

THE RIO KID RETURNS HOME!

The shining waters of the Rio Frio and the green rotting plains of Texas call to the Rio Kid—and although there are countless enemies awaiting him there, the Kid trails back to his old country!



TRAILING BACK!

OUR ROARING LONG COMPLETE WESTERN YARN, STARRING THE RIO KID—BOY OUTLAW!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Kid Horns In!

THE Kid!" Sheriff Watson, of Frio, stared, rubbed his eyes, and stared again. It seemed to the burly sheriff of Frio that his eyes must have deceived him.

But they had not deceived him.

It was the Rio Kid, handsome, sunburnt, and smiling, who stood in the doorway of his office fronting the plaza of the little cow-town on the Rio Frio. It was the Rio Kid, the boy outlaw wanted by half the sheriffs in Texas; long absent from his old haunts, but unchanged, now that he had come back to them. The Frio sheriff stared blankly, taken utterly by surprise. He was so astounded that he forgot to reach for a gun.

Watson had not forgotten the Rio Kid, neither had the town of Frio, or the ranchers along the banks of the Pecos. The Kid's reputation, while he rode the Texas trails, and camped in the Texas chaparrals, had been too gaudy for easy forgetfulness. Still, the Kid had slipped out of mind. For a long time he had not been seen or heard of.

It was said in the cow camps that the Kid had ridden out of Texas across the Staked Plain to try his luck in a new country. And there were many who wished him well, for whatever the Kid might be, he was a white man with all his faults, a good friend and a fair foe. And at the Double-Bar Ranch, at least, there were many who opined that the Kid never had had justice.

Many tales were told in the bunk-houses and the round-up camps of the Kid's wild ways. Many more were told of his sudden vanishing from the country that had known him. Some vague rumour had reached the Rio Frio of the Kid in the gold country of Arizona. And it was said that he had been seen up in the cow country of Montana, and that he had hit trouble in the sheep ranges of Wyoming.

But such rumours were vague. And many guessed that the Kid had gone on the long trail—shot up, at last, in some rookus, quick on the draw as he was—or scalped by the apaches in the Staked Plain. And as no sure news came of him, and he was never seen in his old haunts Sheriff Watson came to believe that the Kid really had gone over the range at last, and that he would never drop his hand on his

shoulder and rope him in, as he had sworn to do. And now there stood the Kid, as large as life, smiling at the astounded sheriff from the open doorway of his office in Frio.

The sheriff, smoking a Mexican cheroot in the drowsy heat of the afternoon, his feet on his desk, his rocking-chair tilted back, had heard a horseman ride up and dismount outside. Not for an instant had he dreamed that the horseman was the Rio Kid; the horse, the famous black-muzzled mustang, that had carried the boy outlaw through so many dangers. When he turned and saw the Kid the sheriff stared open-mouthed. It was the Kid, or his ghost. And the sheriff of Frio almost believed that it was his ghost.

"The Kid!"

Watson stuttered the words. He could scarcely believe that it was not a vision that would vanish if he rubbed his eyes.

The Kid grinned. The sheriff's stupefied amazement seemed to entertain him. He swept off his Stetson hat in ironical salute.

"The Kid!" repeated the sheriff of Frio.

He remembered now, and reached for a gun. Before his hand touched the butt, a blue-grey barrel was looking him in the face, with the Kid's lithe finger on a trigger.

"Forget it, teller!" said the Kid laconically.

The sheriff forgot it promptly. The Rio Kid was smiling and good-humoured. He had seldom been seen otherwise. But only the slightest pressure of his finger was needed to send a bullet crashing through the brain of the Frio sheriff. And Watson was not asking for sudden death. The glint in the Kid's steady eyes rather belied the smile on his face.

The Kid stepped into the office. Still in blank amazement the sheriff watched him; for it was broad day. The sun was shining down on dusty Frio. Men rode in from the prairie trails with clinking spur and bridle. Outside the Red Dog across the plaza a poker-party sat at a table under a red-striped awning. At any moment a caller might drop in to see the sheriff, at any moment a bunch of cow-punchers might ride up at any moment the sheriff's man, Abe, might come into the office. And the Rio Kid had ridden into the midst of a hundred dangers as coolly as if he had the freedom of

every town in Texas, and was standing there, smiling at the sheriff who had sworn to take him, dead or alive, and who had placed a reward of a thousand dollars on his head. The Kid's nerve was well known; but this capped the stack.

"I've sure got your goat, just a few, sheriff," smiled the Kid. "You wasn't expecting a galoot about my size to mosey in."

"It's really you, Kid!" gasped the sheriff.

"Little me, back from my travels, sheriff. I guess I could tell you a whole lot, if you wanted to hear the story. I've sure humped into a gold-darned heap of things since I lit out from Texas."

"You've come here to give yourself up?"

The Kid laughed.

"Do I look like it?" he asked banteringly.

The sheriff breathed hard.

"You're sure a cool cuss, Kid! You always was, I allow. But you won't get away with it this time. You've moseyed into Frio, and I guess you won't find it so easy to mosey out agin."

"Quien sabe?" said the Kid, shrugging his shoulders. "I'm taking chances, I guess. But I always was a galoot to take chances. I've come back to Texas, sheriff. And I guess I wanted to see you again, and talk turkey to you. That's why I'm here. Any objection to parting with your hardware?"

With the Kid's walnut-butted gun looking him in the eye the sheriff was not disposed to state objections. The Kid leaned over and jerked the Colt from his belt, and tossed it into a corner behind a box. The sheriff gave no sign. He was disarmed; but the Rio Kid had horned into the midst of a hundred foes, and Watson did not believe that he would get away with it. He waited.

The Kid lounged across to the sheriff's desk and sat on it, facing the burly Frio man. His manner was careless and easy, yet it was to be noted that where he sat he could keep an eye on the window and on the open door, as well as on the sheriff. The Kid was taking big chances; but he was as wary as a cougar, as watchful as a lynx. He sat on the desk and swung

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his legs in their baggy goatskin chaps, and smiled at Watson.

"Sort of 'sprised?" he remarked.

"Yep!"

"Did you reckon I'd hit the trail for good?"

"I reckon I began to think that you was wiped out in some rookus, Kid. You been out of Texas, at any rate."

"You've said it. I figured on staying out, too," said the Kid. "But you know my record, sheriff. I hit trouble wherever I camped. Not that I've got any kick coming. I've piled up a good-sized roll."

"Hold-ups?" asked the sheriff.

The Kid's eyes glittered for a moment.

"Hard work with pick and spade," he said. "I made my roll in the gold country, and I reckon I'd be there still owning a big mine, only a gang of hoodlums got on my trail. You want to believe, sheriff, that when I lit out of Texas I let up on the old game, and started fresh—"

"Oh, shucks!" said the sheriff.

"Honest injun, old-timer!" said the Kid. "I'm last from New Mexico, where I stopped a piece to round up a gang of rustlers that had been robbing the ranches on the Rio Bajo."

"Sho!"

"You ain't taking that in?"

"Not to any great extent," said the Frio sheriff sarcastically. "You're a born fire-bug, Kid. And there's only one thing that will stop you from hunting trouble, and that's a long rope over a branch."

"Have it your own way," drawled the Kid. "I'm giving you the straight goods. But have it your own way. Anyhow, I didn't horn in here to tell you what an all-fired angel I've growed. No, sir, I've come here to talk turkey."

The sheriff's glance wandered to the open doorway, and the blaze of sunshine without. Then it returned to the Kid.

"Spill it!" he said.

"I've come back to my own country," said the Kid. "I've ridden far, and I've ridden wide; but I'm telling you, sheriff, that this old country was calling me back all the time. I've stood over the Big Canyon of the Colorado, and I reckon I saw the old Huecas. I've listened to the Missouri, and heard the waters of the Rio Frio. I knew I'd come trailing back at last, and now I've come. But I ain't come on the war-path, sheriff. I ain't come a-shooting. No, sir! I've come on the peace trail."

The sheriff stared.

"Meaning?" he asked.

"I never wanted to be an outlaw," said the Kid, and his voice was deep and grave now. "I was driven into it. You know that Old Man Dawney, of the Double-Bar, got the goods on me, all through a mistake, and I guess he's owning up to that mistake now. I reckon I was wild, hunted down for a thing I never did, and that all the Double-Bar knows now that I never did. I reckon I ran wild, some—as I guess any galoot might have in my place."

"A pilgrim has to live, sheriff, and I was driven off the ranches. Things were put down to me that I never did, once I was riding the trails—hold-ups that I'd never hear of; shootings that I'd never dreamed about. I reckon if anything happened between the Rio Grande and the Pecos, it was said in the cow camps that it was the doing of the Rio Kid. I never heard half of it."

The sheriff's face was grim.

"You know that, sheriff! You know how they stack a heap on to a man when he ain't there to deny it, and

can't be. You know they've landed on my shoulders the doings of half the gunmen and fire-bugs in this part of the State."

"Likely enough!" said the sheriff. "I guess if you hand in your guns, you'll get a fair trial at the county seat."

The Kid laughed.

"I guess the reputation they fixed on me would have hanged half a dozen galoots my size," he said. "I never rustled a cow in my life; but there's a dozen ranchers ready to swear that I've driven their herds. Big men—with the judge and jury in their pockets. I've never held up a galoot on the trail—but a heap of galoots who've been held up would swear that I was the pilgrim that went through their rags at the end of a gun. Your trial at the county seat don't cut any ice with me, sheriff."

The sheriff of Frio made no rejoinder. His glance wandered to the doorway again. Would no galoot ever mosey in?

"All the same, I'm done with outlawry if I'm let," said the Kid. "That's what I've come to tell you, sheriff. I've come back to my own country; but I give you my word that I ain't come a-shooting. Any man on the



ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS! That's the reward offered for the capture of the Rio Kid—and you can bet there are many good and bad men out to earn it. But it's a far from simple matter even to trail this elusive boy outlaw, let alone catch him.

old Double-Bar will tell you that I'm a slave to my word. You give me a wide miss, sheriff, and I ain't troubling you any. Give me a chance to prove that I never was the fire-bug that folks believed. Leave me alone, and you'll see me live quiet and peaceful." The Rio Kid's voice was vibrating with earnestness now. "Give a galoot a chance, sheriff. You can work it, if you like. You're boss of the law in this section. Your word goes a whole lot in the county town. You can leave me in peace on the Rio Frio, if you want. You can give me the chance I'm asking for to prove up. What do you say?"

The sheriff eyed him.

Always at the bottom of his heart he had had a sort of liking for the bold and handsome Kid, keenly as he had sought to rope him in and hand him over to a hard fate. The Kid's appeal found an echo in the sheriff's heart. But his bronzed, bearded face was hard and uncompromising.

"It's no cinch, Kid," he answered.

"I guess you mean what you say—while you're saying it. But sooner or later you'd break out again, and ride wild on the trails. I guess I ain't the power to do what you want—if I wanted to. And—"

"And you don't want?"

"None! I stand for the law, and the law wants you. I'm on your trail, Kid, to take you dead or alive, and I tell you so with your gun looking me in the face," said the Frio sheriff. "Pull trigger if you like."

"I guess if I let drive a bullet through your cabeza, Jake Watson, I wouldn't let any boss-sense out at the hole!" said the Kid bitterly. "I tell you once more that I've come back here peaceful, only asking to be let alone and to live quiet. I tell you I never wanted to be an outlaw, and you and the rest made me one. Do you stand for keeping me one?"

"I stand for the law," said the sheriff stubbornly, "and the law wants you, Kid, and the law's going to have you, if I can work it."

"You're a hard man, Jake, and a dog-goned gink!" said the Kid.

There was a silence.

The Kid, with his gun resting on his knee, as he sat on the desk, looked thoughtfully at the sheriff of Frio.

He had come there, into the midst of a hundred dangers to "talk turkey" to his old foe. He had talked in vain.

Once an outlaw, always an outlaw! The Kid had come back to his own country with hope in his heart, only to find that all things were unchanged, that every man's hand was against him, and his hand against every man's, as of old. Hard and bitter grew the handsome face of he Kid.

Sheriff Watson eyed him stolidly. He was at the boy puncher's mercy, and he half expected a shot from the walnut-butted gun that rested on the Kid's knee. But the Kid was not the man to shoot down an unarmed enemy. He knew now, if he had doubted before, that he had no ruth or mercy to look for; that the sheriff of Frio would hunt him, as he had hunted him of old, so long as he stayed in the Frio country. And the Kid intended to stay.

But the black cloud passed from his face, and he smiled. His light and mocking manner returned.

"I guess I've wasted my time talking turkey to a hard-faced cuss like you, Jake Watson," he said. "I reckon I'll get it. You want to remember that if you make a move, hombre, they'll be needing a new sheriff in Frio. I—"

He broke off as a shadow darkened the open doorway. Abe Harrigan, the sheriff's man, stepped in from the sunlight. In the sudden change from the bright sunshine to the dusk of the office, Harrigan did not for the moment see the boyish figure perched on the desk.

"Sheriff, there's a critter tied up to the rail that's powerful like that mustang that the Rio Kid used to ride!" he exclaimed. "It's sure powerful like—Thunder!"

"Put 'em up!" said the Kid's soft voice.

And Abe, glaring in amazement at the mocking face over the levelled revolver, gasped:

"The Kid! Great gophers!"

And his hands went up promptly over his head.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Kid's Defiance!

THE Rio Kid slid from the sheriff's desk. Abe Harrigan eyed him open-mouthed. The sheriff, still seated in the rocker, watched him. He had hoped that his man might



A RECKLESS DEFIANCE! "You, Poker Pete!" rapped out the Kid. "Take down that bill!" Poker Pete hesitated and backed away a pace. Then he took down the bill. The Kid's gun was not to be argued with. (See Chapter 2.)

come in—and Harrigan had come, only to put up his hands under the Kid's gun. The sheriff's look was bitter, but he was cool and patient. It was unlikely that the reckless Kid would get away from the crowded cow-town alive and free, especially if there was shooting to alarm the town. If Abe succeeded in getting in one shot—

But Abe's hands were above his head, and he was not thinking of drawing a gun. He knew the Kid's deadly aim and lightning quickness too well for that. Abe was taking it like a lamb.

"I guess it's time I was getting," drawled the Rio Kid. "But I'm sure glad to see you again, Abe, before I vamoose the ranch."

"If I'd knowed!" muttered Abe.

The Kid laughed.

"You sure saw my critter hitched on the rail—you might have guessed, Abe. But you never was bright."

"It's your say-so now, Kid," said Abe, with a glitter in his eyes. "Pile it on all you want. I ain't kicking so long as you hold the drop."

"Sit on that desk."

Abe sat in the place lately occupied by the Rio Kid. The Kid had not even troubled to disarm him. Abe was free to draw and try his luck, if he liked. But he did not.

"Ain't it a pleasure, old friends, meeting again like this?" smiled the Kid. "Member the last time we met, Abe? You lighted on me in the chaparral, and I made you dance with bullets chippin' your boots. You sure danced like a greaser at a fandango."

Abe gritted his teeth and did not answer.

"But I reckon I can't hang on talking over old times," sighed the Kid. "I got to be riding. Sheriff, you've still got my proposition afore you. You giving me the same answer?"

"I came trailing back peaceable," said the Kid. "But if you're gone on making it war, I'm your antelope, sheriff."

Watson made no reply to that. His eyes were longingly on the doorway. At a distance he could see a group of cow-punchers riding across the plaza towards the Red Dog Saloon. Had they guessed what was passing in the sheriff's office they would have come whooping down on the scene. He had only to raise his voice and give a call. But it would have been his last shout on earth, and the sheriff did not call.

"If you want war—by the great horned toad, you shall have it!" said the Kid. "I guess I'll make you tired of trailing me, sheriff. I guess I'll make Frio sit up and howl till they let up! Get out of that rocker!"

The Kid was not smiling now.

His face was grim, his eyes gleaming, his lips set. His offer of peace had been refused, and the Kid was on the war-path. In his present mood the lives of the sheriff and his man hung on a thread—and they knew it.

Watson rose quietly from the chair.

"Back to Abe—pronto!"

The sheriff backed up to Harrigan.

"Abe, you'll take off his neck scarf, and tie his paws behind him," said the Kid. "Make it a good job; my eye's on you, hombre. You try any shenanigan with me, Abe, and look out for a quick trip across Jordan!"

"It's your say-so!" repeated Abe sullenly.

He took the sheriff's neck scarf and bound Watson's hands behind his back. The sheriff's eyes met his; but Abe dared not regard the mute appeal. Trifling with the Rio Kid just then was equivalent to playing with a jaguar in the chaparral. The sheriff's wrists were securely bound together.

"Now hand over your own rag!"

With Abe's own neck scarf the Kid

bound Harrigan's hands behind him. The gun was still in Abe's belt, but he made no attempt to touch it, even when the Kid holstered his own Colt.

The Kid surveyed them grimly.

They stared at him, their faces white with rage and humiliation. What would all Frio say when they were found like this—roped up like refractory steers in the sheriff's own office? The Kid picked a trail-rop from a hook on the wall and ran it round the two of them, binding them together back to back. Then he stepped back to the doorway.

"I'm sure hitting the trail now, sheriff," he said. "You ain't changed your mind, old timer?"

"I'll run you down, and see you hanged up on a cottonwood, as sure as shooting, Kid!" said the sheriff hoarsely. "I'll make it last sickness for you before the sun sets again on the Frio!"

"Quien sabe?" grinned the Kid.

He turned and looked into the street. A burly puncher was coming across to the sheriff's office. The Kid recognised Bud Wash, foreman of the Double Bar Ranch—in old days the Kid's foreman. Bud Wash was coming directly to the office, and the Kid stepped into cover inside at once.

"Not a yamp!" he said quietly to his prisoners. "There'll be shooting here if you give so much as a toot, you-uns!"

The heavy tramp of the puncher was heard in the porch.

"You to home, sheriff?" called out the foreman of the Double Bar.

The Kid's gun touched the sheriff's ear.

"Tell the galoot to step in."

For an instant Watson set his teeth, determined to resist. But the next moment he called out in a choking voice:

"Sure! Step in, Bud!"

The burly puncher stepped in.

"Hands up, Bud!"

"Waal, I swear!" ejaculated the foreman of the Double Bar, staring blankly at the Kid. "You back agin, Kid?"

"Yep!" The Kid smiled at his old foreman over his gun. "Put 'em up, Bud; I'd sure hate to spill your juice over the sheriff's floor!"

"I guess I ain't gunning arter you, Kid," said Bud coolly. "Holy smoke! What you been doing here? Ha, ha!" The foreman of the Double Bar roared with laughter as he stared at the sheriff and his man.

"I guess I can take your word, Bud." The Kid dropped his gun into the holster. "I'm hitting the trail now, Adois!"

He walked out of the office to his horse.

"Draw, you fool!" panted the sheriff as soon as the Kid was outside. "Get him as he mounts, you moss-head!"

Bud Wash looked at him coolly.

"I guess I ain't pulling on the Kid," he answered. "I reckon he could have fixed me up like you if he'd wanted, him holding the drop. I ain't pulling on the Kid any."

"You dog-goned gink—"

"Aw, cut it out, sheriff!" said the Double Bar foreman.

There was a clatter of hoofs outside. The Kid was riding.

The sheriff and Abe struggled madly with their ropes. Bud Wash grinned and stood in the doorway looking out. No man on the Double Bar Ranch was disposed to take a hand against the Kid, once their comrade in the bunkhouse on the ranges. Bud Wash watched him with cool interest and hoped that he would get clear.

But the Kid did not seem in a hurry to get clear. The open trail lay before him, but the Kid was not riding for the prairie. He rode across the plaza to the Red Dog. There was a roar of voices from the saloon as the boy outlaw drew rein in front of the building. The poker party outside the Red Dog leaped to their feet; from door and window a dozen startled faces looked.

"The Kid!"

"The Rio Kid!"

The horseman looked at the startled crowd with a smile. The gun in his hand was half-raised.

"You sure know me, fellers," he said.

"Yep, it's the Rio Kid come trailing back. I've sure been to see the sheriff, and I guess I've left him in his office roped up like a steer."

"Gee-whiz!"

"I've come back," went on the Kid.

"But I ain't come a-shooting if Frio lets me alone. That's what I want to tell you galoots. Give me a rest, and I'll give you a rest. But if any galoot here is hunting for trouble with me, let him hop out into the street—and here I am, pronto!"

There were twenty men staring at the Rio Kid, and every man in the crowd packed a gun. But no gun was touched. The boy outlaw's audacity seemed to have taken away the breath of the Frio men. And the half-raised gun in his hand spelled danger. The Kid's eye was wary; no man who had reached for a gun would have been likely to get it away from his belt under the watchful eye of the Kid.

"No galoot looking for a leetle rookus?" asked the Kid. "I'm sure glad to hear it. Gents, I've come trailing back peaceable, and I guess I'll never burn powder along the Rio Pecos if I'm left alone."

He lifted his gun and pointed with

the muzzle to a notice that was nailed on the wall of the saloon beside the door. It was an old frayed bill—frayed by wind and weather—but the wording on it was still readable, and it was to the effect that five hundred dollars reward was offered for the Rio Kid, dead or alive.

"You, Poker Pete!" rapped out the Kid.

Poker Pete, the proprietor of the Red Dog, backed a pace.

"Take down that bill!"

"Aw, forget it, Kid!" protested Poker Pete. "That there bill was posted by the sheriff."

"Take it down!"

Poker Pete hesitated a moment; then he took down the bill. The Kid's gun was not to be argued with.

"I guess I'm waiting to see you tear it up!" remarked the Kid.

Poker Pete tore the bill across and across.

"That's good!" The Kid waved his gun cheerily to the staring crowd. "Adois!"

He wheeled his mustang and galloped away.

The Frio crowd stared after him breathlessly. Three or four men reached for their revolvers.

Bang, bang!

Bullets were flying as the Kid swept round the corner of an adobe building and vanished. There was a rush after him—in time to see the Kid galloping out on the open trail on the prairie.

The Kid looked back, waved his Stetson hat, laughed, and galloped on; and the grassy plains swallowed him from sight. The Kid was gone, and there was a rush of the crowd across the plaza to the sheriff's office.

Bud Wash was untying the sheriff and his man, and that process was completed under twenty pairs of staring eyes, twenty grinning faces.

"That Kid is sure some lad!" chuckled Poker Pete. "He sure got you this time, sheriff!"

Watson made no reply. His bronzed face was white with rage. The moment he was free he dashed out for his horse, and without waiting to call any to follow him galloped furiously out on the prairie.

The sun had set by the time he rode back into Frio, dusty, fatigued, and with a look on his face that warned the Frio men to ask no questions. But they knew that he had not found the Rio Kid.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Trapped!

"IT'S a cinch!"

Sheriff Watson, of Frio, spoke between his teeth. He stood in the thickening dusk of the deep canyon, in the heart of the sierra Huecas, and stared at the gleam of flickering flame in the distance. Against the dusk of falling night, and the black of pine-clad hillsides, the distant camp-fire gleamed and flickered; and the sheriff of Frio knew that he had trailed down the Kid at last.

The sheriff and his posse had been riding and trailing hard. There were seven men in the party in the Huecas canyon, standing by their horses staring at the distant fire. Abe Harrigan, who had the keenest eye for a trail of any man on the banks of the Pecos, had picked up the track of the grey mustang again and again.

Some of the party wondered at the wary Kid having left a trail at all; they had ridden out of Frio with little hope of tracking him, for the Kid was

as elusive as a will-of-the-wisp. But they had found the trail, and followed it into the very heart of the lonely sierra, amid rocky arroyos, and deep, black barrancas and tangled pines. And now, in the distance, they saw the flicker of the lonely camp-fire, and knew that they were in sight of their goal.

"I guess he's our mutton, sheriff!" said Abe. "He sure ain't 'wise' to it that we're on his trail, or he wouldn't be burning a fire. He sure reckons that he's safe up here in the Huecas."

"He sure docs," agreed the sheriff.

"We ain't roped him yet," said Pecos Pete.

The sheriff gritted his teeth. Since the episode in his office at Frio, Jake Watson had thought of nothing but the roping in of the Rio Kid. All Frio had laughed over his discomfiture; they were laughing still. Only the capture of the Kid could wipe out that bitter humiliation. The Kid had come trailing back to his own country, only to find bitter vengeance there. And vengeance now, was in the sheriff's hand.

"You galoots want to watch out," he said quietly. "We've got him cornered; but it will mean shooting. I guess the Kid will put up an all-fired fight. Shoot when you see him, and shoot to kill!"

"Sure!" assented the posse.

They were not likely to stand on ceremony with the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande. Once the Kid had a gun in his hand, even seven to one would not be long odds.

"He can't get clear," went on the sheriff, his eyes fixed on the distant flicker. "I know this country—I've been over it afore, many's the time, arter the Kid. This here canyon ends up agin a wall of rock that a fly couldn't climb over. There ain't any way out except this way. We've got him. He sure figures that he's safe here—and I reckon we've got a chance to catch him napping. That camp-fire looks like it. But watch out."

"You bet!"

"Leave the cayuses here. I guess he'd hear them on these rocks. Keep your guns handy."

The horses were tethered; and the sheriff and his men proceeded up the canyon on foot. Every man gripped a gun in his hand, his eyes on the alert. It looked as if the elusive Kid was trapped at last; but in dealing with the Rio Kid a galoot needed to keep his eyes peeled. Softly, cautiously, in the thickening darkness, the Frio men trod on the rocky way, closer and closer to the flickering fire that burned at the head of the canyon.

The canyon narrowed, as they advanced, to a mere gorge. So narrow, that in one place, a narrow neck between high rocks, they had to walk in single file. Beyond the narrow neck, the canyon opened out again, a basin enclosed by high and inaccessible cliffs. In that narrow neck the Kid could have held the whole force at bay with ease had he known they were coming. The sheriff breathed more freely when they were through, and treading wider space again. Closer and closer they drew to the camp-fire.

Pine cones and branches burned cheerily at the foot of a rock. By the fire lay a still figure in a blanket. In the freelight they could see it clearly, and the sheriff caught his breath. The elusive Kid, so long hunted in vain, had been caught napping at last—asleep, with his foes stealing on him in the shadows!

Closer and closer the sheriff's party drew, gun in hand, ready to pull

trigger if the still form in the blanket stirred. But it did not stir. And at last Sheriff Watson, with blazing eyes, ran forward, and jammed his gun to the sleeping form and shouted:

"We've got you, Kid! By the holy smoke, we've got you at last!"

Every gun in the party was aimed at the recumbent form. Abe Harrigan tore the blanket aside; and every trigger was ready to rise at a movement from the Kid. The next moment there was a roar of rage from the sheriff. As the blanket was dragged aside it was not the Rio Kid that was revealed. A log lay by the fireside—and it was the log that the blanket had covered.

"Gee-whizz!" gasped Pecos Pete.

"It ain't the Kid!" stammered Harrigan.

"Fooled!" muttered the sheriff. "Fooled by that dog-goned Kid! But he kaint be fur off—come daylight, we'll hunt him out of the rocks—"

"Hark!" said Abe.

Far down the canyon, the way the posse had come, sounded the crashing of galloping hoofs. The sheriff started and bent his head to listen.

Beyond the narrow neck of the canyon the horses had been tethered, while the Frio men crept on to the Kid's camp. The galloping, echoing through the dusk of the sierra, told what had become of the tethered horses—and told where the Kid was.

"Great snakes! He's stampeded the cayuses!" hissed the sheriff.

He rushed away down the canyon. His men followed him fast. Twenty miles from Frio, in a rough country, they had lost their horses—and the sheriff foamed with rage at the knowledge.

The galloping died away into the silence of the night, while the sheriff and his men were still panting down the canyon towards the narrow neck. Suddenly from the darkness of the gorge, came the flash and the ring of a revolver.

"He's there!" panted Abe.

The sheriff almost raved. The posse, creeping on to the camp-fire had passed the Kid in the darkness; left him behind them in cover. And he had stampeded the horses in the lower canyon; and now he was in the narrow gorge—their only way of egress—holding it against them. Again the revolver barked from the darkness, and it was followed by the sound of the Rio Kid's voice.

"Halt, you 'uns! I guess any galoot that moseys a step further will get his, sudden!"

"You darned gink!" raved the sheriff.

The sheriff gripped his gun convulsively, and started forward. Abe Harrigan caught him by the arm.

"Let up, sheriff! It ain't good enough!"

Watson shook his hand roughly off. In his rage he had lost all prudence, and he rushed into the gorge, firing wildly as he rushed. From the gloom of the narrow neck came a single shot, and the sheriff pitched over on the rocks and lay groaning. And his men, who had been following, halted again and retreated. In the gorge the groans of the sheriff died down to a low mumbling.

The mocking voice of the Rio Kid rang from the shadows of the gorge.

"You 'uns coming on?"

There was no answer from the Frio posse.

The Kid was master of the situation; and the Frio men could only wait for dawn, and what chance daylight might afford them. As they waited there came a sound of crawling, mingled with gasping and muttering. From the gorge the wounded sheriff of Frio crawled back to his waiting men.

From the gorge came no farther sound, and the Frio men wondered whether the Kid was gone. But they did not venture to enter the gorge to ascertain. They waited grimly till the sun rose on the Huecas.

Then a cautious advance was made into the rocky, winding gorge; but no shot greeted them as they came. The Rio Kid was gone—and had been long gone. His trail, if he had left one, was useless to seek; the posse were dismounted now, and their leader was wounded; it was futile to figure on following the Kid on foot. Many a long mile away their horses were grazing on the plains. The sheriff, his wound bandaged, his bronzed face white with pain and rage, gave the word to hit the trail for Frio.

In a litter made of pine branches, the wounded sheriff was carried on the shoulders of his men, tramping long, weary miles under a blazing sun.

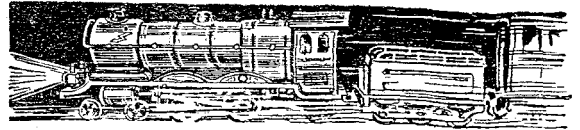
It was past midday when they reached Frio; and all the cow town turned out to see them come in.

Through a crowd of grinning faces the weary posse trailed down the street of Frio.

Afar, in the sierra, the Rio Kid smiled as he rode the grey mustang by lonely trails.

THE END.

(Next week's Western thriller is entitled: "THE THOUSAND DOLLAR KID!" Don't miss it, boys!)



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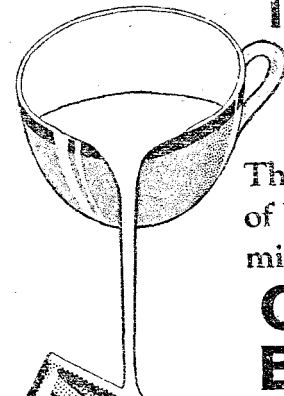
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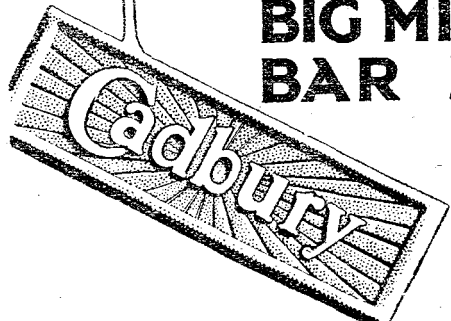
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Mesquite Judd, the gunman, rides into Frio determined to win the reward of ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS offered for the capture of the elusive Rio Kid. But the reward he eventually earns is quite different!



OUR ROARING WESTERN THRILLER—STARRING THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Gunman from the Brazos!

MESQUITE JUDD rode into the cow-town of Frio in the sunny morning, himself and his horse covered with the dust of the trail. Men on the street of Frio stared at Mesquite as he rode by, his scarred, bearded face grim under his Stetson hat. There were many in Frio who knew the gunman from the Brazos; none who knew any good of him. No man was his friend; many were his enemies. But if the Frio man stared, they were careful not to give offence. Mesquite, who packed two guns, was a "killer" by reputation, and not a man to seek trouble with. Three or four men saluted him as he passed, and Mesquite acknowledged the salutes with a sardonic grin. He was well aware that they would rather have pulled a gun on him, had they dared. But pulling a gun on Mesquite Judd was one way of asking for sudden death. The gunman was hated and feared, but he could ride without fear through any cow-town in Texas.

Through the dusty street, thick with dust that blew in from the plains, Mesquite rode on his horse, and stopped outside the sheriff's office on the plaza.

A little crowd was gathered there, staring at a bill posted on the wall. That bill announced the reward of a thousand dollars for the taking of the Rio Kid, dead or alive. It was signed by Jake Watson, the sheriff. Across a blank space was written another announcement, in a bold, clear hand, evidently added over-night while the town of Frio was sleeping. It ran:

"Two thousand, spot cash, for the galoot who can do it!

(Signed), THE RIO KID."

Mesquite grinned as he looked at it. "I guess that kid's got some gall!" he remarked. "This here town ain't got much sand, to let a kid puncher twist its tail this-a-way."

Some of the crowd looked round angrily at that comment from a stranger. But the anger died out of their faces as they recognised Mesquite Judd.

"The Kid's sure got a heap of gall," said Poker Smith, of the Red Dog
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saloon. "I reckon he moseyed in hyer last night to stick that up. The sheriff will sure be mad when he sees it."

"A thousand dollars offered for that dog-goned outlaw, and no galoot hyer with grit enough to rope him in!" said Mesquite contemptuously.

"He sure ain't easy to rope in," answered Poker Smith mildly. "The sheriff and his posse was arter him up in the Huecas, but the Kid rung in a cold deck on them. It ain't so plumb easy, Judd."

"Not for this burg!" jeered Mesquite. "Mebbe you'd like to take a hand!" said Poker Smith, as sarcastically as he dared.

"You've said it," answered Mesquite coolly. "I guess that's why I'm hyer, feller."

There was a buzz in the Frio crowd as the gunman dismounted, hitched his pinto to the rack, and strode heavily into the sheriff's office. The news that Mesquite Judd, the "killer" from the Brazos, had come to town to "get" the Rio Kid, rang through Frio like wild-fire.

Mesquite tramped into the office. Sheriff Watson was there—with an arm in a sling, a gun on the desk before him. He turned a scowling face on the newcomer, and started as he recognised the gunman. His hand dropped on the gun on the desk.

"Forget it, sheriff," said Mesquite. "I sure ain't come hyer for gun-play, hombre."

"I reckon you've got gall to come hyer at all," snapped the sheriff. "Your sort ain't wanted in Frio, Mesquite Judd. I guess the sooner you hit the trail, the better it will be for your health."

"I'm after the Kid."

"The Rio Kid?"

"Sure!"

Watson stared at him, and withdrew his hand from his gun. His face was still scowling: the scowl had seldom left it since the day the Rio Kid had come back to his own country. Bitter and deep was the humiliation of the Frio sheriff. The boy outlaw of the Rio Grande had defied him, defeated him, led him and his men into a trap in the sierra, contemptuously spared his life, when it was his for the taking. There were murmurings in Frio, and in the surrounding ranches: the Kid was too

good for the sheriff, and with reckless defiance he still rode the trails untouched, and even ventured into the cow-town to carry his defiance to the sheriff's own door. The Frio sheriff's cup of bitterness was full to overflowing.

But he eyed the gunman doubtfully. Frio did not want a galoot of Mesquite Judd's calibre within its borders; and in other circumstances Watson would have warned him out of the town.

"What's your grouch agin the Kid?" he asked, after a long pause.

Mesquite shrugged his broad shoulders.

"I guess I ain't got no kick coming, fur as the Kid's concerned. It's the reward I'm after. I heard about it down on the Brazos, and I reckon I've moseyed along to collect it. He's a Thousand-Dollar Kid now." The ruffian grinned. "That's my grouch."

There was another pause. The sheriff's whole nature was against having anything to do with the gunman, or speaking a civil word to him. But in the bitterness of defeat and humiliation, he put that aside. If Mesquite Judd could get the Kid, his visit was welcome.

"I reckon you've as much right to go after the Kid as any galoot in Texas!" the sheriff said at last.

"Sure!"

"The reward's there for the man that can get him," said Watson. "If you mean business, Mesquite Judd, I reckon you're free to camp down in Frio, as long as you like. I guess I ain't picking faults in any galoot that trails the Rio Kid."

"That's boss-sense," said Mesquite coolly. "The Kid seems to have got this whole country where he wants it. Down on the Brazos, I reckon we'd have got him roped in and strung up afore he could say 'No sugar in mine.' You sure are peaceable galoots in this burg."

"Enough chin-wag," snapped the sheriff. "I reckon you won't find it plumb easy if you go after the Kid. You're welcome to try. He's about as easy to find as a weasel, and as easy to catch if you find him. I reckon if you light on him, it will be the last thing that will happen to you."

The gunman's eyes gleamed under his beetling brows, and his square jaw was thrust forward. His hand lingered over one of his low-slung guns. The sheriff

stared at him steadily; he was not the man to be bulldozed in his own office by a gunman—even a killer of Mesquite's reputation. The threat in the ruffian's look had no effect on him.

"I guess I've pulled on a galoot for saying less than that Jake Watson," said Mesquite at last.

"Forgot it," snapped the sheriff. "Pull a gun here, Mesquite Judd, and you go into the calaboose so quick it will make your head swim. You ain't on the Brazos now."

Mesquite breathed hard.

"I ain't come here hunting for trouble," he said. "I'm after the Kid, and the reward. You put me wise where he was last seen, and I guess I'm hitting the trail to look for him."

"He was last seen up in the Huecas, twenty miles from here," said the sheriff. "He may be there, or he may be at the street's end, for all I know. He's got gall enough to ride into Frio in the daylight and shoot up the town. And if he does, I reckon you won't stop him."

"You watch out and see!" snarled the gunman. "I've heered about that rookus in the Huecas—he got you and your men dead to rights, and sent you home afoot, with a bullet in your fin. There ain't a man in the Frio country can handle the Kid; but I reckon I can work the rifle—I guess getting that kid puncher will be pie to me."

"Get on with it, then," said the sheriff grimly. "I'll sure be glad to hand over the reward if you tote the Rio Kid into town—dead or alive."

"Dead, I reckon," said the gunman coolly. "I ain't taking no chances, and when I get a bead on the Kid, it will be last sickness for him. Don't you figure on getting him alive to string up—you'll sure miss your guss."

"Dead or alive," repeated the sheriff.

The scowl on the Frio sheriff's face was less black when the Brazos gunman was gone.

His conscience troubled him a little for dealing with a man like the killer. But the Rio Kid had defied the law too long; he had defeated and humiliated the Frio sheriff too deeply. Any man that could get the Rio Kid was welcome to Jake Watson now. And if any man could get him, it surely was the cool, cunning, ruthless killer from the Brazos, savage as a cougar, ruthless as a rattlesnake, intent only on killing his man and grasping the blood-money. And if it turned out otherwise, if the Kid proved too good for the gunman, as he had proved too good hitherto for all the enemies who had sought him, the sheriff grimly reflected that the cow country would be rid of a pest. There would be no one in Texas to mourn for Mesquite Judd. Either way only good could come of it, and the sheriff of Frio stifled his conscience and waited eagerly for news.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Kid's Answer!

ALL Frio watched Mesquite Judd, during the next few days, with breathless interest. The gunman loafed about town, chiefly at the Red Dog Saloon, where he had taken up his quarters. Every day he mounted his pinto horse and rode out on the trails; but he was generally seen at the Red Dog at night. His hard, bronzed face told nothing, and he was a man of few words. But day followed day, and Mesquite had not succeeded in "getting" the Rio Kid. He was known to be as good a man on a trail as he was with a six-gun; but the elusive Kid left little trail to be followed. Indeed, many of the citizens of Frio, and the punchers on the ranches, opined that if the Kid learned that the killer was on his trail,

he would not avoid a meeting, but would go out of his way to give Mesquite what he was asking for.

Desperate and dangerous as the gunman was, it was certain that the Rio Kid would not fear a meeting with him, likely enough that he might seek one. Frio was a rough town, and every man in Frio packed a gun; but Frio had its limit, and a gunman of Mesquite's reputation for ferocity was not liked or wanted there. Had the sheriff given the word, the Frio citizens would have gathered in force to run the killer from the Brazos out of town. But it was fairly well known that the sheriff was backing the gunman, or, at least, that he was willing to give him every chance to earn blood-money. And the Frio men were civil to a desperado whose guns had more than a dozen notches cut on them, every notch registering the death of a man. Once the gunman was absent from town for three nights in succession, and all Frio waited breathlessly for news, many opining that Mesquite had found his man at last, and that it was the Kid who had proved victor. But Mesquite rode back to Frio on the fourth day, grim and silent as ever, worn by hard trailing, and evidently still unsuccessful.

Getting the Rio Kid was a tougher task than the gunman from the Brazos had figured. But he gave no sign of throwing in his hand. If only for the sake of his desperate reputation, the "killer" could not afford to admit a defeat. He was there to rope in a thousand dollars for the Rio Kid, and he was there till he had done it.

The Double-Bar bunch, when they rode into town, if they came on Mesquite, gave him grim looks. On the Double-Bar ranch the punchers remembered the Kid with an affectionate memory, and in the bunkhouse there was a suggestion of riding into town in a body and stringing the Brazos gunman up to a branch. But Old Man Dawney heard of it and intervened. In his own heart there was a soft corner for the Kid, but he would not have his bunch openly taking the side of an outlaw. Savage and ruthless desperado as Mesquite was, a reckless killer of men, and a seeker of blood-money, he was standing for the law in his hunt for the Rio Kid. The reward of a thousand dollars stood officially offered for the boy outlaw, and it was open to any man in Texas to earn it, if he could. But on the Double-Bar there was not a man who did not long to hear that the Brazos gunman had been found "shot up" on the trails. And one afternoon, as Bud Wash, the foreman of the ranch, was riding an outlying range by the upper waters of the Rio Frio, thinking of the Kid, and wondering how a galoot could get a word of warning to him, he sighted a rider in the post-oaks, and waved his hat in greeting, and the Kid came galloping out of the scrub to meet him.

Handsome and sunburnt, cheery and fresh as ever, the Rio Kid sat the saddle of his grey mustang with the black muzzle. He grinned at the ranch foreman.

"You ain't pulling a gun, Bud?" he chuckled.

"I guess not," said the foreman.

"You ain't honing to handle a thousand dollars?" grinned the Kid.

"I guess there's a man in town honing for it," said Bud. "What are you doing here, Kid?"

"Looking at the old range, jest for greens," answered the Kid. "I was raised hyer, and I reckon, if I ride ever so long a trail, I'll always come trailing back some time to the Double Bar ranges. I reckon I was sure glad to see you from the post-oaks, Bud."

"I'm sure glad to see you, Kid," said the Double-Bar foreman. "I guess the

best advice I can give you is to hit the trail out of the Frio country, pronto."

"Sheriff Watson on the war-path again?" grinned the Kid.

"Nope. He's laid up for a piece, since you winged him in the Huecas. But there's a new man in town; you've heard of Mesquite Judd?"

"I surr- have," said the Kid. "Seen him once down in the Brazos country. A bad man, Judd."

"He's after your scalp."

"Sho!" said the Kid.

"It's the reward he's honing after," said Bud. "Kid, he's a bad man, is Judd, and he's killed more galoots than he's got fingers and toes. I guess I ain't no slouch with a gun, but I look another way when I come on Judd in Frio. I don't want any trouble with him. Kid, that wolf will get you, soon or late, if you hang on in the Frio country. You sure want to hit the trail for New Mexico, or the Panhandle, till he gets tired and pulls out."

"What's his grouch against me?"

"Blood-money," said Bud briefly.

The Kid's eyes gleamed.

"I guess I'll give him a chance to earn it," he said.

"Kid," said the foreman of the Double Bar earnestly, "give it a miss. That galoot Judd is bad medicine. I guess you're a galoot to whip your weight in wild-cats; but Mesquite Judd is a killer, and he's lightning on the draw."

"I ain't jest slow myself," grinned the Kid.

"He'll get you, Kid, if you hang on," said Bud. "I tell you, there's some tough galoots in Frio, but they speak soft when Mesquite is around. He's sure bad medicine."

The Kid smiled.

"I'll sure give him a chance," he said. "No man is going to hunt the Rio Kid, and brag that I'm dodging him. So-long, Bud! It won't do you no good if you're seen chewing the rag with an outlaw."

"So-long, Kid!"

The Rio Kid rode away and disappeared into the post-oaks. Bud Wash rode on his way with a thoughtful brow. He had given the boy puncher a friendly warning, but he wondered whether he might not have done more harm than good. He guessed that the Kid was more likely to seek Mesquite Judd than to avoid him, now that he knew that the gunman was hunting him.

In Frio that night some wakeful citizens heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs in the shadowy streets; but it was not till morning that the cow-town knew that the Rio Kid had come—and gone. On the door of the Red Dog Saloon, when Poker Smith opened it, a chalked inscription was to be read, and in half an hour all Frio had read it, and commented on it, and when Mesquite Judd came to look at it a breathless crowd watched him.

"The Kid's been in town," said Poker Smith.

Mesquite's hard, grim face grew mottled as he stared at the words chalked on the door by the outlaw he was seeking.

"NOTICE."

Mesquite Judd is warned to light out of Frio pronto. He's got three days. If he ain't vamoosed by then, I'm coming to see him, and I'm coming a-shooting.

THE RIO KID.

Black as midnight grew the brow of the killer as he read that defiance. All eyes were on him; some of the crowd were grinning. But the grins died from their faces as Mesquite looked round. From face to face the gunman's cold, hard glance passed, and all eyes dropped.

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before his. He was seeking one man who would venture to mock or to give offence; and if he had found one Mesquite's gun would have seen play in the street of Frio. But there was no man in the cow-town who cared to take up the unspoken challenge. Voices died away, and there was a dead silence till the man from the Brazos spoke:

"You, Poker Smith, you reckon the Rio Kid put that up?" he asked.

"Sure," answered the saloon keeper. "You reckon he was in town last night?"

"Sure."
"You reckon he'll keep his word?"
"The Kid ain't never broke his word, Mesquite."

The gunman knitted his brows.
"I guess he'll break it this time," he said. "He don't dare to ride into Frio, except at night, sneaking in like a coyote in the dark. He don't dare to come a-shooting."

"To-day's Monday," said Poker Smith. "If you're here on Thursday, Mesquite, the Kid will come, and he will come a-shooting."

"You reckon so for sure?"
"Every galoot in Frio will tell you the same."

The gunman laughed grimly.
"I'll sure be to home when he calls," he said.

And he turned away. Later in the morning came Sheriff Watson, his arm still in a sling; and the sheriff read that chalked notice with bitter joy in his eyes. Mesquite might doubt, but the sheriff of Frio did not doubt; he knew that the Kid would keep his word, if he had to ride through a hundred foes armed to the teeth. The sheriff, writhing under defeat and humiliation, saw light at last. That day he was busy, and the following days. By Wednesday the sheriff's plans were laid and carried out; in the street of Frio, armed men loafed and lounged; tried men that the sheriff could trust, men who were quick to shoot, and ready to shoot; and when Thursday dawned, the last day of grace for Mesquite, the sheriff and his men were watchful as lynxes. All Frio believed that the Kid would be as good as his word; all Frio believed, knew, that he would come to seek the Brazos gunman, as he had declared that he would. And all Frio knew that he could never get away alive. Whatever might be his luck in a shooting-play with the Brazos killer, he could not escape the sheriff. Once he was in the town, he would be surrounded, shot down without mercy if he resisted arrest, and the long trail would be ended.

That day, at early dawn, men were riding into Frio from all sides. The news had spread far and wide—all along the Frio and the Pecos it was breathlessly discussed in ranch and bunkhouse. Every puncher who could get away from the ranges rode into Frio that day—men rode all night to be at Frio in the morning. The plaza swarmed with punchers in Stetsons and chaps, the Red Dog saloon overflowed with a buzzing crowd. Every man who rode in was scanned by a hundred pairs of eyes, lest he should be the Rio Kid. At what hour the Kid would come, no man knew or could guess; but that he would come, all were certain. Among the crowd, moved the sheriff's men, alert, watchful, hand near gun, watchful for the handsome, reckless Kid. At his office sat Sheriff Watson, grim, patient, relentless, with half a dozen of his men loafing on the benches outside, ready for his call, ready for action at

the first rumour that the Kid was in town or had been seen on the trails. Outside the Red Dog saloon, cool, grim, silent, lounged Mesquite Judd. He had not gone—he had not thought of going. He was waiting for the Rio Kid to keep his word.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. The Old-Timer!

THE old-timer who dismounted at the Red Dog in the hot afternoon looked as if he had collected most of the dust on the prairie trail. His horse was a mustang, with white muzzle and white stockings; a handsome, sinewy animal. But the old-timer himself looked as if he had survived from the old days before the Mexican War. His face, brown as a berry, was thick with a grizzly beard and grey moustaches; his Stetson hat was a dusty rag, and ragged grey locks escaped from under it. His buckskin clothes were old and worn, and covered with dust; his spurs were red with rust. He packed a gun; but if his gun was anything like the rest of him, it did not look like being of much service. He hitched the white-muzzled mustang to the rack, and stared round at the buzzing crowd that swarmed outside the saloon. So many horses were hitched there that there was scarcely room for another. Horses were tethered everywhere in Frio that day; the cow town looked as if half the population of the county had ridden in. And the old-timer stared in surprise under his shaggy grey eyebrows.

"Say, what's the rookus?" he inquired, addressing nobody in particular. "Is it a necktie party to-day, fellers?"

Some of the crowd grinned at him. Many an old-timer wandered into Frio at one time or another, but this specimen was the rustiest, dustiest specimen the Frio men had ever seen.

"Ain't seed the Kid on the trail, have

you, old-timer?" asked two or three voices.

The old fellow blinked at them.
"What kid?"

"The Rio Kid, you durned old hobo," said Euchre Dick. "Ain't you heard that the Rio Kid is expected in town to-day?"

"Oh, that gol darned young fire-bug," said the old-timer. "Has the sheriff got him at last, then?"
"Nope!"

And as the old-timer seemed unaware of the thrilling happenings that impended, a dozen pilgrims obligingly gave him the news. The old-timer listened with interest.

"That Kid is sure some fire-bug," he said. "I reckon he will keep his word, you 'uns."

"That's what we all reckon."
"Anc the sheriff won't give him a chance to vamoose this time, I reckon," said Santa Fe Sam, of the Bar-10, "I'll tell a man. Jake Watson's got twenty men watching for him, and when the Kid moseys in, it will be him for the long jump."

"Sho!" said the old-timer. "That don't seem fair play to me, fellers, if he's coming in for gun-play with a galoot what's hunting him."

"You bet the sheriff ain't losing a chance like this," chuckled Euchre Dick. "The Kid's asking for it this time, and you can bet that he will get it, right where he lives."

"And when is he a-coming?" asked the old-timer.

"Nobody knows—but he'll come."

"He'll sure come," said Santa Fe Sam. "The Kid's a galoot of his word. He warned Mesquite to quit; and Mesquite ain't quit. The Kid will come a-shooting before the day's out."

There was a roar down the street, an alarm that the Rio Kid was seen. There was a rush of the crowd. But it was a false alarm; the man riding in was only a puncher from the Cross-Bar ranch. The old-timer stood leaning on the wall of the saloon, watching the excited crowd with interested eyes. His eyes turned from the buzzing throng to the hard-faced gunman who lounged near the door.

Mesquite Judd was there; and he was ready. His low-slung guns had been hitched forward, ready to his hands; his keen, deep-set eyes were alert. If the Kid came—or when he came—it was doubtful whether he would get as far as gun-play with the man from the Brazos; for the sheriff's men had orders to seize him at sight, and to shoot him down without hesitation if he offered resistance. The instant the Kid was seen riding into Frio, guns would be levelled; and as nobody expected him to surrender, all Frio expected to see him fall riddled with bullets. Mesquite Judd, threatened with the loss of the blood-money he sought, if the Kid fell into the sheriff's hands without his assistance, only hoped that he would be the man to pull trigger first on the boy outlaw.

The old-timer watched him quietly for a few minutes. The crowd came surging back to the Red Dog; the Kid was not seen yet. Many believed that he would not come till night had fallen; in the dark he would have more chance of getting away again—though the chance would be slight enough. The old-timer entered into the incessant talk that was going on in the crowd outside the saloon. Like most old-timers, he was talkative; and he confided to uninterested ears that his name was Buck Davis, and that he was called Panhandle Buck,

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because he had punched cows along the Panhandle in the days of his prime.

"How long ago was that, old-timer?" grinned Santa Fe Sam.

"I sort of disremember," said the dusty old puncher. "But it wasn't so long ago as you might calculate. I reckon I ain't so old as I look. But I can tell you 'uns one thing—I don't think any great shucks of this town, or of the galoots in it. You let a gunman like Mesquite Judd bulldoze you all he wants. I reckon if this was a white man's town that all-fired scallywag would be fired out of it so quick it would make his head swim."

There was a sudden hush. The taunt was irritating enough to the men of Frio, and it was uttered loudly, in full

"Oh, shucks!" gasped Euchre Dick.

The whole crowd gasped. For the moment even the Rio Kid was forgotten, and all attention was fixed on the dusty old cowpuncher who hurled that reckless defiance at the killer from the Brazos feared by every man in Frio.

Mesquite drew himself from the wall of the saloon. His dark, hard face was darker and more savage. He made a stride towards the old puncher.

"I guess I'm Mesquite Judd, you old rat of the desert!" he said grimly. "You got anything more to say?"

And the Frio crowd looked on, expecting to see the old-timer wilt, and back away in fear from the anger he had roused. But the puncher from the Panhandle did not move.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Shot for Shot.

"GEE-WHIZ!" The whole crowd gasped; and as they gasped they backed rapidly out of the line of fire, for shooting was certain.

Mesquite Judd lay at full length—knocked down by the puncher from the Panhandle. He lay dazed; and the Frio crowd gazed on almost in terror. It was certain that there would be shooting now; and the old-timer would be filled with holes as soon as Mesquite got to this gun.

In the wild excitement of this new episode no one thought of the Rio Kid—the boy outlaw might have ridden into Frio unnoticed at that moment.



STRAIGHT FROM THE SHOULDER! With surprising activity the old Panhandle puncher side-stepped the blow Judd aimed at him, and struck back in return.

Crash! There was a gasp from the crowd as the gunman went staggering back, to fall full length on the earth. (See chapter 3.)

hearing of Mesquite Judd, who was leaning on the wall of the saloon only a few yards from the old-timer as he spoke.

Mesquite looked round, with a gleam in his deep-set eyes. But he gave a shrug of contempt as he saw who the speaker was. That grey-bearded puncher was not worth his powder and shot.

"You want to watch how you shoot off your mouth hyer, you durned old fool!" said Santa Fe Sam. "That's Mesquite jest yonder, and if he got mad with you, I reckon you'd never know what hit you!"

Panhandle Buck glanced round.

"Where's Mesquite?" he demanded, in a loud voice. "If that gunman has got all you galoots cold, he ain't got me cold, and don't you forget it! I'm spry an' ready to tell a hound like Mesquite Judd that I sure reckon he's a scallywag and a murderer, and if he don't like it I've got a gun hyer ready to back it up!"

"You Mesquite, are you?" he said. "You the killer that ought to have been strung up down on the Brazos? Yep! I got some more to say. I'll tell the world, if this town had any gall, they'd take you and hang you on the nearest cotton-wood, for the murdering coyote that you are, Mesquite Judd."

The hand of the gunman moved towards his gun. But instead of touching it he clenched his fist.

A moment more, and the puncher from the Panhandle would have been hurled into the middle of the street by a crashing blow.

But that blow never was delivered.

With an activity surprising in one who looked so old and grey, the Panhandle puncher side-stepped, closed in on the gunman, and struck. And there was a gasp from the Frio crowd as Mesquite Judd went staggering back, to fall at full length on the earth.

The man feared by all the cowtown, the man reputed a ruthless killer, the man who was never known to miss his aim, had been knocked down by the old puncher, and lay panting in the dust. The old puncher from the Panhandle had recklessly evoked the trouble that every man in Frio had been careful to avoid. And he did not seem alarmed. He was standing at ease, his hand near his gun, watching the man from the Brazos like a cat, evidently ready for what would follow. Old-timer as he looked there was more "sand" in him than in any man in Frio.

Mesquite staggered to his feet. The look in his deep-set eyes might have made any man tremble. The old-timer grinned at him.

"You Mesquite," he jeered. "They say the Rio Kid has warned you to vamoose the ranch, and you sure better hit the trail while you're healthy. If the boys hyer ain't enough sand in

their crawl to handle you, I guess I'm the galoot to do it; and if you want gun-play, you dog-goned gink, I'm your mutton, with the wool on."

Mesquite gave him a murderous look. "You're sure goin' to get gun-play, old-timer, whether you want it or not!" he grated between his teeth.

The breathless crowd surged further back. Mesquite had not reached for a gun yet—but it was coming. He backed away a few paces, his eyes on the man from the Panhandle, watching him like a cat. The old-timer backed away in his turn. Neither had he reached for a gun; but under his whaggy brows his eyes were keenly alert.

There was a pause; and the silence that fell on the swarming crowd in the plaza of Frio was like death. Every man knew that when Mesquite Judd reached for a gun his movement would be like lightning; and that swift movement would be followed instantly by a rain of bullets, riddling the man who had recklessly defied him. The pause was counted by seconds; but the seconds seemed like hours to the crowd staring on with bated breath.

There was a sudden, tigerish movement of the gunman; his gun was in his hand.

Crack!

Swift as he was, the old-timer was swifter. Before the gunman's hand came up to the level, a revolver appeared as if by magic in the old-timer's hand, and was turned instantly into a stream of fire and smoke.

The two reports roared like one; but one was a fraction of time the quicker. The tattered Stetson spun from the old-timer's head, and dropped behind him.

Mesquite Judd was seen to stagger. Then suddenly he crumpled up and rolled on the earth.

There was a breathless yell.

"Mesquite's got his!"

"Great snakes!"

The old-timer picked up his hat, and grinned at the bullet-hole in the tattered brim. Mesquite lay where he had fallen, his hand still grasping the Colt that he was powerless to use again. A surging, swarming crowd surrounded the old-timer; the dusty old puncher from the Panhandle, the only man ever known to beat Mesquite Judd to the draw.

"Gee-whiz!" Poker Smith gazed breathlessly from the doorway of the Red Dog. "Mesquite's got his! Say, old-timer, I reckon you was some gunman in your time!"

"I reckon so!" assented the old-timer, with a grin. "I sure reckon I'm some gunman still, feller."

"Mesquite won't never get the Rio Kid now!" grinned Euchre Dick.

"He sure will not!" said the old-timer.

And at that mention of the Rio Kid the crowd remembered for what they had gathered there, and eyes were turned again on the street and the trail. The Brazos gunman, desperately wounded and almost unconscious, was carried into his room in the Red Dog; the old-timer slipped away quietly in the crowd.

Was the Kid coming? When would he come? The man he was to meet was not there to face him now; the killer from the Brazos had been shot up by the unknown old-timer who had ridden into camp from nowhere. But the Kid would come; he had said that he would be in Frio that day, and the Kid was a slave of his word.

Outside the sheriff's office the sheriff's waiting men stared at the old-timer, who came loping up on his mustang with the white muzzle and the white stockings. They grinned at the dusty old-timer; but they grinned with respect—they had to respect the man who had faced the dreaded gunman from the Brazos, and shot him up.

"Say, fellers," drawled the old-

timer. "is this here shebang the sheriff's office?"

"You've said it, old 'un!" answered Poker Pete.

"Sheriff to home?"

"Yep."

"I kinder reckon I've got a note for him," said the old-timer, fumbling in his ragged shirt, and drawing out a folded paper. "There's news in that letter, feller, about the Rio Kid, that young firebug that Jake Watson is honing to get. You hand that note to the sheriff."

Poker Pete took the folded paper, and the old timer rode on down the street. He gave the mustang a touch of the spur, and the sinewy animal broke into a gallop. Horsemen were still riding into Frio; and the old-timer was the only man who was riding out, and many glances turned on him as he went. The old-timer rode swiftly out of the town, and, once on the open trail, spurred his mustang to a racing speed.

Sheriff Watson unfolded carelessly enough the paper that Poker Pete handed to him. But when he glanced at it a sudden change came over his face, and he gave a gasping cry. Only a few words were written on the paper:

"I've sure kept my word, sheriff! You want to send for another gunman.

"THE RIO KID."

Jake Watson stood rooted to the floor, staring at the words. For the moment he seemed paralysed. Poker Pete looked at him in wonder.

"The Kid!" The sheriff of Frio found his voice. "Who gave you this note? Where is he? After him—"

"I guess it was the old-timer that shot up Mesquite Judd—"

"It was the Kid!" roared the sheriff, mad with fury. "Follow me! Shoot him on sight!"

He choked with rage as he rushed from the office into the street.

"The Kid!"

"The Rio Kid!"

The word passed from mouth to mouth. Up and down Frio men sought the old-timer—the grey-bearded puncher from the Panhandle—out on the prairie trails horsemen swept at full gallop, gun in hand. Like wildfire the news ran and buzzed through Frio. The Rio Kid had kept his word; he had come—and he had gone. But Frio had not known him when he came—they knew who the old-timer was only when he had gone.

There was mounting in haste in Frio, running and riding, wild spurring on all the trails that led from the town; but at sundown weary horsemen came loping in, unsuccessful. The Rio Kid had kept his word, and that day he had ridden into Frio, and faced his enemy there and beaten him; but the boundless prairie had swallowed him up again, and the sheriff raged and raved in vain.

Afar in the trackless chaparral, the Rio Kid had stripped off the disguise that had hidden his well-known handsome face from hundreds of eyes that knew it well, and washed the paint from the legs and muzzle of the grey mustang. Out on the darkening plain he could hear the distant, echoing thunder of galloping horses; and he laughed as he heard it. The reward was not yet earned for the Thousand-Dollar Kid!

THE END.

(You'll find the Kid involved in another breathless adventure next week. Don't miss: "BANDITS OF THE BORDER!" a stirring Western yarn.)



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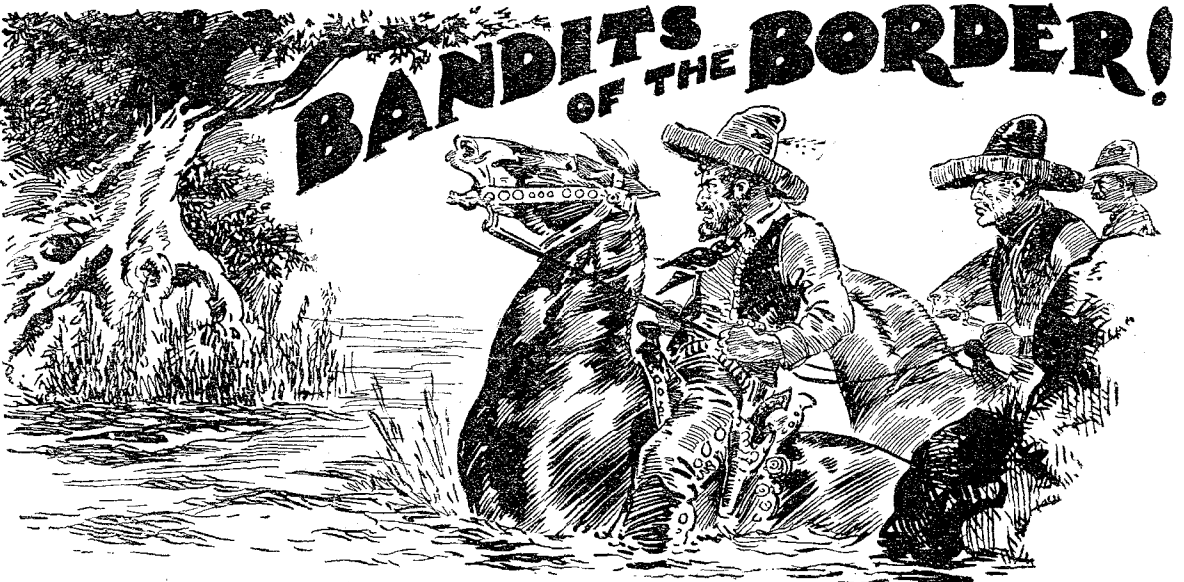
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THE RECKLESSNESS OF THE RIO KID!

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OUR ROARING LONG COMPLETE WESTERN TALE, FEATURING AN AMAZING BOY OUTLAW, THE RIO KID!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.**Dangerous Neighbours!**

THE Rio Kid lay close. The Kid feared no foe, or any number of foes; and, if need had been, he would have faced Sonora Jose's gang with careless defiance, and relied upon his six-guns and his unerring shooting to pull him through. But there was no need, and the Kid, reckless as he was, had no hunch to hunt for unnecessary trouble with a crowd of greasers. He lay low, and watched the Mexicans through the thick foliage of the ceiba; ready for trouble if it came, but with no intent to seek it.

They had camped down in the timber island in the early morning. There were nine of them—Sonora Jose himself, copper-skinned, black-haired, black-bearded, with gold earrings in his dusky ears, and eight other Mexicans or half-breeds. They were one of the toughest crowds that the Rio Kid had ever seen. Savage as jaguars, armed to the teeth.

They had staked out their bronchos under the trees, and were lolling in the grass, or leaning against tree-trunks, rolling endless cigarritos and smoking them, muttering to one another in their own soft and musical language.

Sonora Jose, on the edge of the timber, was watching the plain. And the Kid, in the branches of the big ceiba that overlooked almost the whole extent of the timber island, watched them, and wondered what their game was.

The Kid had camped in the "motte" overnight. It was the noise of the arrival of the Mexicans that had awakened him in the dawn, and caused him to turn out of his blankets—quietly and cautiously. The crowding of a bunch of horsemen into the timber spelled danger for the Kid. He had fully expected to find that it was Sheriff Watson, of Frio, with his posse.

Leaving his mustang hidden in the

thickets, the Kid had climbed the big ceiba to get a view of the newcomers, and now he was watching them, and wondering. He knew the black-bearded ruffian with the earrings. Sonora Jose was well known on both sides of the Rio Grande. Brigand on the Mexican side, cow-thief on the Texas side, Sonora Jose was wanted by Texas sheriff and Mexican alcalde.

The Kid wondered what he was doing here, within ten miles of Frio, so far from the border. That the swarthy gang were there on the trail of plunder, he did not need telling. They had taken cover in the timber, and were waiting. While his men lolled and smoked, Sonora Jose was watching the plain—for what?

It was not the Kid's funeral. Was he not himself an outlaw, hunted as hard as Sonora Jose, or harder? All the Kid had to do was to lie close till the swarthy gang had gone, and leave them to their trail, whatever it was. Had they found him in the lonely timber island they would have killed him for his horse and guns.

But they clearly had no suspicion that anyone was in the clump of timber excepting themselves, and the Kid was safe enough so long as he lay doggo. But there was a thoughtful shade on the Kid's handsome, sunburnt face. It got his goat to see a gang of Mexican brigands on Texas soil; and if it was Texas cows they were after, the Kid had a feeling that he would take a hand. He was an outlaw, hunted far and wide, with a price on his head; but he had a feeling that he would never see Texas cows driven across the Rio Grande by that gang of swarthy cut-throats without chipping in.

But, after all, it was not likely that they were after cows. In the broad daylight, many a long mile from the border, Sonora Jose could never hope to drive off a herd of long-horns in safety. It wasn't cows, the Kid reflected. But if it was not, it was difficult to figure on what the Mexicans

were there at all for. They were in a country that was not healthy for them. The Kid knew how gleefully any bunch of cow-punchers in the Frio country would have saddled up and packed their guns for a chance of wiping out Sonora Jose and his gang.

And at last the Kid, thinking it out, guessed what the game was. Sonora Jose, on the edge of the motte, staring across the prairie, was watching the trail by which the hack ran to Frio—the two-horse hack that came up from McCracken, with letters and parcels and passengers, and sometimes with a sealed bag of greenbacks for the bank at Frio. It was the hack for which the crew of swarthy outcasts were waiting. There was to be a hold-up on the trail.

The Kid knew it now. Once he had thought it out, he had no doubt. Still he wondered a little. More than once the hack from McCracken had been held up, but there was seldom much loot to be gleaned, nothing that was worth the while of Sonora Jose and his gang—unless— On the occasions when the money was brought up from McCracken to the Frio Bank it was worth anybody's while. So it came into the Kid's mind further, that to-day there would be a bag of greenbacks on the hack, and that Sonora Jose had wind of it.

The Kid, hidden in the thick foliage, shrugged his shoulders. It was no business of his. A cowman born and bred, he could never have stood by idly while Texas cows were driven over the border by Mexican cattle-thieves. But the Frio Bank was nothing to him. Herman Fray, the banker at Frio, was nothing to him—or less than nothing.

It was Sheriff Watson's business to protect the bank and its money, and the Kid grinned at the thought. Sheriff Watson and his men were hunting for the Rio Kid, hunting him far and wide, by prairie and chaparral and sierra. Let them hunt—while this gang from across the border held up the hack and cleaned out the sealed sack consigned to

the bank. The Kid had no call to chip in.

Some time that sunny morning the hack would pass, coming into view on the plain, from the trail that ran through a wide tract of post-oaks. It was booked to reach Frio at noon, but it never was on time, and there was no telling when it might appear.

The Mexican gang had settled down to wait, and until the hack came they would not go. The Kid had to wait, too, unless he was to reveal his presence to the greasers—which meant shooting, with nine to one in the fight. The Kid, extended at ease on a thick branch of the ceiba, his back resting in a fork of boughs, waited.

"Pronto!"

The word came suddenly from Sonora Jose.

In a moment the idle inactivity of the gang was at an end. The Mexicans leaped from the grass, and ran to their horses.

The Kid, in the thick branches, could not see out over the prairie. But he knew now that the hack had come in sight on the trail from the post-oaks. The trail ran on at a distance from the timber island, winding across the rolling prairie to Frio.

Sonora Jose spoke rapidly to his followers in Spanish. The greasers scrambled on their bronchos. Rifle in hand, they rode out on the prairie, and left the timber behind. Then the Rio Kid slid down from the branches of the tall ceiba. Standing on the edge of the motte, where Sonora Jose had stood a few minutes before, the Rio Kid looked out across the waving grass.

The whole scene was spread before his eyes now.

From the post-oaks the hack had emerged, and was out on the open, grassy plain. The gang of Mexicans, galloping and spurring, were sweeping down on it in a bunch. The hack-driver had whipped up his horses, and the hack was going at a tearing speed now, jolting and bumping over the rough ground, in a frantic attempt to escape from the swooping gang of riders. It was a hopeless attempt; the driver had no chance at all: but he was doing his best to get clear.

Bang, bang, bang: roared the rifles, the Mexicans firing from the saddle. The shooting was wild. The Kid's lip curled as he watched, with utter contempt for the shooting of the greasers.

Much of the lead flew yards and yards wide. But some of it went home, and one of the horses traced to the hack suddenly pitched over, dragging down the other as it fell. The vehicle rocked and pitched and almost overturned, coming at last to a standstill. Then, with a wild yell, and a rattling of banging rifles, the Mexicans rode up and surrounded it. The Rio Kid, on the edge of the timber island, still watched.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Hold-Up!

SPOT PETERS, who drove the McCracken hack, sat and lifted his hands over his head, calmly chewing tobacco. His business was driving, not fighting with Mexican fire-bugs, and, havin' done all he could to elude them, Spot let it go at that. He put up his hands like a lamb, and grinned serenely at a savage-faced brigand who levelled a rifle at him.

"Forget it, greaser," said Spot Peters. "I ain't worrying you any. Get on with it, hombre!"

And the greaser grinned and lowered the rifle.

There were three passengers inside the hack, and their hands were already over their heads, without waiting for command. The rifles of the numerous gang of hold-up men could have riddled the vehicle with bullets and there was no chance of resistance.

At a word from Sonora Jose the passengers stepped out and lined up beside the trail, their hands over their heads. The traces were cut, and the uninjured horse roped in by one of the greasers. Spot Peters and his passengers were booked to finish their journey on foot—when the hold-up men were done with them. The hack would remain where it was till fresh horses were brought. Ten miles on foot to Frio would give the raiders ample time to ride clear, before the sheriff and his men could get on their trail.

But the passengers, expecting the raiders to go through their pockets, were agreeably disappointed. It was not such small fry that Sonora Jose was after. Sonora Jose, outlaw and cut-throat and brigand, was still, in his own estimation, a caballero, and rifing pockets was beneath him. It was bigger game that Sonora Jose was after. Moreover, he was in hot haste now. Now that the hold-up had taken place, the sooner the gang were off the scene the better it was for their health. Lonely as the prairie was, a cow-puncher might have ridden into sight, or a horseman on his way to or from Frio. The raiders could not be too swift.

"The money for the bank," said Sonora Jose. "Pronto, hombre!"

Spot Peters stared.

"I guess you're mistaken this time, feller," he drawled. "There ain't nothing on this here hearse but them passengers and their truck."

"Pronto!"

"I guess I'm telling you—"

Sonora Jose lifted his rifle and placed the muzzle to the driver's side, pressing it hard on Spot's ribs.

"The money for the bank," he said. "If you are tired of life, senor—"

"I guess not, greaser!" answered Spot, still in an easy drawl. "They ain't told me what's in the sack, but it's yourn, as you're so pressing."

He stooped and removed the rug from under his feet, lifted a little, sealed sack, and handed it to Sonora Jose.

"It sure gets my goat to see them greenbacks headin' for Mexico!" he sighed. "But I ain't arguin' about it, hombre. They pay me for driving this here hack, not for packin' a gun. It's your say-so."

"Gracias!" said Sonora Jose with sarcasm, as he took the leather bag.

It disappeared under the folds of his serape.

Spot shrugged his shoulders.

"I reckon they told me in McCracken to watch out for the Rio Kid on the trail," he said. "But I never figured on seeing your gang so far this side of the Grande, senor. I guess some body in McCracken put you wise about the durocks going to-day. Say, ain't you leaving me a hoss to pull me into Frio?"

Sonora Jose grinned.

"No, senor; you will reach Frio soon enough to suit me on your feet. Adios!"

He waved his hand to his men and the whole gang turned from the hack and rode away to the west.

Spot Peters stared after him.

"Gee!" he remarked. "I reckoned they'd be hittin' the high spots for Mexico, like they was sent for. I guess they're looking for cover in the Huecas, the way they're headin'. I reckon that

will be suthin' to tell Sheriff Watson when we hoof it into Frio."

"How are we getting into Frio, driver?" inquired one of the passengers.

"I reckon we're going on Shanks' pony, feller," drawled Spot. "Or else you can hang on hyer till I come back with fresh horses, which, I calculate, won't be this side of sundown."

He descended from his seat, tucked his whip under his arm, and started. The three passengers trailed after him.

It was a long and weary tramp to Frio, across rough, rolling prairie, under a blazing sun. But there was no help for it. It was an hour later that a Double-Bar puncher was sighted on the plains and hailed, and Spot Peters and the three dusty and fatigued passengers begged for the loan of his horse. The cow-puncher was sympathetic, but he grinned at the suggestion of parting with his horse. To a puncher on the prairie such a request was equivalent to asking a seaman in mid-ocean for the loan of his ship.

But San Antone Bill agreed to ride into Frio with the news, and send out horses to meet the hapless party. He disappeared in a cloud of dust in the direction of the cow town.

Before noon all Frio knew of the hold-up, and that the Mexican raiders had fled west for the wild passes and canyons of the Huecas. And Sheriff Watson, dismissing from his mind for the time his fierce pursuit of the Rio Kid, called out his men, and mounted in hot haste, and rode west.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Kid Horns In!

"**D**OG-GONE my boots!" growled the Rio Kid.

His face was dark with irritation.

From the timber island he had watched the hold-up, his eyes, keen as an eagle's, losing no detail of what had passed.

The motte lay east of the trail; the raiders had ridden west. Every stride of their bronchos carried them farther and farther away from the Rio Kid. He was done with them—if he liked.

He watched the driver and the passengers hoofing it for Frio till a fold of the prairie hid them. He watched the bunch of horsemen, their sombreros nodding over the waving grass, till the west swallowed them. Only in his sight remained the halted hack, and the dead horse, and the black buzzards gathering from far and near, drawn by the carcass.

"Dog-gone my boots!" repeated the Kid savagely. "You durned moss-head-Kid! You durned locoed gink, can't you mind your own business? What is that gol-darned bank and its dust to you, you all-fired geek? You want to horn into trouble that don't concern you, you pesky guy."

The Kid talked to himself bitterly. It was no business of his. What did it matter to him if a gang of greasers rode off with a sack of banknotes belonging to Frio—Frio, the town where he could not ride without being shot down—the town where a rope and a branch awaited him if he was caught by the men who sought him far and wide? He was an outlaw, and a hunted man; and his business was to escape the law, not to stand for it. But though he cursed his propensity to horn into troubles that were not his, the Kid knew all the time that he was going to horn in. The sight of a gang of Mexicans clearing off with Texas money got his goat. Outlaw or not, he was a Texan, and he did not, and would not, stand for it.

He argued with himself fiercely, knowing all the time that he was going to horn in, that he was not going to let Sonora Jose and his gang ride into Mexico with their plunder, knowing, too, that he had ample time to head them off.

For the Kid had not been deceived, like Spot Peters, by that gallop to the westward of the Mexican hold-up men. The Kid had cut his eye-teeth long ago. He knew that the Mexican brigands would never remain on Texas soil, even in the wild recesses of the Huecas. There for days, or even weeks, they might elude pursuit, but, with the whole country up, they would be roped in sooner or later. The Kid was wise to Sonora Jose's trick. The Mexicans had ridden for the west to let Spot Peters carry into Frio the news that they had made for the Huecas; but, out of sight, they would turn to the south and ride for their own country. It was a trick to gain time to escape, to send the certain pursuit on a false track. Every hour was precious to them, so far from the border, and if the Frio sheriff went hunting for them to the west they had ample time to cover the long miles that lay southward between them and the Rio Grande.

The Kid knew it all as well as if he had read the cunning thoughts in the black-haired head under Sonora Jose's sombrero.

He stood staring out discontentedly across the prairie. The bunch of sombreros had vanished to the west, towards the blue line against the sky that marked the Hueca sierra. They were out of the Kid's keen sight now, and already, he reckoned, they had turned south.

"Oh, shucks!" growled the Kid.

He went for his horse. Slowly, still arguing with himself, the Kid drew the black-muzzled mustang from its cover in dense thicket.

He still argued with himself, affecting to be doubtful of his own purpose. But his resolution was fixed.

"Shucks!" he growled. "You're a god-darned gink, Kid Carfax. You're asking for a rookus with a gang of the durndest fire-bugs on the border—nine of them, by the great horned toad! You're sure asking for the long jump." Then the Kid's white teeth gritted. "But they ain't getting that dust across to Mexico, old hoss—they sure ain't, while I've got a six-gun to say no."

The Kid's brain was working rapidly, even while he grumbled, while he saddled the mustang.

That wild, wide country, with its boundless prairies, its tracts of scrubby post-oaks, its dark chaparrals, its sundried arroyos, and black barrancas, was an open book to the Kid. As range rider and as hunted outlaw, the Kid had ridden it far and wide, and it had no secrets for him. As well as if Sonora Jose had told him his plans, the Kid knew the intentions of the Mexican brigand.

"They ain't hitting the high spots for the Huecas, old hoss," he told the black-muzzled mustang. "They sure ain't! They could hide in the Staked Plain, but I sure reckon it's too far from home for them. They're burning the trail for Mexico, old hoss; and afore they get to the Rio Grande and the border they got to cross the Rio Pollo—and after the rains in the Huecas, I guess the Pollo will be roaring. And when the Pollo's full, old hoss, they got to get to the ford; and if we can't beat them to the ford of the Chicken River, old hoss, I guess I'll sell you for your hide
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and buy me a pair of store shoes and go drumming!"

The Kid grinned at the idea.

"Twenty miles to the ford, old hoss; and we've got to do it humping," he said. "If you can't do twice the speed of any of them hairy bronchos from Chihuahua you're a back number, and it's you for the turkey buzzards. I guess when that gang of hoodlums rides up to the ford on the Chicken River they'll find us to home."

The Rio Kid rode out of the motte.

He turned his face to the south and rode at a gallop. Bunch-grass flew under the tireless hoofs of the mustang.

The Kid knew the speed of his horse. He had good reason to know it, for it was the speed of the grey mustang that had saved his life many a time when pursuit was hot and close. The Kid had an eye for horseflesh, and he had looked at the Mexican's mounts.

Sonora Jose and his men were well mounted, but the best broncho in the gang was nowhere near the Kid's sinewy mustang for speed. The Kid knew that he would be at the ford of the Pollo long ahead of the fleeing raiders; that the fastest in the bunch would be far behind him. And he knew that Sonora Jose could escape from the Frio country only by way of the ford on the Rio Pollo—the Chicken River, as the cowmen called it, though its old Spanish name still clung.

In rainless seasons the Rio Pollo crawled, a streak of muddy water, between high banks of sun-dried mud, and could be forded at any point of its course of sixty miles; but when there had been heavy rains in the Huecas the Pollo came thundering down across the plains filled to its brim, roaring and foaming, and at such times the Rio Kid himself would have hesitated to ride it anywhere but at the ford. And the Kid, who had been driven out of his camp in the Huecas by the rains, knew what the Pollo would be like now—a foaming torrent, thick with driftwood and drowned cows and prairie rabbits—impassable except at the one spot.

It was for that spot that the boy outlaw was aiming now.

And he was riding as if for his life.

The mustang's lightning hoofs seemed scarcely to touch the grass. The Kid had no need to use the spur; a touch of his hand was enough. He rode at a desperate gallop, his face set and hard, the wind of his speed cutting him almost like a knife. But there was exhilaration in his heart. He still reviled himself as a gink for horning into a trouble that was not his, but his whole nature rejoiced in the rookus that was coming. No pursuit from Frio could have overtaken the raiders in time; even had the sheriff not fallen to their trick, and had he ridden straight on their trail, the best horseflesh in Frio would hardly have come up with the fugitives before they reached the Rio Pollo. But the Kid was on the spot, and for him it was easy going.

Half a mile after mile of grassland raced under the Kid's mustang. A sudden grin dawned on his face as he rode

through a patch of chaparral and came on a couple of punchers of the Bar-10 ranch loping along on their bronchos. He swept past them like a whirlwind, and they stared after him, gasping:

"The Kid!"

Crack, crack!

The two punchers were blazing away wildly after the vanishing horseman.

The Kid laughed as he swept on. He had no grouch against the punchers, though they loosed off all the cartridges in their Colts after him; he was glad that he did not need to draw a gun on them. They dropped out of sight in a few minutes, and the Kid forgot them as he galloped onward, ever south and



THE HOLD-UP! Spot Peters sat and lifted his hands over his head, not fighting! "The money for the bank!" said the Kid, "no money for the bank in this hyer sheb."

farther south, till across the sea of grass he had a glimpse of the Pollo tossing its foaming waters in the blaze of the sun.

Round him now on all sides was prairie, a sea of rolling grass. His glance swept round, keen as an eagle's, but over the waving grass there was no rider to be seen. The Kid, who had nothing to learn about horseflesh, calculated that the Mexicans, if they had ridden their hardest, were five miles behind him in the race, at least; and as they had started from a point well to the west of the timber island, whence the Kid had started, they would most likely hit the Pollo higher up and follow the bank down to the ford.

Not a sign of a Mexican sombrero was to be seen, at all events, over the tall grass; and the Kid, knowing that he had won the race—and won it by miles—slacked his pace a little to ease the deep-breathing mustang, and cantered on to the ford.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Trapped at the Ford!

SONORA JOSE was grinning under the shade of his big sombrero as he rode down the bank of the lashing Pollo. His men, riding hard behind and round him, had satisfied looks, in spite of haste and dust and sun-blaze and saddle fatigue. Sonora Jose had reason to grin; his followers had reason to be satisfied. For in the leather sack taken from the Frio hack ten thousand dollars in good paper were stacked; such a sum as Jose Narvaez seldom or never handled, though often his raids gave him rich booty.

The Mexican brigand had struck

on his prey; and now the loot was under his streaming serape as he rode, buckled to his belt. It had been the swiftest and easiest and most completely successful of all the many raids of the bandit from Mexico.

In dry weather he could have crossed the Pollo anywhere and saved himself a few miles in his retreat. The day was dry and scorching, so far as that went; but it followed many days of rain, which had fed the Pollo with yellow floods from the slopes of the Huecas, and the river was full to overflowing now. But it mattered little; hard riding had won safety, and he was close to the ford without a sign of pursuit. When he looked back only waving grass glistening and gleaming in the sunshine caught his eyes, and before him ran the Pollo, and the ford was close. By the brimming bank he rode on as swiftly as before, with no thought of drawing rein till he was on the south side of the ford.

That a swift horseman had headed him off from the ford where lay his only retreat from the Frio country, Sonora Jose did not yet know.

But he was soon to know.

Wide and deep and swift rolled the Pollo, fed by the rushing waters of the divide. But at the ford, where sandbanks on a stony bed lay thick, the river was shallow when at its deepest. When the river was low the ford was like a stony causeway across the bed, with tiny streams trickling through; when it was high the ford was barely two feet under water, a flood spreading out over the low banks at either side. To the eye of a stranger the ford did not exist; but Sonora Jose knew every foot of it, and could have picked it out at midnight on the darkest night. In the rolling water here and there a tree rose from the shallows. Across, on the southern side, a clump of ceibas rose, with flood-water washing round the great trunks. That clump marked the end of the ford, a sure landmark to all who knew the country.

Sonora Jose rode into the water, his men behind him in a bunch, splashing through the muddy shallows towards the distant clump.

Crack!

The big sombrero spun on the head of Sonora Jose—it spun round as a bullet struck it within an inch or two of the brigand's head.

"Carambo!"

Sonora Jose yelled in surprise.

Behind him he looked for foes; before him he had dreamed of none. But the shot rang from the clump of ceibas at the southern side of the ford, directly in the path of the retreating raiders.

Sonora Jose dragged in his broncho, up to its haunches in rolling water, and his men hurriedly reined in behind. There was no cover for them at the ford, they rode in the water exposed to fire; and the man who had fired was in front of them, unseen in the ceibas clump. He was hidden in deepest cover, with the whole gang strung out under his eyes in easy range; if that hombre knew how to shoot, he held the lives of Sonora Jose and all his gang in the hollow of his hand.

Jose gritted his white teeth and glared

at the clump of trees. Who was it, in that solitary desert, who was barring his path to Mexico and safety? Pursuit was not even in sight behind. What enemy could be in front? Jose swore savage Spanish oaths in his surprise and rage.

Crack!

The second shot spun his sombrero again, almost lifting the big hat from his head.

"Nuestra Senora!" hissed Jose.

He knew that the marksman was playing with him; the man who had sent two bullets so close could have sent either of them through the brigand's brain had he chosen. Sitting his horse in the swirling yellow flood, Sonora Jose stared with savage doubt and inquiry at the distant clump.

To ride on was death, if the hidden marksman so chose; to retreat was to pen himself in the Frio country, for to a distance of thirty miles on either side there was no crossing of the Rio Pollo when it was in flood.

The Mexican bandit was trapped.

His swarthy face paled under its bronze. Before many hours had passed the country behind him would be hot with pursuit. If he did not cross the Pollo at the ford, it was not likely that he ever would pass it.

The news of a Mexican raid would turn out every ranch outfit for sixty miles round Frio. The apprehensive glance of the brigand turned back over his shoulder—to a sea of waving grass, which ere long might be dotted with Stetson hats.

He gritted his teeth and rode forward, his hand upheld in sign of peace—of surrender, if the unseen enemy chose to understand it so. Once he had a glimpse of that enemy, his rifle would do the rest.

No shot, no sound or movement came from the clump of ceibas on the south side as the Mexican bandit rode on through the swirling water. His men, muttering uneasily, followed him more slowly. Sonora Jose's heart beat faster with hope. He did not understand the enemy's silence and inaction; but he was drawing nearer and nearer, and a swift rush—

"Halt!"

He was ten yards from the clump when the shout rang sharply. Only ten yards of shallow, swirling water lay between him and the ceibas. But it might as well have been ten miles, for all the chance that Sonora Jose had to passing the distance alive, if he rode on. He dragged in his broncho again.

"Tenga cuidado!" came the voice from the ceibas, and the mocking tones went on: "Sit your hoss where you are, Jose Narvaez, or I guess they'll miss one thief in Mexico for keeps!"

"Who are you?" hissed Sonora Jose.

There was a laugh.

"I guess you've cinched, you pesky guy! Ever heard of the Rio Kid?"

Jose started violently. Evidently he had heard of the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande.

"You—the Rio Kid?"

"Sure!"

"What do you want?" hissed the Mexican.

"That little sack you've got under your serape, amigo! I guess I ain't letting you get it across into Viejo Mejico!"

The bandit started again.

"How do you know—" He broke off. It mattered little how the Kid knew. He knew, and that was enough. "You accursed Gringo, there are nine of us, and if you pull trigger once again

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his head as the bandits' weapons were turned on him. His business with Sonora Jose. "Hand it over, pronto!" "I guess there ain't no!" answered Peters calmly. (See chapter 2.)

suddenly and struck effectively; he had succeeded to perfection, and the way back to Mexico was open and free; a few hours of hard riding, and the wide waters of the Rio Grande would roll between him and possible pursuit. He had little doubt that pursuit from Frio would ride for the Huecas—as, indeed, was the case—but if it followed him direct he had little to fear; he was already long miles from the scene of the hold-up, and once across the Pollo there was nothing to stop his ride to the Rio Grande and Mexico.

Sonora Jose showed his white teeth in a grin as he thought of his success. A Mexican confederate in McCracken had passed the word to him in time concerning the precious freight for Frio, unguarded even by a messenger or a marshal's deputy—though a guard would not have made much difference to Jose; he would have burned powder willingly had it been needed, though otherwise he was glad to avoid the spilling of blood on the Texas side of the border.

Like a hawk Sonora Jose had swooped

we will cut you in pieces and leave you for the zopilotes!"

The Rio Kid laughed again.

"Come on all you want, amigo, and the buzzards are welcome to me if you can get me! Quit chewing the rag, you Greaser thief! I guess you're wise to it that if I burn powder you'll never see Mexico again! Are you handing over that sack of greenbacks?"

"Never!" roared the enraged bandit.

"Never's a long word!" drawled the Rio Kid. "Guess again!"

The bandit searched the ceibas with his eyes. The voice came from thick cover, and he could see no sign of the Kid. But he knew that from the foliage a six-gun was aimed, and only too well he knew the deadly aim of the boy outlaw. His life trembled in the balance; but not for life itself would the brigand yield up his plunder.

He hissed an order in Spanish to his men, to spur on and fire into the trees as they spurred—the last desperate chance that remained to the gang of brigands, save surrender.

But dubious looks answered him, and the Mexicans hung back.

"El Nino del Rio," muttered one—"The Rio Kid!"

They sat their horses in the shallows, and dared not ride on in the face of the

gun that never missed. In the open country they would have ridden him down, strong in numbers; and the Kid's unerring six-gun would hardly have saved him from so many foes.

But the Kid was in thick cover, and, short as the distance was, the bandits knew they would never reach that cover alive under his fire. Muttering and cursing, the brigands sat their bronchos, splashing in the yellow water, and dared not advance.

The Kid's voice rapped out again:

"Hands up, Sonora Jose! You're my mutton, hombre!"

"Carambo!" hissed Jose, between his teeth.

And he gave his horse the spur, riding on furiously and desperately, his rifle ringing out as he rode.

Bang!

From the ceibas came a single shot, and before the broncho had taken three strides Sonora Jose pitched from the saddle and splashed into the stream.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Kid Wins Out!

HIGH over their heads the gang of raiders held their hands, in token of surrender. If they had thought of following their leader's desperate rush, his sudden fall

drove the thought from their minds. In the shallow water Sonora Jose, his face white, his eyes glaring, clung to a half-submerged pecan, struggling in the flood that sought to tear him away. But the eyes of the gang were fixed on the ceibas from which that one deadly shot had come.

Sharply the voice of the Rio Kid rang out—sharp with menace.

"Drop your guns, you guys!"

The rifles splashed into the water.

"Now ride on—and keep clear of this hyer timber! Beat it, you jays, and beat it your darndest! I guess if you even squint this way, it will be the last thing you'll ever do! Beat it, fellers—pronto!"

A bullet whistling over the heads of the cowed gang emphasised the order. But the Mexicans did not need bidding twice. They spurred on, glad to escape, skirting the clump of ceibas as wide as they could, and rode over the bank for the south. One man slacked rein for a moment, glancing back at his wounded leader struggling in the water, and a bullet from the ceibas cut a strip of swarthy skin from his cheek.

With a yell, the horseman rode on after the others.

In the ceibas, the Kid watched them riding madly in flight, and grinned. It would not have lain heavy on the Kid's conscience had he shot down every cut-throat in that savage gang, as he might easily have done; but he was glad to see them go. They vanished in a dust-cloud, and the Kid stepped out of his cover.

He jerked the riato from the mustang's saddle, and ran to the bank. The rope looped round the shoulders of Sonora Jose, and he was dragged out of the water.

Dripping with water, white as death, the brigand sprawled in the grass, his hand feebly seeking the long, keen cuchillo in his belt. The Kid stooped, jerked the knife away, and tossed it into the Pollo.

"Madre de Dios!" breathed Sonora Jose, gnitting his teeth with fury. "Accursed Gringo—"

"Aw, cut it out!" drawled the Kid. "You're getting off cheap, feller! I guess I don't know why I put the ball into your shoulder, instead of letting daylight through your cabeza; but I always was a tender cuss. You'll live to be hanged yet, you durned cow-thief; but you sure will not carry a bag of Texas money across the border into Mexico—you sure will not, feller!"

He groped under the serape, and dragged away the leathern bag. The brigand's eyes followed it, glittering.

The Kid coiled his lasso and called to his horse. The black-muzzled mustang came trotting out of the ceibas.

"You lose, Jose!" he said cheerily. "I reckon you played your game right smart; but you never reckoned on the Rio Kid hornin' in, and that's where you fall down, feller. There's your cayuse. I reckon you can hop into the saddle and beat it for the Rio Grande as soon as you want, and call yourself lucky that you're dealing with a galoot my size, instead of a Texas sheriff. Beat it while you're healthy!"

And the Rio Kid, mounting his mustang, rode back across the ford, and galloped north into the Frio country, the leather sack of greenbacks at his saddle-bow.

THE END.

(All Texas is on the look-out for the Rio Kid—the boy outlaw! Saddle up and follow him in his most breath-taking exploits in "THE TRAIL OF TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS!"—next week's grand story of the roaring West!)

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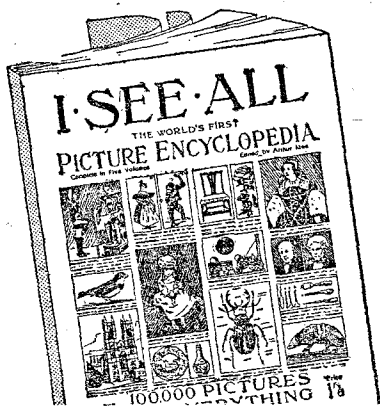
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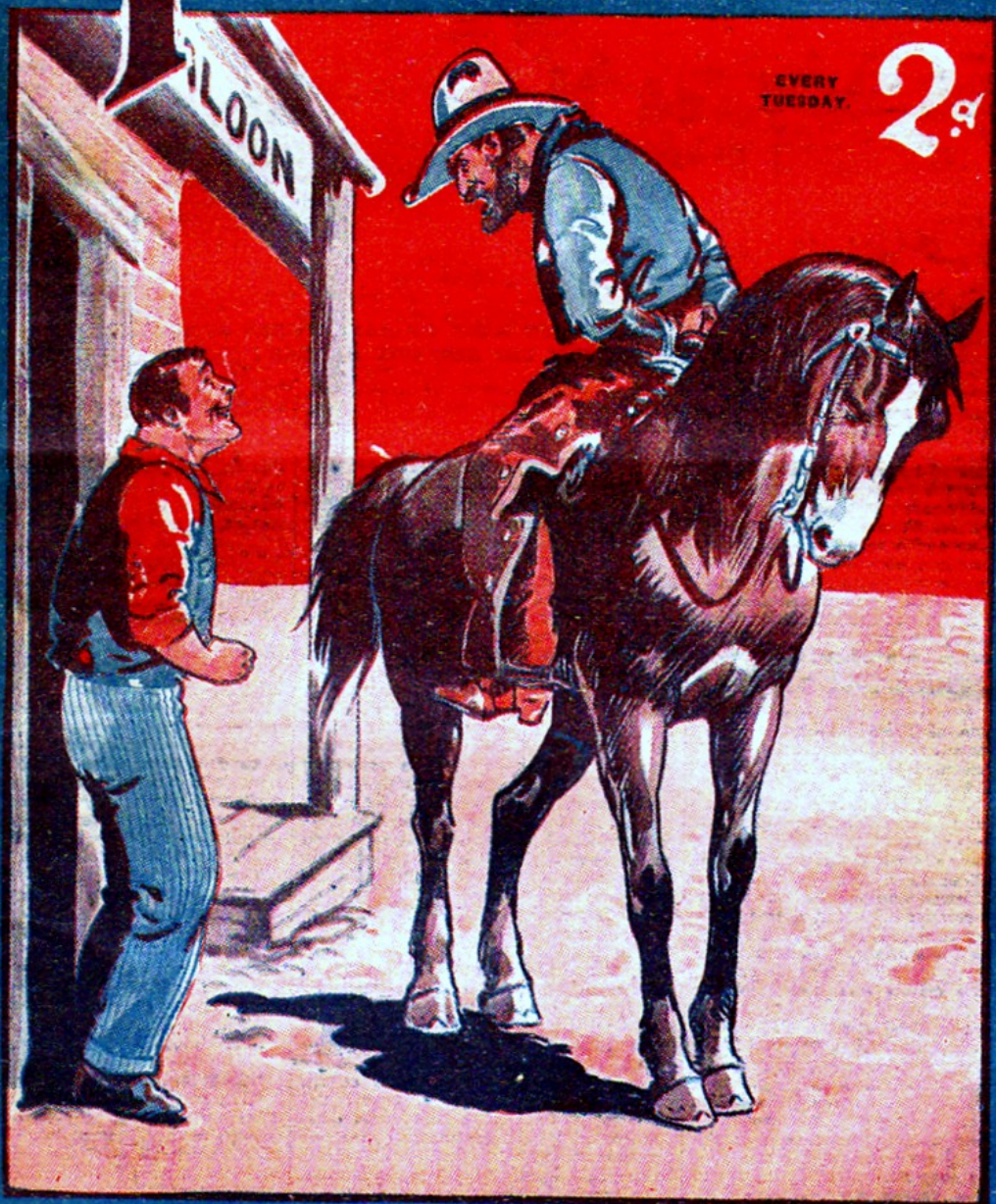
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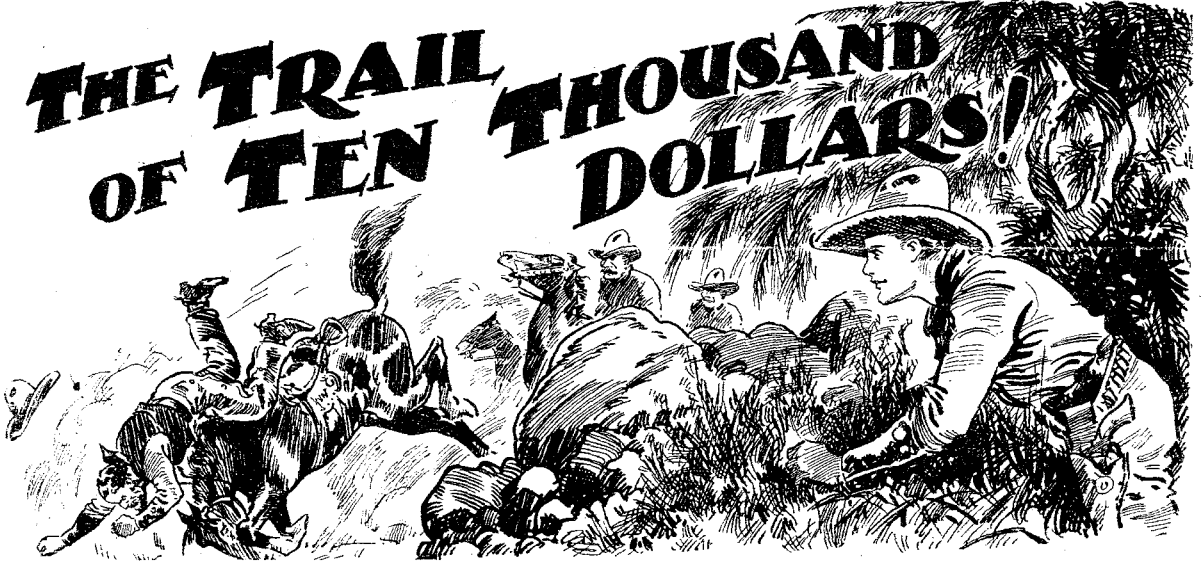


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THE FIRST CHAPTER.
No Luck!

SHERIFF WATSON dropped from his dusty horse, tired and weary, threw the reins over a post, and strode heavily into his office on the plaza at Frio. Worn and dusty from long trailing and hard riding, the sheriff of Frio sank into his rocker with a grunt of relief. He sat there staring grimly out into the plaza, where the shadows were lengthening as the sun sank behind the Huecas in the west.

Dusty horsemen who had followed him into the cow town dispersed in various directions, in quest of rest and refreshment.

The town of Frio had been waiting eagerly for the sheriff's return; and now he had returned the Frio men did not need telling that he had been unsuccessful. In the Red Dog saloon, among the groups that stood about under the cottonwood-trees on the plaza, there was sarcastic comment on the activities of the sheriff of Frio. Not only had the Rio Kid beaten and baffled him, defied him, and escaped him, but now a gang of Mexican raiders from over the border had carried off plunder almost under his nose, snapped their fingers at him and ridden off in triumph. In the matter of the Rio Kid, perhaps, it was not to be wondered at; the Kid was as elusive as a will-of-the-wisp, and Jake Watson was not the only sheriff in Texas whom he had defied and beaten to a frazzle. But it got the goat of all Frio to think that a gang of Mexican bandits should ride away with a sack of ten thousand dollars belonging to the Frio Bank, and snap their swarthy fingers at pursuit and at the law. There were many men in Frio who opined that Jake Watson was losing his grip, and that what the Frio country wanted was a new sheriff who could handle things better and maintain the law.

Jake Watson, weary to the bone, thick with the dust of the trails and the mud

of the arroyos in the Huecas, knew the trend of the discussion on the plaza, as well as if he had heard what was said. His brow was black and bitter. There had been a time when he had had a soft corner in his tough heart for the Rio Kid, a sort of sneaking admiration for the boy outlaw who threw a laughing defiance in the face of all the cow country. But defeat and humiliation had worked a change, and his feeling towards the outlawed puncher was now very like personal hatred. He longed to get a rope on the elusive Kid; he ached to look into the handsome, laughing face over the levelled barrel of a six-gun. The Kid had offered him peace, and when his offer was rejected he had allowed that he would make Frio sit up and howl; and he was doing it. Had not all his time and energy been devoted to the hunting of the Rio Kid, the sheriff told himself bitterly, Sonora Jose and his bandits would never have been able to make their swoop in the Frio country, and get away with the loot.

But it was less of the Kid, than of the hold up that had taken place that morning, that the sheriff was now thinking. All through the blazing day he had trailed and spurred in the rocky arroyos and barren slopes of the Huecas, only to learn at last that he had gone on a false trail; that the bandits he sought were not there, and never had been there. Men were still out on the trails hunting for sign of them; but the sheriff knew that there was little chance, now, that they would be seen on the Texas side of the Rio Grande. While he had been hunting them in the Huecas, they had had ample time to ride south to the border and escape into their own country.

There was a step in the doorway; and the sheriff turned his black scowl upon the man who entered; a fat man in store clothes. Banker Fray was almost the only man in Frio who wore store clothes; the only man within a

hundred miles who wore a plug hat. Generally Herman Fray was a quiet and grave man; but he looked neither now. His fat face was red, his eyes glinting, as he whisked into the sheriff's office. His look, as he fixed it on Jake Watson, was angry and accusing.

"News?" he rapped.

"None!" grunted the sheriff.

Herman Fray gesticulated with angry excitement.

"Ten thousand dollars!" he panted. "Ten thousand dollars taken from the hack by that gang of greasers, and you tell me there is no news! The driver brought in information that they had struck to the west after robbing the hack—they're hiding in the Huecas—"

"I reckon they was fooling Spot Peters," grunted the sheriff. "They ain't in the Huecas, and never was. I reckon it was a blind, their headin' west and they struck south for the Rio Grande, arter all."

"And you've let them go?"

The sheriff snarled.

"I've been in the saddle ever since Spot brought in news of the hold-up. I guess I've got men out huntin' for sign of them. They may have hit for the Staked Plain, or they may have gone south. If they've gone south, they're in Mexico afore this."

"And the sack of greenbacks with them!" howled Herman Fray.

"Sure!"

"And you—"

"Let up!" growled the sheriff. "Quit chewing the rag, Herman Fray! I guess I'm tired, some; but I'm ready to take the trail agin the minute I get news of them Mexican fire-bugs. Let up!"

The Frio banker stamped out of the office. The sheriff's glance followed him gloomily. A dusty horseman dismounted outside and strode in. It was Pecos Pete, one of the sheriff's men.

"I reckon we've hit their trail, sheriff," said Pecos Pete. "We sure picked up the trail of ten critters head-

in' south. Spot Peters allows there was nine in the gang, and they took one of the hosses from the hack. I reckon that trail belongs to the bunch you want."

Jake Watson, fatigued as he was, was out of his rocker with a bound.

"That's sure good news, Pete," he said. "If Sonora Jose headed south for Mexico, as I reckon he did, he had to make for the ford of the Rio Pollo—the river's in his way, and it's in flood—there's no crossin' except at the ford. Tell the boys to git fresh cayuses and saddle up."

"I reckon if they hit direct for the ford, sheriff, they're across the border in Mexico by this time," said Pete.

"Mebbe. But it's a long stretch from the Pollo to the Rio Grande, and suthin' may have stopped them, or their cayuses may have given out." The Frio sheriff was ready to catch at a straw. "It's cow country the other side of the Pollo, and they'd have to dodge the ranches—and they might run into a bunch of punchers. There's a chance, anyhow."

"A mighty slim one," said Pecos Pete.

The sheriff rapped out an oath. "Tell the boys to saddle up fresh horses, and quit chewing the rag!"

"Sure!"

Ten minutes later, the sheriff and his men were riding out of Frio to the south. A crowd gathered to stare after them as they went, with a shaking of heads. No man in Frio believed that Jake Watson would be in time to overtake the bandits if they had headed south early in the day. Hard riding was futile on the trail of desperate fugitives, well-mounted, with a long start. The Frio men doubted, but hoped for the best. For the robbery of ten thousand dollars belonging to the Frio Bank hit many of the citizens of Frio—many had doubts whether the cow-town bank would pull through after such a loss; Herman Fray's looks were not reassuring. And if the cow-town bank "went up" many a man in Frio was likely to lose his roll. One thing was certain, that if those ten thousand dollars were not recovered, Jake Watson's days as sheriff were likely to be numbered.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Met on the Prairie!

THE Rio Kid lifted his head from his blankets and listened.

High over the rolling prairie sailed the full, round moon; glinting on waving grass that glistened like silver.

But in the clump of pecans and sassafras where the Kid had camped, all was dark.

Close by the Kid, the black-muzzled mustang lay asleep; but the mustang had awakened at the dull booming sound that echoed through the night and lifted his head, as his master had done.

The Kid listened intently.

From the prairie, vast in shadow and silver under the moon, the dull distant sound came—louder and louder with every moment. It was the galloping tramp of many horses. Horsemen were riding through the night—riding down from the north at full gallop. Closer came the sound of the thundering hoofs, booming through the silence; and the Kid calculated that there were not fewer than a dozen riders in the bunch. And the Kid shook off his blankets and rose, and his hand went to his belt, shifting the holsters of his guns a little nearer to his reach.

The Kid had camped down in that clump on the prairie at sundown, and slept the peaceful sleep of an infant; his slumber was never broken by the

knowledge that men hunted him far and wide. But the Kid awakened instantly at the sound of danger, with all his senses on the alert. That day the Kid had faced, and beaten, a gang of Mexican bandits; buckled to his belt was the bag of ten thousand dollars in greenbacks that he had taken from Sonora Jose. But the horsemen who were riding down from the north were a different proposition, the Kid was well aware. They were not Mexicans; they might be a bunch of cow-punchers, but the Kid opined that they were the sheriff's posse from Frio. And if Jake Watson and his men were at hand, it was up to the Rio Kid to keep his eyes peeled and his guns handy.

Gallop! Gallop!

The thudding hoofs came closer.

"Quiet, old hoss!" the Kid murmured to the black-muzzled grey mustang. But the word was not needed; the mustang lay still and silent.

The Kid moved through the thickets, and, keeping in cover, looked out on the moonlit prairie. Black, moving shadows broke the silvery glimmer to the north—figures of hurried riders in Stetson hats, spurring. Whoever the bunch were they were riding hard, riding as if for life. A slow grin came over the face of the Rio Kid.

"Jake Watson and his hombres," he said to himself. "I reckon they've got wise to it that the greasers headed for the ford of the Pollo, and they're on the trail hours too late."

The Kid chuckled.

The situation struck him as amusing. He had held up the gang of bandits at the ford, shot down Sonora Jose, and taken from him the bag of ten thousand dollars. Hours too late, the sheriff of Frio was on the track, riding hard when hard riding could no longer serve. Long before this the bandits would have splashed through the waters of the Rio Grande and escaped into Mexico without their plunder, which was in the Kid's keeping.

But the situation was not likely to continue amusing if the sheriff of Frio came on the Rio Kid. Well he knew that Jake Watson would have let all the bandits on the border escape him for a chance of roping in the Kid. The bunch of horsemen were heading directly for the clump of pecans where the Kid had camped, and if he rode out of it on the other side he would be full in their view in the moonlight. Jake Watson was long hours too late to catch the bandits, but it looked as if fortune had given him a chance of catching the Rio Kid. The grin died off the Kid's sunburnt face, and he whistled softly. Closer and closer came the bunch of rapid riders.

But they were heading for the ford of the Pollo, ten miles south of the Kid's camp; they were not likely to stop at the clump of trees, the Kid reflected. He had only to lie doggo till they had passed. They were riding hard in the hope of yet catching up with the retreating bandits, and were not likely to halt by the way. There was no reason why they should ride through the patch of trees and thickets; their way lay past it on the open plain. The Kid realised that he had only to keep his presence there a secret; which was easy enough in the deep dark cover of the thickets.

The Kid was right in his surmise. Closer and closer came the bunch of horsemen; but they were sweeping by a dozen yards from the clump. Not within that distance would the nearest of them pass, the Kid figured, as he watched them from cover. And he waited and watched quietly. They were abreast of the clump now; a minute more and they would be sweep-

ing away past it to the south, riding on with whip and spur for the ford of the Pollo. But it was the unexpected that happened. Under the Kid's eyes, not thirty feet from the trailing mass of Spaniards-beard that hid him, one of the horses stumbled, with its foot in a gopher hole, and the rider was pitched heavily from its back. There was a heavy thud as he struck the earth.

Three or four of the riders, not noticing the accident in their wild haste, galloped on without turning their heads. But the rest reined in, with a clattering of hoofs and a jingling of bridles. The stumbling horse had recovered his footing, but the man who had fallen lay like a log. As the riders reined in round him, he struggled to a sitting posture, his Stetson rising into the Kid's view over the waving grass.

"Thunder! You sure came a sock-dolager, sheriff!" the Kid heard the voice of Pecos Pete.

A curse from Jake Watson answered. He struggled up, but sank down again. The crash on the hard earth had half stunned the sheriff of Frio.

"You hurt bad, sheriff?" asked Abe Harrigan.

"I guess I'm shook up some!" growled the sheriff. "But I ain't made of putty, I reckon—there ain't nothing broke! Ride on, you galoots! What you stopping for and wasting time? Beat it, pronto!"

"But you—" said Pecos Pete.

"Ain't I shouting that I ain't hurt?" snorted the sheriff. "And if I was, ain't you arter them Mexican fire-bugs, durn your pesky hide! Beat it, you guys, and I'll follow arter you. Beat it, dog-gone you!"

The crash to the earth had not improved the temper of the Frio sheriff. His men rode on at his word, dashing away at a gallop to the south after those who had already almost disappeared. Sheriff Watson sat in the grass, grunting and grumbling savagely. He was shaken and winded, and not in a state to remount his horse and resume the wild ride for some minutes at least. He staggered to his feet at last and stood unsteadily, staring south. Far in the dimness of the plains Stetson hats bobbed over silvery waving grass, vanishing towards the distant Rio Pollo. From the blackness of the pecan clump the Rio Kid grinned at the man who had been left behind.

The sheriff turned to his waiting broncho at last.

"You durned ornery cayuse!" he growled. He limped to the broncho. "I guess you got to put it on some now; I sure reckon you're goin' to jump lively, if a quirt can make you! Dog-gone you!"

"Forget it, sheriff!" said a soft, silky voice.

Sheriff Watson spun round with a yell of amazement. A lithe figure had darted from the shadows of the pecans, and the sheriff of Frio spun round to see a six-gun, with the Rio Kid's handsome, mocking face grinning at him over the levelled barrel.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Whip-Hand!

"PUT 'em up, Jake Watson!"

The Kid was smiling, his eyes were dancing. But there was no jesting in his voice, and no jest in the levelled revolver with a finger on the trigger. Jake Watson, with black rage in his face and in his heart, lifted his hands above his head at the order of the boy outlaw, his eyes burning at the Kid from under his contracted brows.

"You're sure a wise man and a good little man, sheriff!" mocked the Kid. "You got your paws up jest in time to save your cabeza. Though dog-gone my boots if I know why I don't let drive a bullet through your ornery skull and be durned to you."

"Shoot, you gol-darned fire-bug!" hissed the sheriff of Frio. "Shoot, you pesky scallywag!" The sheriff stared furiously after his men, vanishing far in the dim prairie. If they would hear a shot and return to rope in the Kid, it was worth going down under the boy outlaw's bullet. But that thought was only for a moment. They would not hear or heed the crack of a Colt in the thunder of many hoofs, even if it reached so far; and if they rode back they would not find the Rio Kid. And the sheriff, who for a second had been tempted to reach for his gun, even with the deadly muzzle looking him in the face, gave up the idea and kept his hands over his head.

The Kid's face was grim; he could read in the enraged looks of the Frio sheriff the thoughts in his mind.

"Forget it, Jake Watson," he said quietly. "I guess I've got you dead to rights. You've sure moseyed right into my hands, sheriff, and you're my mutton. Keep them paws in the air, you gol-darned jay!"

The sheriff stood with his hands up, his breast heaving with rage. Not for a moment had he dreamed of a meeting with the Rio Kid on the prairie; all his thoughts had been concentrated on the gang of Mexican bandits, and the slim chance that remained of riding them down before they escaped across the border. Had he surmised—had he only dreamed—that the Kid was at hand—Again he was tempted to risk all and clutch at a gun; and again the certainty of sudden death deterred him. Death itself would have been almost welcome to the enraged sheriff could he have seen the Rio Kid a prisoner in the hands of his men when he fell. But his men were far—riding far and fast, vanishing in the dim distance at his own order. He was alone with the Rio Kid on the boundless prairie, at the boy outlaw's mercy, and throwing away his life would buy him nothing. He kept his hands over his head, his teeth gritting with rage, his eyes blazing.

The Kid watched him coolly.

"You've got me, you durned fire-bug!" said the sheriff at last in a low, sullen growl. "It's your game—gol-darn you! If my men had been hyer—"

"I guess if your galoots had been hyer, sheriff, I shouldn't have shown up so spry!" grinned the Kid. "But when you was left, I reckoned I'd like a leetle chinwag with you. I guess I'll borrow your hardware, sheriff, if you ain't any powerful objection."

Still keeping the sheriff covered, finger on trigger, the Rio Kid stepped closer, and with his left hand detached the gun from Watson's belt. With a sweep of his arm he tossed it away into the waving grass at a distance.

"Now I reckon we can have a little pow-wow, all friendly and peaceable, sheriff," said the Kid.

"Dog-gone you!"

"Aw, can it, sheriff!" jeered the Kid. "What's the good of cussing? It won't buy you anything." He lowered his revolver, but it was ready to rise again at a hostile movement. His manner was mocking and bantering. "I've sure got you dead to rights, Jake Watson! And what's the matter with

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stringing you up to a branch yonder, like you'd do to me if you knew how?"

Jake Watson breathed hard.

"I ain't asking you for nothing!" he answered, through his set teeth. "Shoot if you durned well like! I'm on your trail till one of us goes up the flume, Kid Carfax; and if I live, I'll see you swinging on a branch yet!"

"That sure ain't wise talk, sheriff, with my gun so handy!" grinned the Kid. "You're asking for your ticket for soup, feller!"

A glare of rage and defiance was the Frio sheriff's answer.

"You're a hard man, Jake," said the Kid, "as tough as hickory, I guess! When I came trailing back to the Frio country I wanted to come peaceable, as I told you, and you wouldn't have it. I guess I allowed I'd make Frio sit up and howl—and you've sure howled some since then, sheriff. I guess I'm plumb loco not to drive a bullet through your cabeza here and now! But it ain't my way, and I reckon you're wise to that."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"But you ain't hunting me like a lobo wolf, sheriff, without getting something back on your little self!" he went on. "I'll sure make you tired of trailing me afore you get through!"

"I'll see you strung up yet!" snarled the sheriff.

"Guess again!" jeered the Kid. "Why, you ornery cayuse, you couldn't string up one side of me! You can't even rope in a gang of Mexican greasers what held up the hack nigh under your pesky nose! I guess Banker Fray will wait a big piece before you bring back the ten thousand dollars you're trailing."

Sheriff Watson started, staring at the Rio Kid.

"What do you know about that?" he snarled.

"A whole lot, sheriff!" chuckled the Kid. "Why, I watched the hold-up this morning and I sure headed off the greasers at the Rio Pollo ford and got the greenbacks you're after!"

The sheriff gave almost a yell.

"The thunder you did!"

"Jest as I'm telling you, sheriff," said the Kid nonchalantly. "Your men can ride hell-for-leather to the ford, but they won't find any greasers—I sure reckon Sonora Jose and his gang are across the Rio Grande by this time. And Jose has got a bullet from my six-gun to carry along with him, to remind him of the Rio Kid, and I've got the dollars!"

The sheriff's face was a picture of amazement and doubt and wonder.

"You've got the dollars?" he stutered.

"Sure!"

"You got the ten thousand in greenbacks that them dagoes lifted from the McCracken hack?" the sheriff gasped.

The Kid tapped a leather bag that was buckled to his belt. The sheriff stared at it with amazement. It was the little sack of greenbacks that the Mexican bandits had taken from the hack, he knew that. And it was in the hands of the Rio Kid! Amazement held the Frio sheriff dumb.

The Kid laughed lightly.

"I reckon you'd never get your paws on them greasers, sheriff; and if you did you wouldn't rope in the dollars. I guess I was before you."

The sheriff's eyes were fixed on the little sack. There were desperate thoughts in his mind. Pursuit of the Mexican raiders was futile now; even their capture, if it was still possible, meant little when their plunder had passed into other hands. It was defeat

for the Frio sheriff again—defeat once more at the hands of the Rio Kid.

From the sack that contained ten thousand dollars in paper money the sheriff's eyes went furtively to his horse. His rifle was on the bronco, in its case strapped to the saddle. If he found one chance in a thousand of grasping that rifle, or driving a bullet through the Rio Kid's heart and seizing on the sack of dollars, the Sheriff of Frio would take that chance. He breathed hard and deep.

"Forget it, Jake." The Kid seemed to read what was passing in his desperate thoughts. "This hyer is my game, and you lose, sheriff!"

The Kid stepped to the bronco, drew the rifle from its case, and dropped it to the ground. There was a cracking sound under his heavy heel as he stamped. The sheriff muttered a curse. His last hope was gone.

"I reckon I want you to get on that cayuse, sheriff," said the Rio Kid.

"What's your game, you durned rustler?"

"I guess you'll be wise to that later," drawled the Kid. "Jest at present it's my say-so, and you're coming for a leetle pasear with me, sheriff!" His bantering tone changed to one of sharp menace. "Get on that cayuse!"

The sheriff, gritting his teeth, mounted the bronco. The Kid took the scarf from his neck.

"Put your paws together, sheriff!" For an instant the sheriff did not stir, but the glint in the Kid's eyes warned him. He put his hands together, and they were bound with his own neck-scarf.

The Kid whistled, and the black-muzzled mustang came trotting out of the pecans. Mounting the mustang and taking the sheriff's reins, the Rio Kid rode away across the prairie to the north towards Frio. Jake Watson, with rage in his heart, rode beside the boy outlaw whom he had hunted, a prisoner in the hands of the Rio Kid.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Return of the Sheriff!

POKER SMITH, of the Red Dog Saloon, was the earliest riser in the cow town of Frio the following morning. Poker, as a matter of fact, had not slept well. Most of the profits of the Red Dog were banked in the Frio Bank, and the hold-up by the Mexican bandits worried Poker a whole lot. It was opened up and down Frio that if the trail of the ten thousand dollars did not end successfully, if the cow-town bank suffered that heavy loss, payment would be suspended. The bank's failure would hit many men in Frio hard, but Poker Smith it was likely to hit the hardest.

The proprietor of the Red Dog Saloon had had a bad night, and perhaps that was why he awakened early in the sunny morning at the sound of clattering hoofs in the dusty street of Frio, and at the sound Poker leaped from his bed.

All Frio knew that the sheriff and his men were burning the trail through the night on the hunt for the bandits, and if the early horseman was a galoot with news Poker wanted to hear the news without delay. Poker Smith ran to his window, dragged it open, and stared out into the street, glimmering in the early sunrays.

What he saw made him stare harder. Poker Smith rubbed his eyes and stared again.

A horseman was coming up the street to the plaza from the prairie trail. But it was such a horseman as Poker Smith

had never seen ride into the cow town before. The horse, evidently tired, came on at a walking pace, unguided by the rider—unguided, but heading for home from its own natural instinct. The rider sat backwards in the saddle, his back to the horse's head. All that

"Waal, carry me home to die!" roared Poker Smith. "If this hyer don't beat the hull deck! Say, sheriff, is that you?"

Jake Watson gave him a glare of fury. "Cut me loose, you galoot!" he hissed. "Cut me loose, you jay!"

It seemed to the hapless sheriff that all Frio was turning out early that morning to look on his discomfiture. He cursed under his beard as he waited for Poker Smith to reappear with a knife to cut him loose.

Round him surged a crowd, gathering



RETURNING THE PLUNDER! The Kid unfastened a leather bag from his belt. Banker Fray's eyes fixed on it, astonished, startled. "Kid!" he gasped. The Rio Kid tossed the sack to the banker. "Count the dollars, feller," he said. "There's ten thousand there those greasers took!" (See Chapter 5.)

Poker could see of him as he came on was his Stetson hat, his grey woollen shirt, and his hands that were tied behind him with a neck-scarf.

"I swow!" ejaculated Poker Smith, in amazement.

As the bronco paced nearer he made out that the rider's legs were tied under the horse with a length of trail-ropes. Hand and foot the man was tied, backwards on his horse.

Poker Smith dragged on his clothes and rushed down to his door. He tore the door open and ran into the street. He had not seen the rider's face, but there was something familiar in the outlines of the figure, to Poker Smith's eyes. But it could not be the Sheriff of Frio who had ridden back to town in such a style—it surely could not!

Standing outside the saloon Poker Smith watched the oncoming horse. The rider's head twisted round, and Poker saw a bronzed, bearded face, white with rage under its tan. It was the sheriff.

Poker burst into a roar of laughter. Sheriff Watson had returned from the trail of ten thousand dollars, and this was how he had returned. Other doors were opening now along the irregular street and the plaza.

The saloon-keeper roared again.

"But who fixed you up like this, sheriff? Ha, ha! You sure never let a gang of greasers fix you up that a-way!"

"Quit chewing the rag, and cut me loose!" yelled the sheriff fiercely.

"Hang on a piece while I get a knife!" gasped Poker Smith; and he went back into the saloon, chuckling.

Sheriff Watson sat his horse. The broncho had halted before the saloon, and stood there, the sheriff almost writhing on his back.

This was the retaliation of the Rio Kid; this was how the Kid had sent him back to Frio; and the sheriff could have wished that the boy outlaw had shot him through the heart instead.

Perhaps mercifully, perhaps carelessly, the Kid had started him into the town at dawn; and the sheriff hoped that he might be released before all Frio had gathered to gaze on his shame and humiliation. But that hope was delusive.

Three or four pairs of eyes had seen him, from windows and doors, and like wildfire the news ran through the cow town. Men, half-dressed, buckling belts or hitching suspenders, came pouring in to the street, every face on the grin.

thicker and thicker every moment. Loud laughter awoke all the echoes of the plaza.

"It's sure the sheriff!"

"You have been hunting the Rio Kid, and finding him?" yelled a mocking voice, followed by a roar of laughter.

The sheriff crimsoned with rage. His eyes blazed at the crowd of derisive faces. But he did not speak. He could not. His face was choked by fury.

Poker Smith came out at last, a bowie in his hand. He stepped up to the sheriff, grinning. Amid loud laughter he sawed at the trail-ropes that fastened Jake Watson's legs under the bronco.

"The sheriff has sure hit trouble!" chuckled Lewson, the storekeeper of Frio. "He ain't brought back them dollars, you-uns!"

"He sure ain't!" said Poker Smith. "There, you can git off'n your cayuse now, Jake."

He gave the sheriff a helping hand from the horse's back. Then he sawed through the neckscarf that was knotted round his wrists. The sheriff's own neckscarf was missing; evidently it was that which had been used to bind his hands.

There was a roar of inquiry from all the crowd; but the sheriff said no word. But the name of the Rio Kid passed from mouth to mouth. The fury that blazed in the sheriff's face at the mention of that name confirmed the surmise of the Frio crowd.

Free at last, the sheriff strode away to his office, still without a word. He left the plaza echoing with laughter behind him.

"That Kid is sure some lad!" chuckled Poker Smith. "I guess the sheriff will be as mad as a hornet!"

Mad as a hornet hardly described Sheriff Watson's state when his door hid him at last from the mocking eyes of Frio. That morning the sheriff was not seen in public.

Banker Fray, who came to his office for news, was refused admittance.

It was not till noon that the sheriff's men rode in, weary and dusty from the trail, with a tale of failure.

They had found no trace of the fleeing bandits, learning nothing of them. They had missed their leader; and they were amazed to learn that he had returned to Frio; and still more amazed when they learned how he had come back—tied on his horse with his face to the tail.

Who had done it they could not say; but no one doubted that the sheriff had fallen in with the Rio Kid on the prairie and had come out at the little end of the horn.

Sheriff Watson hid his rage and humiliation behind closed doors. He knew that all Frio was rocking with laughter. The thought was in his mind to resign his place, and to ride out of the Frio country, never to return. But he drove that thought away.

The Rio Kid had shamed him in the eyes of all the Frio country; he knew that the story would spread along the Frio and the Pecos, to be greeted with yells of laughter in every bunkhouse for a hundred miles. But the Rio Kid should pay at long last! In his rage and shame the Frio sheriff swore it with many an oath that he would give the boy outlaw no rest, day or night; that he would trail him, with tireless vengeance, till he should see the outlawed puncher strung up to the branch of a cottonwood.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Pony Up!

"HALT!" Herman Fray, the banker of Frio, pulled in his horse, the buckboard rocking in the hurry of his halt. Three miles out of Frio, where the trail ran through a belt of cottonwoods, a horseman pulled out of the trees, with a sharp command on his lips and a six-gun in his hand to enforce it.

Herman Fray, banker and auctioneer and real-estate agent—a man was many things in a cow town like Frio—was not a fighting-man; but had he been one of the hardest cases in Frio he would scarcely have ventured to reach for a gun, with the Rio Kid's smiling face looking at him over a levelled barrel.

He dragged at his reins, and the buckboard stopped; and the Kid rode closer, with a cheery nod to the banker.

"Mornin', feller!" greeted the Kid. Fray eyed him grimly.

He was on his way to McCracken; and all the Frio citizens who had seen him

drive away in his buckboard, guessed what his mission was—to make an attempt to raise money in McCracken to tide the bank over the crisis.

Fray had not seen the sheriff since his return; but he had heard of that return, and he had no longer the faintest hope that Jake Watson would trail down the ten thousand dollars.

"I guess you're wasting your time, Kid!" said Herman Fray coolly. "I guess about ten dollars is my limit; and that ain't worth your while!"

"And you the richest man in Frio!" bantered the Kid.

"With too much hoss-sense to carry dollars on this trail, after what happened yesterday," answered Fray. "You've sure missed your chance, Kid; you should have horned in on this trail yesterday."

The Kid laughed. "You dog-goned gink!" he said. "Do you figure that I've stopped you to go through your rags?"

"I guess it ain't for the pleasure of hearing me chewing the rag!" answered Fray sarcastically.

"Sure!" assented the Kid. "I got business with you, Herman Fray!"

"Come to the bank in Frio," said Fray. "That's my place of business, Kid. There's a heap galoots would be pleased to see you come!"

"You've said it!" grinned the Kid. "They sure would, and Jake Watson the most of all, I reckon, after the way I sent him home!"

"Then it was you?" said Fray.

"It sure was, feller. I guess I warned the sheriff that I'd make him sit up and howl; and I reckon he's howling now, some! But that ain't what I've stopped to tell you, Herman Fray. Keep your dollars in your pocket, you all-fired jay," added the Kid contemptuously.

"They say a heap of things about me, but no galoot can say that I ever held up a man on the trail and cleaned him out. No, sir. That ain't my business with you. I've been lookin' for a chance to see you outside Frio—"

"I guess you're seeing me now," said Fray. "Get it up, Kid; I'm due in McCracken early!"

"I reckon the sheriff ain't brought

you back them dollars that the greasers rustled off the hack yesterday?" grinned the Kid.

Fray scowled.

"He sure ain't!" he replied.

"Then ain't it lucky for you, and for a heap galoots in Frio, that a pilgrim about my size was cavorting around when them greasers hit the horizon with the sack of dollars," said the Kid.

The Frio banker stared at him.

"I guess it wasn't my business," went on the Kid cheerily; "but I wouldn't stand for Texas dollars going across the Rio Grande in the claws of a gang of greasers! I jest had to horn in!"

The Kid unfastened a leather bag from his belt. Banker Fray's eyes fixed on it, astonished, startled.

"Kid!" he gasped.

The Rio Kid tossed the sack into the buckboard.

"Count the dollars, feller!" he said. "I ain't asking you for a receipt; this here piece of business is quite unofficial. But see that the dust is all there, hombre!"

For a moment the Frio banker stared at him spellbound. Then mechanically he picked up the leather sack. With shaking fingers he turned out the contents, and with staring eyes counted over the wad of notes. Then, gasping for breath, he looked at the Kid again.

"Got it right?" asked the Kid carelessly.

"There's ten thousand dollars in this sack," said the banker.

"Ain't that right?"

"Sure!"

The banker looked at the bag of bank-notes again, and again he looked at the Rio Kid.

"You got this off the bandits, Kid?"

"Yep! I gave Sonora Jose a bit of lead in exchange!"

"You're handing it back to me?"

"Ain't it yours?"

"Sure!" Herman Fray stared at the Kid. "Kid, they say a lot of hard things about you; but I reckon most of them don't fit. Kid, why didn't you ride away with this bag of dollars?"

"You've got me guessing!" grinned the Kid.

He waved his Stetson to the astonished banker, wheeled his horse, and rode away into the cottonwoods.

Herman Fray stared after him blankly till he was out of sight. Then he took up his reins, swung round the buckboard, and drove back to Frio in a cloud of dust.

That night Frio buzzed with the news—the most startling news that had ever spread through the cow town. The trail of ten thousand dollars had ended, and it was the Rio Kid, the outlawed puncher who was hunted for his life, who had roped in the dollars from the Mexican bandits and sent them back where they belonged. In the cow town by the rushing waters of the Frio it was a nine days' wonder.

THE END.

(What do you think of the Kid, chums? A fellow in a thousand, eh? He's at his best in next week's roaring yarn of the West, entitled: "THE VENGEANCE OF CHIEF MANY PONIES!" Take a tip, and make sure of your copy now!)

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