip.

Like a panther the Kid leaped forward.

Up went the revolver, but the Kid had the rising arm in his grasp, and the bullet, as it flew, flew skyward. A second more—Hank never knew how—the six-gun was wrenched from his hand and the muzzle of it was pressed to his chest, the Kid's finger on the trigger, the Kid's sunburnt, handsome face grinning over it.

"Let up, pard!" said the Kid pleasantly.

Hank spat out a curse. The Kid's look became quite ugly, and the trigger rose a fraction. His eyes gleamed over the gun like steel.

"Don't!" cried Miss Janet.

"I guess it's your say-so, miss," assented the Kid.

He tossed the revolver into the waters

of the Horse-Thief River, that flowed by Miss Janet's fence.

"I guess you want to hit the trail, feller," said the Kid. "I guess the sooner you hit the trail, the better it will be for your health. Pronto!"

And as Hank paused the Kid grasped him, and the former hired man went spinning into the water after his gun, and he disappeared there with a mighty splash.

"Oh!" gasped Miss Janet.

Hank crawled out on the opposite side of the river. He did not seem to care for the Kid's side of it. He limped away, quenching water, and vanished from sight across the alfalfa fields.

The Kid smiled. Then he blushed as he turned to meet the eyes of Miss Janet fixed on him. The Kid had thoroughly enjoyed that rookus; much more than he enjoyed his labours as a hired man. But he was afraid of what Miss Janet might think.

"You see, miss—" stammered the Kid lamey.

But the girl smiled.

"I guess Hank won't come back again in a hurry," she said. "I guess he has had a jugful more than he wanted. I'm glad you can take care of yourself."

"I sure always could do that, miss," smiled the Kid. And then, greatly daring, encouraged by the kind smile, he added: "And I guess if you'd let me take care of you, Miss Janet—"

The girl's merry laugh interrupted him.

"I guess I don't need it." She had not caught the Kid's hidden meaning. She nodded to him, and went back into the cabin.

The Kid picked up the hoe.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. The Kid Hits the Trail!

THUD, thud, thud!
Horse's hoofs rang on the trail.

Two more weeks had passed, and the Lired man at Horse-Thief was still in Janet's service, still working in the fields and the barns, more than earning his keep.

Janet had told him more than once that she had never seen such a hired man; that she guessed she was lucky when he came along to Horse-Thief and stopped at her homestead. Perhaps it was because other matters occupied her mind that she did not divine the cause of the hired man's unremitting service and loyal devotion. And until he should see understanding in her eyes the Kid did not dare to speak. He who would never have shrunk from half a dozen levelled six-guns, was daunted by a pair of blue eyes.

Thud, thud, thud!

The Kid was mending a fence along the trail when the horseman rode out from Horse-Thief and came clattering up to the homestead. Since the affair with Hank and his friends the Kid worked with his gun-belt on, and as the horseman dashed up to the gate, he straightened up, and his hand dropped on a gun. A young man with a sunburnt face and a merry eye pulled rein at the gate and gave him a cheery nod.

"Hallo!"

"Hallo!" returned the Kid, his hand leaving the gun. A gun was not wanted.

"Miss Janet at home?"

"Sure."

"I guess you're a new man here," said the horseman, scanning the Kid.

"New hired man," answered the Kid compositely, wondering a little who the rider was.

(Continued on page 12.)

of bitterness and hatred in his heart as he mooched beneath the elms.

Three forms loomed up before him, and he made no attempt to avoid them. Those three forms belonged to Sir Montie Tregellis-West, Tommy Watson, and myself. We were, as a matter of fact, looking for Pitt. We had no idea then as to the fate he had met at the hands of Christine & Co.

"Somebody here, dear boys," remarked Montie. "I say, old fellow, have you seen anything of Pitt?"

"Yes, he's here," said Pitt calmly.

"The very chap I wanted to see!" I said, striding forward and facing Pitt squarely. "I want just five minutes with you, Pitt. What have you got to say for yourself? What do you mean by playing that foul trick upon our boat?"

"Don't be a fool!" snapped Pitt roughly. "What's the good of making a fuss about it? I thought I was doing Christine a good turn. No harm in taking a rise out of you fellows, is there?"

"Doing Christine a good turn!" I repeated blankly. "Did you tell Christine that?"

"Yes, I did!"

"And what did he say?"

"What's it got to do with you what he said?" snarled Pitt. "Go away, confound you! You're an interfering brute, that's what you are! What's it got to do with you? Who told you to fish up that bowl?"

"THE RIO KID!"

(Continued from page 6.)

More than one man had ridden out from Horse-Thief to the homestead to deal for garden produce; and also, as the Kid knew well enough, to see a pair of blue eyes. He had not seen this rider before; and at the second glance he noted the signs of long travel. The horseman had come through Horse-Thief from a greater distance—a much greater distance. He had been long on the trail, the Kid could see; yet he had ridden rapidly and eagerly up to the gate. Obviously he had been there before—he knew the place and its owner.

He dismounted, hitched his horse at the gate, as the Rio Kid had hitched the black-muzzled mustang that rainy night three weeks ago, and tramped up the path to the cabin. The Kid resumed mending the fence, and the tap of his hammer echoed through the quiet afternoon.

A minute more and he dropped the hammer, leaping up. From the cabin came a cry—a cry from Miss Janet.

It was a startled cry; it might have meant anything, from surprise to alarm. To the Kid it meant that he was wanted in the cabin just as fast as he could get there. The stranger had entered the cabin; the door in the porch stood wide open. A panther leaping on his prey, a red-skinned brave springing at the throat of his enemy, was not so swift as the Rio Kid as he bounded to the cabin—his gun leaping to his hand, his eyes blazing death.

There was the stranger, and Miss Janet was in his arms—his arms were closed round her!

The Kid's left hand grasped the man and dragged him back. He was a powerful man, but in the Kid's grasp he sprawled backwards, helpless as a baby, and went crashing to the floor. The Kid's gun looked him in the face as he sprawled.

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I stared at him wonderingly.

"What's it got to do with me?" I repeated. "I'll show you! You're a scheming cad, and if you'd had your way this plot would never have come to light. Thank goodness, I found it out!"

"Oh, hang you!" growled Pitt, turning away. "It's a pity you can't mind your own business. But I can't expect anything else, I suppose, considering that you were originally picked up in the gutter by a low-down detective!"

I simply shook with fury. I had been quite prepared to let Pitt down lightly. But those words of his stung me into instant action. With a jerk of my hand I swung him round.

Smack!

My fist struck his mouth with terrific force, and he went down with a crash.

"If you get up again I'll give you another!" I said, breathing hard. "And if you ever say anything like that again, I'll thrash you until you can't see!"

Pitt scrambled to his feet, trembling violently.

"Try it on now!" he hissed. "You're a gutter-brat, and you were picked up by a rotten, blackmailing detective—"

Pitt didn't get any further. He lunged at me while he spoke, but I got in my blow first. He fought like a tiger, and for several minutes we were at it hard as we could go. Although a cad of the first water, Pitt was certainly not lacking in pluck. He stood up to me without flinching.

"You dog!" hissed the Kid.

"What the thunder—"

"Stop!" shrieked Miss Janet. She was between the Kid and the man who sprawled and gasped. "What do you mean? How dare you?"

Stupefied, the Kid gazed at her. The gun sagged in his hand. Her eyes blazed anger at him.

"Miss!" he stammered. "Miss! I—I thought—"

"It's my new hired man, Frank," said Janet. The anger passed from her face as she realized the mistake the Kid had made, and her cheeks dimpled, and her laugh rippled. "Don't mind him; he had never seen you before. He must have thought—" She broke off, laughing till the tears came into her blue eyes.

And the stranger, grinning, picked himself up.

The Kid stared at them. His gun was in its holster now. He began to understand. This man who had kissed Miss Janet under his eyes—this man was not a "fresh" galoot from whom Miss Janet was to be defended. He was not a dog-goned guy to be soaked to a pulp. He was—What was he? She called him Frank! Who in thunder was Frank? The Kid knew, in a flash of perception, without being told. The Kid knew in one sharp, bitter moment that the biggest fool in Nevada was the hired man at Horse-Thief, who had horned in when Miss Janet's fiancé had been greeting her after a long absence.

"I—I—I guess I'm powerful sorry, ma'am!" faltered the Kid. His sunburnt face was burning.

"Your hired man has sure got a hefty grip, Janet," said Frank, settling his ruffled collar and grinning. "It's all O.K., my man. I reckon you figured I was a fresh hombre, and Miss Janet wanted a protector. Ha, ha, ha! It's all O.K. Miss Janet don't need protecting from me. Miss Janet is sure going to marry me this fall. Isn't that a cinch, Janet?"

The girl was stalling; but the look on the Kid's face checked her merri-

But I soon settled him. One heavy punch sent him staggering back, and he collapsed, muttering threats still. His nose was bleeding, his left eye was closing up, and his mouth was cut. But I hadn't an ounce of pity for him. The fellow was a rotter to his finger-tips.

Tommy and Montie said nothing, and as I brushed my clothes down, Pitt slowly rose to his feet and stood facing me.

"You'll be sorry for this!" he panted thickly. "You'll wish you'd never made an enemy of me before I've done!"

He turned on his heel and slunk off.

"Dear boy, he fully deserved it," said Sir Montie quietly. "But you've made a frightfully vindictive enemy. Take my advice, and be on your guard! It'll be necessary!"

As events turned out, Montie's warning was fully justified! I hadn't done with Reginald Pitt by a long way!

Incidentally, the boat-race took place—fairly—on Saturday afternoon. The Ancient House won by a clear three lengths, and Bob Christine was decent enough to congratulate me afterwards. He took his defeat in the right spirit.

As for Pitt, well, I've got quite a lot to tell of him—but that's another yarn.

THE END.

(Reginald Pitt has certainly gained notoriety at St. Frank's—and all in a few weeks. You'll hear more of this amazing new boy in next week's rousing story of the chums of St. Frank's.)

ment. For the first time since she had hired the new man there was a gleam of understanding in the blue eyes, and Miss Janet's lovely face was grave now. "Thank you," she said softly. "Thank you. If I needed a protector, I should never find a braver one."

And that was some comfort to the hapless Kid as he backed out into the porch, and, once out, fairly ran for the barn.

In the barn, the Kid looked at the black-muzzled mustang. The soft, black muzzle snuggled under his arm, and the Kid rubbed his horse's nose tenderly, thoughtfully. For long minutes he stood caressing the horse, and his face was pale, his breathing hard. He spoke at last.

"Old boss," said the Kid. "Old boss, you and me run up against a snag when we hit Horse-Thief; we sure did. Old boss, your boss is sure the durndest, pop-eyed, all-fired gink ever! Old boss, it's three weeks since you and me should have figured on hitting the trail for the cow country; and I guess, old boss, that you and me are going to hit that trail mighty sudden."

The slicker pack was on; the Kid led the mustang quietly out. He led him quietly into the trail. He led him softly along by the fence, where the hammer lay as the Kid had dropped it. He led him out of sound of the cabin, and then he mounted. With the reins in his hands, the mountain breeze blowing in his face, his boots in the stirrups, the Rio Kid was the Rio Kid again.

"Now, old boss!" he said.

And a wildly riding horseman vanished in a cloud of dust. The Rio Kid was riding for the cow country again—riding hard—carrying with him a memory half sweet, half bitter. And a job was open for a new hired man at Horse-Thief.

THE END.

(You'll meet the Kid in another rousing Western yarn next week, chums!)



The BUNTER BROTHERS

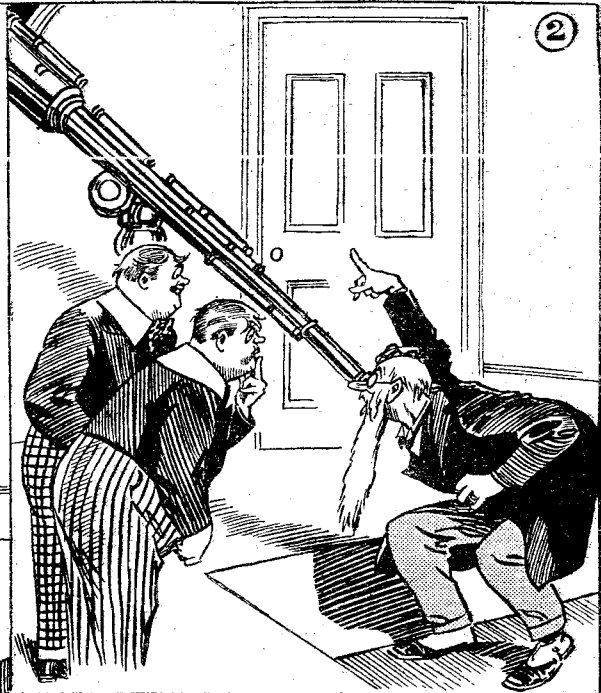
— Merry Mirthmakers. —



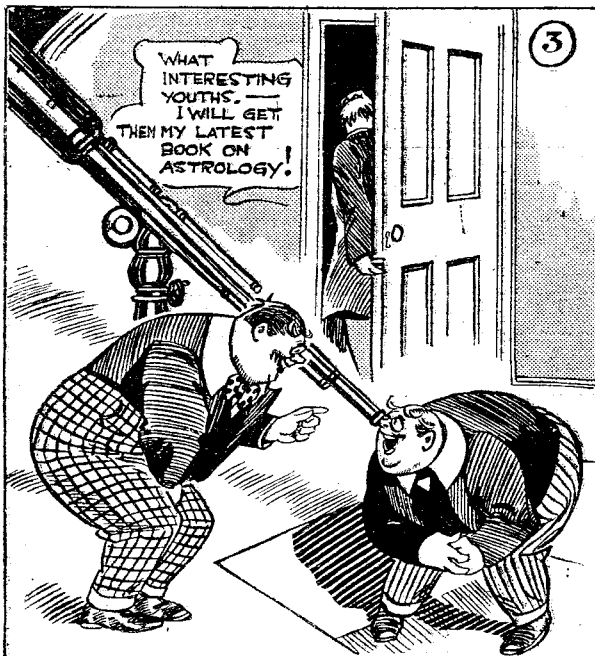
PROFESSOR STARRYCRUMPET ENTERTAINS THE BUNTERS!



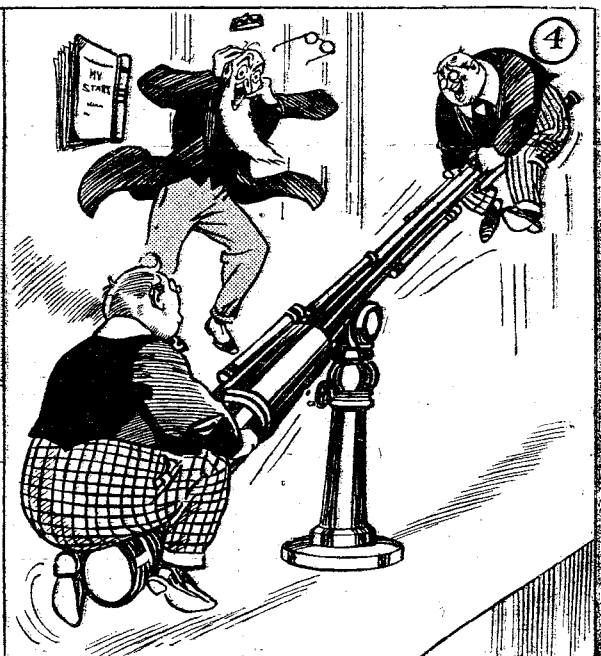
"This," said Professor Starrycrumpet, displaying his wonderful new telescope to Billy and Sammy Bunter, "is the greatest invention of modern times. By looking through it we are able to see what the people on Mars have for breakfast."



The professor bent double and attached his gleaming orb to the end of the telescope. "Look, the orange-coloured planet—'tis Mars!" "Then where's pa's?" asked Billy facetiously, winking at Sammy.



WHAT INTERESTING YOUTHS. — I WILL GET THEM MY LATEST BOOK ON ASTROLOGY!



"I must get on with my work," said Professor Starrycrumpet, "and leave you to study the stars and planets at your leisure." He left the room, leaving the Bunter Brothers to enjoy the spectacle of the Milky Way. "Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Billy. "He thinks we're interested in his old astronomy."

But the Bunter Brothers were not! As soon as they were alone they proceeded to use that wonderful telescope as a see-saw. Just then back came the merry professor. When he saw those two fat boys riding his precious telescope, he had fifty-one fits. After that the Bunter Brothers saw stars with a vengeance—but not through a telescope!

THE RIO KID'S RESOLVE!

When the Rio Kid rides into the cow-country, full of the idea of starting life afresh, he resolves to steer clear of trouble. But Fate is against him, and the resolution he makes is broken!

The RIO KID!

by **Ralph Redway**



ANOTHER ROARING WESTERN YARN, DEALING WITH THE BREATHLESS EXPLOITS OF THE RIO KID: BOY OUTLAW!

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Trouble on the Trail!

WHEN the Rio Kid rode away from Horse-Thief, he had no fixed plan in his mind, only to get away from that town as fast and as far as he could. His experiences at Horse-Thief had been unusual, and the Kid wanted to forget them. Back of his mind was the intention of hitting the cow country—a country that would remind him of his own Texas, but where the name and fame of the Rio Kid were unknown, where no man would reach instinctively for his gun at the sight of his handsome face, and where no sheriff's hand would be lited to drop on his shoulder. But the Kid was in no hurry. He had a fat roll now, and could have loafed away the rest of his life if he had liked, had loafing been in the Kid's line, which it never had been. But at least he could afford to take it easy, and easy accordingly the Kid took it.

If there was one thing that the Kid wanted to avoid it was trouble.

Trouble had dogged his steps in the old days in Texas, and when he had made a new break in the gold country of Arizona, it had dogged him in the same way. The Kid could honestly say that it was not his own fault, it just happened. Now that he was in Nevada—a new country to the Kid—he was firmly resolved that trouble should be kept at arm's length, that the wulnut-butted guns in his low-slung holsters should never see the light. In many ways the Rio Kid was lucky, but in that one little matter he had no luck; he seemed to be born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards.

Riding the black-muzzled mustang at an easy trot in the golden afternoon, while the sun was sinking in a crimson blaze towards the Sierra Nevada, the Kid was feeling at peace with all the world, even with Sheriff Watson, of Frio in far-off Texas. The trail was a lonely one. The Kid had no use for railways, or even for stage-coaches; the grey mustang with the black muzzle could carry him wherever he wanted to go. If the Kid was thinking at all as he trotted easily along the rocky trail, it was of bedding down at the town of Silver Cloud, which he aimed to hit at sundown. There was silence round him, broken only by the chirrup of cicadas in

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This week:

THE BOOTLEGGER!

the sassafras, and the sigh of the wind in the tall pipes on the hillsides. And then, all of a sudden, the silence was broken by a loud clatter on the trail behind the Kid, a clatter that grew wilder and louder every second, and approached him rapidly.

The Kid's idea was that a runaway buckboard was coming up, too fast for the driver to hold in his critters, and he moved to the side of the trail to allow a clear passage for it. His hand dropped on the riata coiled at his saddle; if it was a runaway the Kid had not forgotten his skill with the rope, and there was no cayuse on four legs that he could not have roped in.

But, looking back along the trail, he saw that it was not a runaway. A light wagon drawn by two horses was coming up the trail at a frantic speed, the horses panting, leaping, tearing, and the driver, standing up, was lashing them furiously to drive them to greater efforts. On the rocks of the trail the wagon bounded and bounced, and looked every moment, to the Kid's eyes, as if it would turn over in utter wreck. But the driver, hurried and reckless as he was, knew his business; almost as if by magic he held his horses in hand, while he beat and drove them to frantic speed.

"Great snakes!" ejaculated the Kid in astonishment.

The big, raw-boned man standing in the wagon in blue jeans and Stetson, did not see the horseman by the trail till he was quite near at hand. All his attention was given to the straining horses. His face was set, the perspiration rolled down it. He drove like a man who was running a race with death, and the Kid could guess that there was hot pursuit, as yet out of sight. What it all meant the Kid could not figure, unless some gang of rustlers had tried to hold up the teamster and he was getting away from them at the risk of smashing up his wagon, his horses, and himself.

Clatter, clatter, clatter! Crash!

It was deafening. The Rio Kid looked on in wonder. All of a sudden the teamster saw him. He did not check his horses for a second; but he dropped the whip, grabbed at a six-gun in his belt, and fired at the Kid as he came clattering and crashing up.

Bang!
The bark of the revolver rang sharply over the clattering of the hoofs and bumping wheels.

For once the Rio Kid was taken by surprise.

Why the man, a stranger to him, should fire at sight, at a horseman quietly sitting his mustang by the side of the trail, was simply a mystery. It was good shooting, too, for the Kid felt the wind of the bullet as it passed within a foot of him. Few marksmen could have planted their lead with a hasty shot from a rocking, bumping, tearing wagon, but the teamster's shot had gone very close.

The Kid's eyes blazed.
The hand that had rested on the riata dropped on a gun.

But he did not draw it. It flashed into his mind that if the teamster had been held up on the trail he had figured that the lone horseman sitting his mustang there was one of the gang ahead of him; at any rate, the man must have taken him for an enemy. In a few seconds more the thundering wagon was past the spot where the Kid sat his horse; but there was ample time for the best marksman in Texas to drop the driver with a bullet through the brain, if he had chosen. The Kid did not choose. The wagon thundered by, roaring on down the rocky trail, and the Kid stared after it with a half-amused grin on his sun-burnt face.

"That galoot is sure in a hurry," murmured the Rio Kid. "I reckon he allowed I was here to stop him, and that's why he burned powder. I guess a miss is as good as a mile, old hoss."

He moved out into the trail again, and gazed after the disappearing wagon. The wild clatter still came to his ears, but faintly and more faintly. The wagon turned from the trail, which lay through a wide canyon bottom, and vanished into an opening in the hillside—a wild and rocky gulch where few teamsters would have had the nerve to drive.

The clatter died into silence at last. "Gee-whiz!" murmured the Kid,

In the silence and stillness of the mountains he could almost have fancied that the whole thing had been a figment of his imagination. But from behind him, on the rocky trail, came new sounds—the sounds of thundering hoofs, booming louder and louder every moment. The pursuit was coming on. Pursuers, as he guessed, were on the trail of that desperately-driven wagon, and now they were coming into sight.

The Kid looked back. A bunch of horsemen swept into view, crouched in their saddles, riding hard and spurring fiercely.

The Kid counted four. Perhaps it would have been wise, having lighted unexpectedly on this rookus on the lonely Nevada trail, for the Rio Kid to have taken cover among the rocks and pines till the horsemen were past. He did not think of it at the moment, and perhaps he would not have done so had he thought of it. The Rio Kid was afraid of no man, and it was not his way to hide. Whether the wild riders were rustlers pursuing their quarry, or whether the teamster was some law-breaker fleeing from justice, the Kid could not tell, but, knowing nothing of the rights or wrongs of the matter, he had no intention of chipping in. He drew aside to allow the riders to pass, as he had done for the wagon, asking nothing better than that they should pass and leave him to jog on in peace, which was not much for a pilgrim of the Rio Kid's reputation to ask. But this time he had a gun handy. He did not stand for allowing strangers to take pot-shots at him unimproved.

The bunch of horsemen came on with a swoop, but as they spotted the Kid by the trail there was a sudden wrenching in of steeds, and the whole bunch clustered to a halt, one or two of the horses almost falling back on their haunches with the suddenness of the stop. The four of them turned on the Rio Kid at once, and there was a gripping of guns. But before a gun could be dragged from a holster the Rio Kid was ready. No man in the West was quicker on the draw than the Kid from the Rio Grande.

The two noted walnut-butted guns leaped into his hands as if of their own volition, and they bore on the bunch of breathless riders, the Kid's cool eyes gleaming over them.

"Forget it, fellers," drawled the Kid. "The galoot that lifts a gun gets his, mighty sudden. Forget it!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Hands Up!

"FORGET it!" The Rio Kid grinned over his levelled guns.

He was ready to shoot, if need were; and that readiness showed in his look, in spite of the good-natured grin. There was death in the levelled six-guns: death in the cool eyes behind them; and the four riders released their weapons as suddenly as if the butts had become red-hot. They held in their trampling horses, glaring at the Kid; but no weapon was lifted.

One of the riders, a brawny man with a thick, red beard, and a manner of authority as the Kid noticed at once, pushed his horse forward, ahead of the others, closer to the puncher from Texas. His heavy, rugged face was black with anger, and the Kid could see that he was itching to draw a gun. But it was clear to him that if he drew a gun he would never pull the trigger: the Kid's eyes told him that.

"Put down that gun!" The Kid laughed.

"Put it down!" said the big man

with the red beard. "There are four of us, you durned galoot, and you'll never get away with it alive. I warn you to put down that gun."

"I guess I'm keeping this gun handy, feller," smiled the Kid. "I ain't looking for trouble—never was! But you gents seem too mighty sudden on the shoot to please me. I reckon I'm keeping you covered while you ride on, and leave the trail clear for a peaceful pilgrim. How about that?"

"He's one of the gang, sheriff," said a horseman behind the big man. "They've left him behind to hold up the pursuit."

"I guess I know that!" snapped the big man.

"The Kid's eyes widened. "Sheriff?" he said. "Sheriff of Silver Cloud, looking for you and the rest of the gang," said the red-bearded man. "You ain't getting away, gun or no gun."

The Rio Kid smiled, a little bitterly. He had drawn his gun only in time to stop the burning of powder, he knew that. But he was put in the position—that position he knew so well—of standing up against the law.

"Make it a pow-wow, sheriff," suggested the Kid. "I ain't the galoot you want! I never heard of you before this minute! I'm sure just riding on to Silver Cloud to bed down for the night. Honest Injun."

The red-bearded man scanned him.

"Who are you, then?" he demanded.

"I call myself Kid Carfax."

"You don't belong to this country?"

"Right in once! I guess if you size me up as a puncher from Texas, sheriff, you won't miss your guess."

"Cow-puncher from Texas?"

"Yep!"

"And what are you doing here?"

"Just moving along the trail to Silver Cloud," answered the Kid amicably.

"I pulled these guns to save my skin, Sheriff. I guess I needn't tell you that your bunch was going to shoot before asking questions. You savvy that?"

The Rio Kid spoke peaceably, amicably. He held the upper hand, but he did not want trouble with any sheriff in Nevada. Trouble with sheriffs in Texas had been enough for him. The Kid really would have been glad to get out of this difficulty without the burning of powder. He wanted to keep on the right side of the law, now that he had ridden into a new country. But life came before law.

"Puncher nothing!" said one of the riders—evidently the sheriff's posse of Silver Cloud. "A gun-man from Texas, more like. I guess only a gun-man could have got us covered so quick."

"You've said it," grunted the sheriff.

"A galoot may be handy with a gun, without being a gun-man," urged the Kid. "Let up on it, fellers! What do you want with me, anyhow?"

"You've seen a wagin pass on this trail, driven like mad?" demanded the sheriff of Silver Cloud.

"Correct!"

"It passed this spot?"

"Sure, and the teamster gave me a shot in passing," grinned the Kid.

"That was why I was wise to you-uns when you came up."

The sheriff eyed him doubtfully.

"Where's that durned wagon now?"

"Miles away, I reckon, while you're passing the time with me," said the Kid. "It turned into a gulch ahead in the canyon. I reckon you'll pick up plenty of sign on the rocks if you look. It sure was thundering along."

"And you was left here to hold us

clear, to give the gang a chance to get clear with the goods?" said the sheriff.

"Not on your life! I don't even figure what that galoot had in the wagon," answered the Kid. "I reckoned at first he was hitting the horizon to get away from a gang of rustlers."

"Put up that gun!"

"Oh, can it, sheriff," said the Kid.

"I guess I want to see the lay-out before I put these guns away. What's your game?"

"If you're not one of the Carson gang, you've got nothing to fear. But you'll have to prove it. I guess I'll run you into Silver Cloud, and put you in the calaboose until you do."

The Kid laughed.

"I sure ain't looking for a calaboose to bed down in to-night, sheriff. Guess again."

The sheriff gritted his teeth.

"I'm giving you a chance," he said.

"I know durned well that you're one of the bootleg gang, Mister Puncher from Texas. But I'm giving you a chance."

"Bootleg!"

The Kid understood in a flash.

He knew now what had been in the wildly-driven wagon, and why the teamster had lashed on his horses so frantically, at the risk of life and limb.

Bootleg whisky was in the wagon—a cargo of illicit spirits brought down from some hidden still in the mountains to be sold in the towns, when the sheriff of Silver Cloud had got on its track.

The Kid's sympathies, so far as that went, were with the sheriff.

He had no use for bootleggers.

But he did not stand for trusting himself a prisoner in the hands of the sheriff of Silver Cloud. He was a stranger in the locality; and the sheriff's opinion of him was evidently already formed.

The red-bearded man was chafing with rage, but not daring to draw a gun under the Kid's cool, menacing eye; and the sheriff's prisoner would have to pay for that. And if they searched the Kid, they would find his roll—and the Kid could not account for that roll of bills without telling how he had sold a mine in Arizona—and in the gold country he was an outlaw. If the Kid thought for a moment of carrying his new respect for the law to the extent of yielding himself a prisoner to it, it was only for a moment.

"I'm waiting," said the sheriff of Silver Cloud, between his teeth. "You're my prisoner, Mister Puncher from Texas, guns or no guns. I guess we don't want gun-men from the south in this section, bootlegger or no bootlegger. You're my prisoner. Got that?"

"Not quite," grinned the Kid. The smile left his face, and his eyes gleamed.

"I guess you're a sheriff, all O.K., but you're some bull-dozer, too, I reckon. I ain't taking a pasear with you, I allow. You're riding on, sheriff! You're hitting the trail pronto, before my guns begin to talk. Catch on to that?"

The sheriff of Silver Cloud breathed hard.

"You're my prisoner," he repeated.

"Forget it!" jeered the Kid.

The Silver Cloud sheriff's eyes blazed, and he reached for his gun.

Bang!

There was a crash as the sheriff rolled from his horse, and fell headlong in the trail. Three men behind him reached for weapons, and the Rio Kid's voice rang out like the roar of a mountain lion:

"Hands up!"

And just in time to prevent the blaze of the levelled six-guns, the three horsemen lifted their hands above their heads.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Upper Hand!

"GIT!" The Rio Kid rapped the word out sharply.

He was not smiling now; his sunburnt face had set hard, and his eyes glinted.

The three horsemen eyed him. The sheriff and his posse of Silver Cloud were a hard set of men, and it went bitterly against the grain with the three to knuckle under to this puncher, little more than a boy, who held them covered. But the fall of the red-bearded sheriff was less than enough for his men. They did not want any more burning of powder.

"You durned young fire-bug," said one of them hoarsely. "You've got us cinched this time—but watch out for next time—"

"Can it!" interrupted the Kid. "I'm sure tired of you galoots, and I want to see you hit the trail."

"You've killed Sheriff Purkiss—"
"I keep on telling you to git," said the Kid, his eyes glinting over his guns. "You don't want to give me any back talk. It ain't healthy for you. Pick up that galoot and git. I guess your durned sheriff will be as lively as ever again when you've got a doc to him, though he won't use his gun hand again for six months, I reckon. Pick him up and stick him on his cayuse, and hit the trail, pronto."

That the sheriff was not killed was clear a moment later, as he stirred on the rocky ground and groaned.

"I guess he got it in his gun arm," explained the Kid. "I ain't moseyed into Nevada to shoot up sheriffs. Jest stopped the galoot from getting too fresh with his gun. Pick him up and travel."

Without a word more, and without venturing to touch a gun, they picked up the wounded sheriff, placed him on his horse, and with two of them holding him there, rode away.

Evidently they were anxious to get out of range of the walnut-butted guns; but they cast dark and threatening glances at the Kid as they went.

The Rio Kid looked after them; and dropped the guns back into his holsters when they were at a distance.

The horsemen rode on through the canyon, where lay the trail to Silver Cloud that the Kid had been following. They passed the gulch into which the Kid had seen the bootlegger's wagon disappear, and rode on, vanishing at last in the winding canyon.

With the wounded sheriff on their hands, the Silver Cloud posse had given up the pursuit of the bootlegger.

The Kid's brow was clouded. Bootleggers he loathed; not so much because they were breakers of the law, as for other reasons. Fire-water was not in the Kid's line; and bootleg stuff was not even

good fire-water; the Kid knew that the cargo in the wagon would be a poisonous concoction, compared with which whisky might be regarded as a beneficial medicine. The Kid had seen bloodshed follow indulgence in bootleg spirits. A galoot might be driven outside the law by no fault of his own; only too well the Rio Kid knew that. But the bootleggers drove a vile trade, a trade the mere thought of which got the Kid's goat. And now the Kid was lumped with a gang of bootleggers, in the minds of the men who represented the law in the Silver Cloud section.

The horsemen had ridden on to Silver Cloud; and that town, now, was wiped off the map for the puncher from Texas. Once more the Kid had woke up trouble.

"I guess it's bedding down in the sierra for us, old hoss," said the Kid to the grey mustang. "I sure reckon Silver Cloud wouldn't be healthy for you and me to-night, critter. We want to hit the trail out of this country bright and early in the morning, old hoss."

The Kid rode away from the spot at last. The sun was dipping behind the sierra, dipping to California and the far Pacific. It was necessary to look for a camp before the light went; a shelter under a roof being out of the question for the Kid after what had happened.

He rode slowly through the deep canyon, and turned into the rocky gulch by which the bootlegger's wagon had gone an hour ago.

Silver Cloud, he knew, was only a couple of miles or so farther on, at the

end of the canyon; and that way was not for the Kid. The gulch led up into the hills, wild and rocky and bristling with pines. That was the way of safety for the Rio Kid, and he followed it. To the escaped bootlegger he gave no thought; he had no doubt that the man in the wagon was far enough away by that time; though the Kid would not have been sorry to meet up again with the man who had taken a pot-shot at him on the trail, now that he knew the kind of galoot he was. The Kid would rather have liked to lay his Texas quilt round the broad shoulders of the bootlegger who had been the cause of landing him in trouble again with the law. But though he did not reckon that the bootlegger was anywhere near at hand, the Kid's eyes were watchful as he rode up the gulch; caution was second nature to him. It was for that reason that he sighted a glint among the pine trees, among the piled rocks of the hillside ahead—the glint of the setting sun on the barrel of a rifle. The Kid dropped from his horse as the bullet flew, but he dropped an instant before the bullet came; the crack that followed rang in his ears as he plunged into cover in a mass of sassafras.

"Great snakes!" murmured the Kid.

A moment more, and his horse was in cover at his side. The echoes of the rifle-shot died away among the hills.

The Kid grinned.

He could see the humour of the situation, grim as it was. Sheriff Purkiss, of Silver Cloud, had taken him for one of the bootlegging gang, and he had had to shoot up the sheriff in self-defence. The bootlegger took him for one of the pursuing party; and was firing on him for that reason. The man had not, after all, vanished into the hills with his cargo of poison; the Kid figured it out that the gulch was too rough and rocky even for a reckless driver, and the wagon had been forced to halt. Doubtless the bootlegger hoped for nightfall to give him a chance of getting clear; and till then he was standing at bay, rifle in hand, among the rocks, desperately ready to shoot if the pursuit followed him up the gulch.

The Kid could not help grinning.

Had they not met the Kid on the trail, no doubt Sheriff Purkiss and his men would have followed the wagon-tracks, and met the fire of the cornered bootlegger in the gulch. But owing to that meeting, they had ridden on to Silver Cloud; and it was the Kid—looking for a camp—who came on the cornered desperado.

Crack! Crack!

The bootlegger knew how to handle a gun. The bullets came searching through the sassafras where the Kid lay in cover.

The Kid was grinning; but his eyes glinted.

"You or me now, feller!" he murmured.

When the Kid left his cover, there was no sign to the man up the gulch that he had done so. A creeping Apache stalking his quarry was not more silent than the Kid, a lynx was not more

Your Editor's Note Book

Another week, chums, and then many of you will know whether to expect the postman at the door with a parcel containing a birthday present! An anxious few days, perhaps. But rest yourselves in patience.

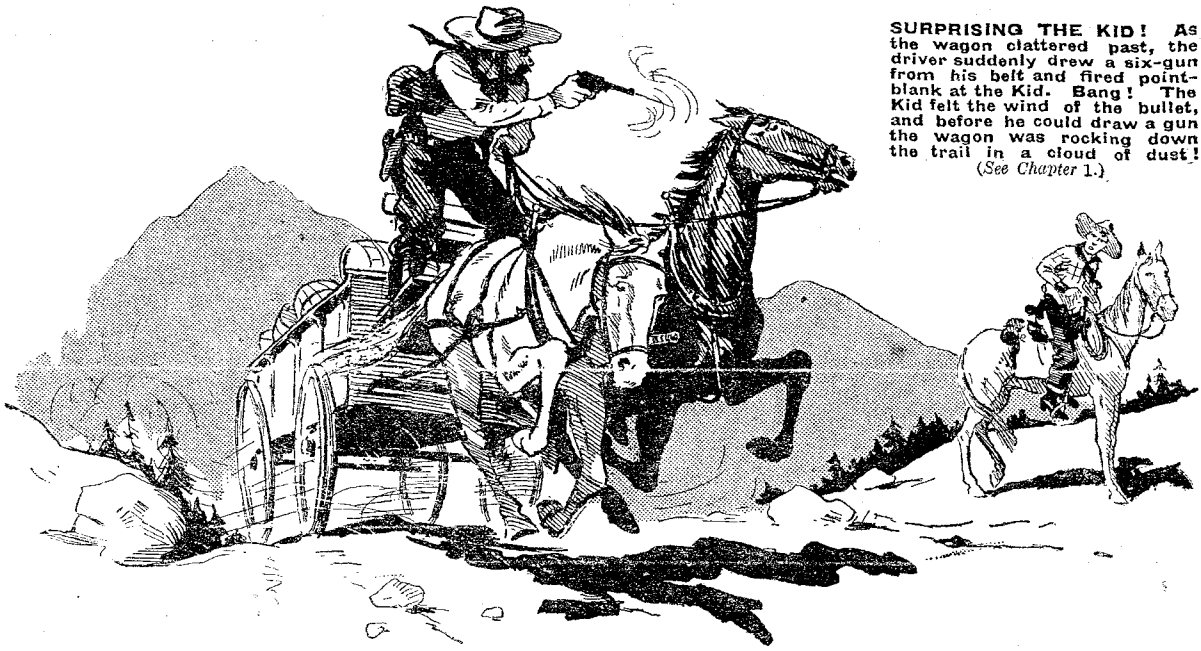
Of course, you've joined the Club? Don't leave these things till to-morrow, for then it may be too late!

But I take it that you've done the necessary good work by filling in the registration coupon for the Birthday Club, or if you haven't, you will do so just as soon as you have read the rules of the Club. That's the idea, chums!

Now, as I was saying: Next week, Tuesday to be exact, is the time for rejoicing, for the first list of birthday dates will be published. If the date of your birth is the same as one in the list that appears, then—it's you for an annual!

Don't be disappointed, chums, when you look down that list of dates, if you find yours is not there. Your turn will come, don't you worry. Every week a new list will be published.

I never knew a fellow to butt into trouble as the Rio Kid does. But he doesn't seem to mind! Somehow, he always gets out of a mess or a tight corner. That's because he's determined never to give in. Whatever the odds, he'll face them without flinching, and, if needs be, go down fighting. That's a great spirit, don't you think, chums?



SURPRISING THE KID! As the wagon clattered past, the driver suddenly drew a six-gun from his belt and fired point-blank at the Kid. Bang! The Kid felt the wind of the bullet, and before he could draw a gun the wagon was rocking down the trail in a cloud of dust! (See Chapter 1.)

stealthy. Slowly and cautiously, the Rio Kid worked and wormed his way among rocks and boulders and bushes—slowly, but surely winding his way up the steep gulch, and never giving a sign; till he was above the spot where the bootlegger lay in the rocks. That one glimpse of a glinting gun, and the ring of the shots, sufficed to guide the Kid; he knew exactly where to look for the man who had pulled trigger on him. And when he came at the bootlegger, he came not from below but from above. From a high rock overlooking the clump of pines where the man was kneeling in cover, the Kid looked down grinning at his back. The man who had driven the wagon was kneeling there, rifle to shoulder, finger on trigger, watching the lower gulch, waiting for the Kid to show himself—and never dreaming that his enemy was now behind him, above him on the hillside. The Kid gave a soft chuckle.

At the sound of it, the bootlegger spun round.

He found himself looking into the muzzle of a six-gun. The Kid was only six yards from him, and five or six feet above, on the steep rocks. And the rocks on which he stood were not steeper than the gun in his hand.

"Drop that rifle!"

The Kid's voice was not loud, but it was very distinct. The bootlegger stared at him blankly. The surprise in his bearded face was almost ludicrous.

"I've told you to drop it, feller!"

The bootlegger lifted the rifle desperately.

Bang!

There was a yell from the bootlegger and the rifle dropped clanging on the rocks. The Kid jumped down into the pines as the bootlegger staggered against a tree panting. The bullet had struck the rifle, and the man's arm was numbed by the shock.

"I guess you ain't hurt, feller!" grinned the Kid. "I sure had a hunch to make it last sickness for you, hombre. But you ain't hurt. Put 'em up!"

"Durn you—"

"Cut it out, feller! Are you putting

up your paws, or do you allow you'd rather be left here for the buzzards."

The bootlegger lifted his hands above his head. The Kid stepped to him, and took the revolver from the holster at his belt, and pitched it away down the hillside. The rifle followed it. The big, rawboned man eyed him like a trapped wolf. But the six-gun in the Kid's hand daunted him, and though he eyed the puncher like a wolf, he submitted like a lamb. Now that he was disarmed, the Kid motioned to him to drop his hands.

"You've got me!" muttered the bootlegger.

"I sure have!" assented the Rio Kid with a nod. "I guess I've got you by the short hairs, feller!"

And he laughed cheerily.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Bound for Silver Cloud!

ONE by one the stars came out in a clear sky, glistening down on the Sierra Nevada, and range on range of pine-clad hills. The rocky gulch was deep in shadows. The Rio Kid stood looking at the bootlegger's wagon. With a gun in the Kid's hand, there had been no argument; the bootlegger had walked before him, and led him to the spot where the wagon lay. Near at hand the two horses were tethered. The Kid, as he glanced round him, did not wonder that the bootlegger had halted and turned at bay. Higher up, the gulch was too steep and narrow for the lightest buck-board, and the wagon could not have gone on. By a dozen paths the bootlegger could have escaped, abandoning his cargo; but there were thousands of dollars of illicit profit in the wagon stacked with liquid poison, and the ruffian had taken a more desperate choice. The Kid understood.

"I reckon you'd have got away with it, if the sheriff's crowd had followed you up here," he remarked. "You could sure have potted those galoots from cover like a bunch of gophers, if you had the sand to do it. And late at night you figured on getting the stuff

away. But you didn't allow for the Rio Kid horning into the trouble, hombre."

The bootlegger muttered a curse.

Even now he could not understand how the enemy had doubled on him and taken him by surprise; but he knew very well that the sheriff and his men could never have done what the Rio Kid had done. He had had no doubt of shooting them down, or driving them off under his fire, if they followed him up the steep gulch. But he had not counted upon an adversary of the Kid's calibre. Had he been dealing only with the Silver Cloud posse, the bootlegger would have got away with it.

"Look here, feller," the bootlegger muttered hoarsely. "You've got me, and you've got the stuff. Call it a thousand dollars, and hit the trail."

The Kid whistled.

"A thousand dollars is sure a pot of durocks," he said, "and on the other side the sheriff has promised me a bed in the calaboose, if he can get his hands on me."

The bootlegger stared.

"Ain't you one of the sheriff's crowd?"

"Nope."

"Who the thunder are you, then?"

"Puncher from Texas," answered the Kid cheerily. "Riding the trail to get to the cow country."

"Then what in thunder did you horn in for?"

"I guess I wasn't allowed to say no," chuckled the Kid. "You tried to shoot me up on the trail, and the sheriff allowed he would rope me in on suspicion of being one of the Carson gang, and then you sure tried to pot me again when I was looking this-a-way for a camp. I guess I never wanted to horn in, feller; but I've got in the trouble up to my neck. I don't stand for being potted at like a gopher, feller, and I was sure glad to meet up with you again."

He laughed again.

"You're an ornery cuss, Mister Carson, if that's your name," he said. "That sheriff is some bull-dozer, and I reckon I can't say I like his manners; but

you're a pesky polecat of a galoot, and you do get my goat. You allowed you was going to shoot up the sheriff's crowd and get away with that poison. You've slipped up on it, feller. Get those hosses hitched."

"What's the game?" hissed the bootlegger.

"You're some driver," grinned the Kid. "I've seen that! I guess you can drive that team after dark and get home, with a gun just at hand to see that you do it."

"I guess—"

"This ain't your say-so, hombre," reminded the Kid. "You're hooked by your short hairs, feller, and I'm the galoot to chew the rag just now. Are you going to hitch up them hosses?"

The bootlegger looked the Rio Kid in the eyes. What he read there was enough for him. Without a further word, he led the horses to the wagon and hitched them.

"That's better," approved the Kid. "I sure like to see a galoot do as he's told peaceable like. I guess we're going to have quite a pleasant little pasare, you and me, in that shebang of yours. Get in and take the ribbons; and I reckon I'll rope you to the seat for safety, feller."

"What—" began the bootlegger, hoarse with rage.

The Kid interrupted him. "I keep on telling you this ain't your say-so. You chew the rag too much, feller. If you want my gun to talk instead of me, you've only got to go on chewing the rag instead of doing as you're told like a little man."

With a curse, the bootlegger clambered into the wagon. A rope secured him there. The Rio Kid took a seat by his side. His gun was in his hand, and the muzzle touched the driver's ribs. The contact of that metal muzzle was more than enough to enforce obedience. The wagon creaked and groaned and rumbled on the rough rocks, grinding noisily down the gulch towards the wide canyon. The Kid gave a soft musical whistle, and the grey mustang loped out of the shadows and followed behind the wagon.

Out in the lower canyon, where the trail ran, the going was better. At the trail the bootlegger paused, and fixed a deadly look on the handsome puncher sitting at his side.

"Right or, feller," smiled the Kid. "Silver Cloud, and hustle. I guess I ain't losing my beauty sleep, even for the pleasure of a drive with a pilgrim of your heft. Get going."

"Silver Cloud?" breathed the bootlegger.

"Sure!"

Perhaps the trader in illicit spirits had had some idea that this puncher had intended to rope in the cargo of fire-water for his own behoof. But when the Kid gave him his destination, he understood.

For a long moment he paused. The muzzle of the six-gun jammed hard on his ribs. There was a cold gleam in the eye the Kid turned on him in the starlight.

"Hit the trail, hombre! I guess I could drive this wagon if I left you here for the buzzards to pick. You want to get a move on."

The wagon clattered on the trail. Under the soft starlight the vehicle rumbled and clattered on, sending a thousand echoes booming through the lonely hills.

Far in the distance the lights of Silver Cloud town shone up at last from the night.

The bootlegger had driven in savage silence; but as he saw the lights of the town he half-turned to the Kid again.

"Five thousand dollars, feller—"

"You sure make me tired," said the Rio Kid. "You chew the rag too much, pard. You're too mighty free with your gun for me to leave you moseying around loose in the hills; and I don't stand for bootlegging. You want to hit the camp before I get tired of holding this gun."

The wagon clattered on down the trail and into the street of Silver Cloud camp.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Kid Calls In!

SHERIFF PURKISS, with a bandaged arm and a white savage face, stared from his office window into the lighted street of Silver Cloud. There was a buzz of voices in the street; a score of idlers were following the wagon that drove up to the sheriff's office, with a grey mustang trotting behind it as it clattered. Sheriff Pur-

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## "HURRAH!"



The First  
List of  
BIRTHDAY  
DATES  
will appear in  
NEXT  
WEEK'S  
issue!

There is still time to  
Register.

~~~~~

kiss stared at it with unbelieving eyes. The wagon was the one he had trailed and tracked and chased that day in the hills, driven by Carson, the leader of the bootlegging gang; and which had only escaped him by desperate flight; and which, he was assured, he would have roped in but for the intervention of the unknown puncher from Texas. And by the side of the teamster sat that very puncher, with a cool and smiling face. The sheriff, wounded, defeated, enraged, was more bitterly anxious to rope in that puncher, than even Carson, the bootlegger himself; and he could not believe his eyes as they fixed on the handsome, sunburnt, careless face. With a bound, the sheriff was in the street as the wagon thundered up to the building and clattered to a halt.

The Rio Kid swept off his Stetson in polite saluta.

"Evening, sheriff! Glad to see you around so lively after that little rookus! I kinder guessed you wasn't hard hit."

"You!" stammered the sheriff.

The Rio Kid dropped from the wagon. The black-muzzled mustang was at his side a second later, and the Kid vaulted lightly into the saddle. The sheriff stared at him, stupefied, and at the scowling, furious bootlegger, who sat bound to his seat.

"That's your man, sheriff!" drawled the Rio Kid. "You'll find the stuff in the wagon—kegs and kegs of it, enough poison to swamp Silver Cloud. You allowed I was one of the Carson gang, sheriff, and I sure told you you missed your guess, and you wouldn't sit up and take notice. And this galoot allowed I was one of your crowd, and he sure tried to hand out bad medicine for me, but he slipped up on it. I figured that he was too mighty free with his gun, and I don't stand for bootlegging; so I've toted him home, sheriff, and hyer he is, if you want him."

"Waal, carry me home to die!" gasped the sheriff of Silver Cloud. "That's Carson, the bootlegger—and—and—and you—" Amazement choked the sheriff's utterance.

"And I'm a puncher from Texas, same as I told you, sheriff, only you wouldn't take it down," grinned the Kid. "I guess I'd never have horned in if this galoot hadn't started the rookus. Do you want him? He's left his guns behind, and he's roped to his seat; that's why he's taking it so good-temperedly."

"I guess I want him—and you, too, Mister Puncher from Texas!" said the sheriff of Silver Cloud grimly. "I guess I don't get on to the rights of this game, but you sure ain't riding free after plugging me in the arm. Men, take that puncher, and shoot him down if he handles a gun."

Loud and clear rang the laugh of the Rio Kid. He had not expected to find friends in Silver Cloud after what had happened on the canyon trail. But it was like the Kid to ride coolly into a town packed with foes.

A touch of the grey mustang's glossy neck; and the crowd surged back as the heels lashed. With a gun in either hand, the Rio Kid rode on up the street; amid a roar of voices and scurrying of feet.

"After him!" yelled the sheriff. "Shoot him down!"

For the moment the bootlegger's wagon and the bootlegger were unheeded. A crowd surged after the reckless rider, and there was a gun in every hand. The black-muzzled mustang came whirling round and charging back at the crowd, and the Kid's guns were roaring now.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

With wild cries the crowd parted and dodged and rushed to escape. Bang! Bang! Bang! rang the six-guns. Not a bullet found a mark—the Kid was firing over the heads of the swarming mob in the street of Silver Cloud; but the crowd dodged and fled wildly from the charging mustang and the roaring six-guns. Right down the street galloped the Rio Kid, his guns roaring, laughing as he rode, and out into the trail under the stars. Silver Cloud was left buzzing and seething with excitement behind him; but not a man followed into the dusk of the hills in pursuit of the puncher from Texas.

The Rio Kid laughed loud and long as he rode by dusky trails that night. Shooting up the town recalled wild old days in Texas when he had ridden with the Double Bar bunch. The Kid had quite enjoyed the episode; but the Kid knew that he would have to pay for his amusement if he lingered. There was no camping for the Rio Kid that night; by the light of the stars he rode, and rode fast and far.

THE END.

(There will be another roaring tale of the Wild West next week, chums, featuring the Rio Kid!)