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EVERY
TUESDAY.

"CACTUS PETE'S CAPTURE!"

Full-of-Thrills Tale of the Wild West!

ANOTHER ROARING WESTERN YARN, STARRING THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW!

CACTUS PETE'S CAPTURE!

by RALPH REDWAY



In his own land of Texas the Rio Kid is an outlaw, and many a sheriff is on the look-out for the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande. But that cuts no ice with the Kid. It is a glad day for him when he leaves the Mexican borders well in his rear and rides over the grassy plains of his own country! Glad to be back once again!

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Roped In!

"IT'S the Kid!"
"It's that dog-goned fre-bug, the Rio Kid!"
"Thunder!"

"Keep close, you 'uns!" growled Cactus Pete. "He's coming right this way, and I guess he's our mutton, with the wool on!"

The four rough, bearded men in the clump of cottonwoods, keeping close in cover, watched the rider on the sunlit prairie.

He was coming on at an easy trot, evidently heading for the clump of trees, where Cactus Pete and his gang lay hid.

The Rio Kid was easy enough to recognise.

The handsome, sunburnt face under the Stetson hat, with its band of silver nuggets, the goatskin chaps, the silver spurs, the blue silken neckscarf that toned with the blue of the Kid's clear, keen eyes, all were well known to many a man in Texas.

The Kid was humming a tune as he rode.

There was no doubt that, for once, the Kid, usually as watchful as a cougar, was off his guard.

His heart was light that sunny day. He was back in his own country again, after a long sojourn on the southern side of the Rio Grande. The Kid had wandered long in Mexico, and had many a wild adventure there; and many times his thoughts had deliried with the idea of getting on a rancho

in Sonora or Chihuahua, and remaining for keeps in the land of the swarthy Greasers, out of the reach of Texas sheriffs.

But his own land called him, and he had come back, careless of the dangers that dogged his every step in the grasslands of the Lone Star State.

In his own land of Texas the boy outlaw carried his life in his hand; but his swift mustang and his walnut-butted guns had saved him before, and would save him again. His heart was light, and he hummed a tune as he trotted over the sunlit prairie towards the cottonwood clump, where he aimed to camp for noon. And the four watched him with alert, greedy eyes as he came.

"I guess we've got that guy by the short hairs," said Cactus Pete, speaking in a low voice, though the Kid was yet distant. "We sure have got him, you 'uns!"

"We sure have—if we want him!" said one of the watching ruffians. "But that Kid is lightning on the shoot, Pete; and I guess I ain't got no hunch for gun-play with him!"

"It won't come to shooting, Kansas. The darned guy's riding right into our hands!"

"Sure!" said Kansas. "But what's the game, Pete? That guy's an outlaw, and dog don't eat dog!"

"We ain't outlaws, I reckon!" grunted Cactus Pete. "If a heap of g'louts figure that we're horse-thieves they can't prove it up on us."

Kansas chuckled.

"I guess there's a whole heap of cow-

men wouldn't wait for much proof, if they got a holt on us," he remarked.

"Aw, can it!" growled Cactus Pete. "We're going to rope in that Kid when he walks into our hands, as he's doing right now! There's a thousand dollars on him, and it's easy money for us!"

"If he gets holt of a gun——" said another of the gang dubiously.

"He won't get holt of a gun, Pawnee Bill. I've got him covered already, and if he reaches for his hardware it will be the last thing he will do this side of Jordan!"

Lying in the grass, behind a tree, Cactus Pete was looking along the barrel of his rifle. The rifle, close to the trunk, rested on a projecting root, the muzzle bearing direct on the approaching horseman.

The Kid was within easy range, and it needed only a pressure of the ruffian's finger to send the rider spinning from the saddle of the grey mustang.

"You git your rope ready, Laredo Jim!" went on Cactus Pete. "You're the best hand in this bunch with a rope. Rope him in when I give the word—and you don't want to be scared of his guns. He won't use a gun."

"You've said it," agreed Laredo Jim. And he uncoiled his lasso in the shadow of the cottonwoods.

"They say that Kid is as sly as a gopher!" muttered Kansas. "But he sure is walking into it this time."

"We got him!" said Cactus Pete. "Can it, or he'll hear something—he's got keen ears on him."

In tense silence the gang of horse-

thieves waited for the Kid to come closer.

He came on, trotting, evidently unsuspecting of danger, ignorant of the ambush that awaited him.

Cactus Pete's eyes gleamed along his rifle. Laredo Jim gripped his rope, ready. Kansas and Pawnee Bill had six-guns in their hands. And the Rio Kid came on, unsuspecting.

He was only a score of yards from the clump of cottonwoods, when he suddenly pulled in the grey mustang. It was as if some instinct had warned the wary Kid of danger.

Cactus Pete shouted instantly: "Put 'em up, Kid! I've got you covered!"

He raised the rifle a little, and the sunlight gleamed on the rusty barrel. The gleam caught the Kid's eyes and checked him as his hand was leaping to a gun.

The Rio Kid sat his mustang, motionless, for a moment; and then his hands went slowly above his head. He knew that he was covered, and that he had no time to draw. And the Kid, reckless as he was, was not the galoot to throw his life away. He put up his hands and shrugged his shoulders.

"Your game, pardner!" he called out cheerily. "You take the jackpot this time!"

"Keep 'em up, Kid!"

"Sure!" said the Kid carelessly.

There was a whiz of a circling rope. The Kid knew that it was coming, but he could not help himself. The loop settled over his shoulders, and tightened round his waist, and with a powerful wrench Laredo Jim jerked him from the saddle.

The Kid tumbled into the grass with a heavy fall; and the next instant the four horse-thieves were round him, grasping him.

"Go easy, you 'uns!" said the Kid. "You've got me cinched, and you don't want to get excited! I've sure said it's your game!"

"Fix him!" growled Cactus Pete.

The gang lost no time in fixing the Kid. The strong rope bound his arms down to his sides; and his guns were taken. The Kid sat up in the thick grass, his face cool and careless, but a deep glitter in his eyes. The fall from the saddle had shaken him a good deal.

"I reckon you never wanted to give me that tumble, you 'uns," he said quietly. "You had me cinched."

"I guess we ain't taking chances with you, Kid!" grinned Laredo Jim. "You're too all-fired sudden on the shoot!"

"Bring him into the timber!" said Cactus Pete.

The Kid was lifted to his feet. In a jubilant crowd, the gang of horse-thieves marched him into the clump, the grey mustang following. The Kid was pitched down at the foot of a tree. He struggled to a sitting position, and leaned back on the gnarled trunk.

"You got me!" he said pleasantly. "But I don't rightly get on to this game. You ain't sheriff's men, I reckon."

"We sure ain't!" chuckled Kansas.

"I seen the heap of you before," said the Kid. "Hoss-thieves, every guy of you. I knew you at Frio, Cactus Pete, where you was run out of town on a rail, and warned that you'd be shot up if you ever came back. I reckon you're wanted in the San Pedro country for brand blotting. What's your grouch agin me?"

"Thousand dollars!" said Cactus Pete briefly.

The Kid's lip curled.

"You've roped me in for the reward?" he asked.

"You've said it."

"I guess I knew you was a gang of pizen skunks when I set eyes on you," drawled the Kid. "Say, you durned coyotes, you sure got my goat! I'd give a whole heap of dollars to be standing free this minute, with a gun in my hand. I guess I'd rub out the dirtiest, pizenest gang in Texas!"

"Can it!" said Cactus Pete. "You're riding with us this afternoon to Blue Pine. I guess you'll get a rope there. Chew on that, Kid."

"You pizen skunk!" retorted the Kid. Cactus Pete's eyes gleamed at him.

"You don't want to blow off your mouth too much, Kid," he said threateningly. "You bulldozed me at Frio, and in the San Pedro country; but I've got you by the short hairs now, and if you chew the rag too much I guess I'll make you squirm."

"You're sure full of sand when you're talking to a galoot with his hands tied," said the Kid contemptuously. "Un-loose me, you ornery polecat, and I'll make you go on your knees and beg!"

Cactus Pete picked up his quirt, swung it in the air, and brought down the thong sharply across the Kid's shoulders.

"That for you!" he said. The Kid's eyes burned at him.

"I guess I'll remember that, Cactus Pete," he said.

"Can it!"

"It's your say-so!" said the Kid philosophically, and he relapsed into silence.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Apache!

CHIEF MANY PONIES lifted his dusky head, with the draggled feather in the matted black hair, from his bed of leaves, and listened.

The eyes of the outcast Apache were gleaming.

In the deepest recess of the timber clump, Chief Many Ponies had lain down to rest in the heat of the day, seeking concealment, as he always did when he camped. Many weary miles had the outcast Apache covered on foot that day, for he had no horse. His blanket was tattered, his moccasins worn and ragged, his leggings in shreds. Chief Many Ponies could remember the day when he had ridden the prairie at the head of a hundred warriors, when he had raided cattle and lifted the scalps of palefaces. But that day was long past, and the Apache chief was an outcast and a beggar, hanging about the camps of the palefaces cadging drinks, stealing horses when opportunity offered, stealing even chickens like a coon. That morning the chief had left Blue Pine, "fanned" out of camp by a crowd of merry cow-punchers who had caught him too near a horse tethered outside the camp saloon. A rain of bullets had fanned the Apache out of camp, many of them going near enough to tear shreds from his ragged leggings and blanket, one of them cutting a gash along his bronzed cheek. Chief Many Ponies had fled for his life, and the prairie had swallowed him—footsore, dusty, fatigued, his heart burning with rage and rancour. In the deep thicket, in the bed of leaves, the Apache had lain down to rest, till the voices among the cottonwoods had awakened him. And the Apache lifted his head and listened, without a sound.

White men were in the timber, and it behoved the Apache to be wary. Fanning with bullets was a joke to the cow-

men; but it was no joke to the Redskin, and he had had enough of it. He lay and listened, his dark head raised like that of an adder, his black eyes gleaming.

It was long before he stirred from his covert. But he stirred at last, moving with the noiselessness of a creeping serpent. White men were camped in the timber, and that meant that there were horses, and a chance for the most expert horse-thief in Texas. A chance, perhaps, of using the knife that was his only weapon, and repaying in part the long and bitter grudge that he owed to the whole white race. The whole race—with one exception; for there was one white man in the land of Texas who had been a friend to him, who had helped him when he was helpless, fed him when he was starving, cared for him when he was wounded. But that white man, himself a hunted outlaw, Chief Many Ponies never expected to see again.

From deep cover, silent, the Apache looked, at last, on the camp of the white men in the timber. His eyes read the rough bearded faces of the four horse-thieves, and he crouched closer into cover. These men were not cow-punchers, from whom he might have expected fanning with bullets. They were desperate ruffians, more likely than not to shoot at sight, and to shoot to kill, if they spotted the Apache lurking round their camp. The life of an outcast Redskin meant nothing to Cactus Pete and his gang.

But the Apache's keen black eyes picked out a fifth figure, sitting at the foot of a tree, bound with rope. And in his surprise, Chief Many Ponies almost betrayed himself by a start. His gaze fixed incredulously on the handsome, sunburnt face of the Rio Kid—the one face that he ever desired to see; the face of the boy outlaw to whom he owed a debt of gratitude, as unforgotten as his bitter grudge against all other white men.

Long the Indian gazed at that face before he crept away again into the deep shadows of the cottonwoods.

His coming, and his going, remained unknown to the gang of horse-thieves. The timber clump, solitary in the vast spaces of the prairie, was, so far as they knew, untenanted by any save themselves and their prisoner. Chief Many Ponies had left no trace of his footprints for the keenest eyes to see; he had made no sound that could have alarmed a coyote. Neither the horse-thieves nor their prisoner dreamed that the trees and thickets hid a lurking Apache.

Four horses were tethered at a little distance, lying in the grass under the trees. The Rio Kid's mustang had been tethered with them. The animals had cropped the rich grass, drunk their fill at the little spring in the timber, and were lying in the grass now, resting until they were wanted for the trail. Under the spreading branches of the cottonwoods there was shade, though it was hot. Outside the radius of the trees burning sunshine blazed down on a scorched plain, dazzling to the eye. Leaning back idly against tree-trunks, Cactus Pete and his gang smoked, and played poker with a pack of greasy cards, while they waited for the burning heat of the day to pass before hitting the trail for Blue Pine. The Kid sat apart from them, bound cruelly with the riata. To make assurance doubly sure, the horse-thieves had knotted the rope round his legs as well as his arms, and taken a turn with it round the tree against which he sat.

The Kid was cinched, and he knew it. He had no more mercy to expect from

this gang of outcast cutthroats than from a sheriff's posse who might have roped him in in their way of duty. A reward of a thousand dollars was out for the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande, and there was not a man in this gang who would not have sold his own brother for a tenth of the sum. And Cactus Pete had an old grudge against the Kid.

The game was up so far as the Kid could see, though his face was still cool, and even cheerful. While there was life there was hope. The rope waited for him at Blue Pine; but Blue Pine was many a long mile distant across the prairie, and could not be reached before night at the earliest. Many chances might turn up in the interval, and one might be enough to save the Kid. He did not give up hope, but he was well aware that it was only his own sanguine nature that could see any gleam of hope in his present circum-

stances. The game was up; the Kid's long trail was bearing its end. And he was thinking of the land he had quitted, of friends he had left behind in Mexico. The call of his own country had been too strong for him to resist, and this was what it had led him to. The Kid called himself a dog-goned gink as he sat in his bonds, waiting till it should please his captors to hit the trail and take him where blood-money awaited them.

His keen ear caught, without heeding, a sound of uneasiness among the tethered horses a dozen yards distant in the timber. The horse-thieves, intent on their game, did not heed it, if they heard it. But the Kid stirred at last and moved his head to look round at the animals. His own mustang was with them, and even in his own situation the Rio Kid was not likely to forget his faithful cayuse.

He suppressed an exclamation as he looked. Something was stirring in the thickets amid which the horses lay—something that was not a horse. The Kid felt a sudden beat of his heart. Someone was stirring in the timber—someone who was, evidently, not a member of the horse-thief gang. A momentary glimpse of a tattered blanket told the Kid that it was an Indian.

"Gee-whiz!" murmured the Kid under his breath.

There was a Redskin in the timber, and he was silently, cautiously busy among the tethered horses. The Kid grinned. If some copper-skinned horse-thief was at work, it was all to the good for the Kid; if the gang were once dismounted, it was a far cry to Blue Pine and the sheriff's office there. But he shook his head. A creeping Redskin was there, he was certain of that; but the cunningest Redskin could never get away with the cayuses. They were in full sight of the camped gang, and not one of the animals could have risen to its feet without drawing a glance. The Kid wondered how long it would be before the gang became aware that they had an enemy close at hand. That thought was in his mind, when a sudden shrill squeal from one of the horses rang and echoed through the timber, and the whole gang stared round.

"What the thunder's the rookus with the critters?" growled Kansas.

Cactus Pete sprang to his feet, grasping a revolver. His glance went instantly to the Rio Kid. But he was relieved at once to see the prisoner still safe in his place. The Kid grinned at him.

"I guess I'm safe here, feller," he drawled. "You don't want to worry about this infant."

Cactus Pete scowled by way of reply and ran towards the horses. There was another shrill squeal. The next moment Cactus Pete's six-gun was roaring, and he yelled to his followers:

"Injuns!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Foo or Friend?

"I NJUNS!" Cards and cigars had been thrown aside and forgotten; every man in the gang was grasping a gun—savagely wary and alert. Even the Kid for the moment was forgotten in the alarm.

Bang, bang, bang! Cactus Pete had fired at a glimpse of a dragged feather in a matted black head. But he had had only an instant's glimpse, and the half-seen Redskin had vanished. Now he was firing into the thickets, blazing away shot after shot, with a savage oath to each.

Bang, bang! The other three ruffians began to blaze away, though they could see nothing but the trunks of trees, the straggling lianas, the bushes, and the thick grass.

The Redskin had vanished. For several minutes the timber rang and thundered with the roar of firearms. The horse-thieves were in fear of whizzing arrows or bullets from the trees; but no missile flew. In a few minutes they realized that they were wasting their lead, and ceased to fire.

Cactus Pete stood looking down at the horses, curses streaming from his bearded lips.

"Killed!" ejaculated Kansas.

"That durned Redskin—"

"Great gophers!" gasped Laredo Jim. "He's killed the cayuses!" Cactus Pete swore furiously.

Do you know the art of trailing, of blazing a track through the woods, and of seeking "sign"? Our contributor gives you a few useful tips on this very important part of scouting, tips that will help you in your next outing!

SCOUTING DAYS!

ON THE TRAIL!

EVER met the Scout who can see things on the ground and all round about that are absolutely invisible to other fellows' eyes? He's the trained trail-finder and tracker. Did it take him years to get that skill—or was it a miracle? Neither! It's as easy as pie! And here's how!

Unless you are scouting over ground where animals are plentiful or birds obligingly leave plenty of footprints, there is not much fun to be had in going after these natural trails. You want to make your own—or get another Scout to make his trail, and then you can put in some jolly practice in tracking him.

Shall we start with the blazing of a trail? That means deliberately making a track which you yourself can follow, and your chums who are in the know. Useful, that, for practice, and for marking the way to and from a camping place or other site which you want to be kept secret.

You blaze the trail in one of several ways: by breaking twigs on shrubs or the low branches of trees—quite small pieces, which are to be left hanging where you snap them. Or they can be bent only, pointing in a certain direction as required.

The age of such a trail can easily be told by the condition of the leaves on the twig. If these are quite dead, that means the twigs were broken a good time back. If the leaves are only wilting, the trail may have been blazed only an hour or two ago.

The same trail-blazing can be carried out by knotting together three or four blades of tall grass here and there, at intervals of eight or ten feet, the knotted blades being bent over in the direction that leads to your camp or elsewhere. Of course, the grass you thus mark must be left standing where it is growing.

All these are natural signposts, which mean everything to the fellow in the know and absolutely nothing to anyone else. Always beware of faked trails. If your chums have started off ahead and the game is for you to track them, you can be sure that they will try hard to conceal their path. They won't purposely make huge footprints in mud, nor will they cleave a great path through long grass.

If you do meet with such tracks, in practice, you can depend upon it that the fellows who made them did so to mislead you. They later turned back in those very obvious tracks and then took a real Scout's path—one that leaves practically not a clue behind!

You can get splendid tracking practice by persuading one of your number to walk ahead, trailing behind him a rather heavy stick connected by string to his wrist. In the business-end of the stick should be several large nails or spikes. As these spikes or nails pass over the ground or through grass they will leave signs, the finding of which will test your powers of observation severely.

Especially as it is the playful habit of that trailing spiked stick to "jump" in places and not leave a visible mark anywhere! The fellow laying this trail should walk in an erratic course, letting his spiked apparatus do whatever it will in his rear.



In the grass lay four dead horses. The knife of the creeping Indian had done the work.

The rustlers stared down at the still carcasses in rage and fury. Of the horses that had lain in the grass after their feed only one lived, and that was the Kid's grey mustang. Why the Redskin had spared Side - Kicker the ruffians could not guess; he had had time for one more plunge of the long, deadly knife. But he had spared him; the mustang was unhurt. Four bronchos lay dead in the grass.

"That durned red skunk!" said Cactus Pete hoarsely. "The dog-goned pole-cat! Thunder! We'll root him out and shoot him to rags!"

"Might be a gang of them," said Kansas, with an uneasy stare round at the trees.

Cactus Pete spat out an oath.

"If there was a gang of the Reds, you bonehead, they'd be on us afore this. Can't you see there's a single track there? Jest one of the bucks."

"Gee! What'd he kill the cayuses for?" said Pawnee Bill. "I reckon he'd lift them if he could; but what'd he kill them for?"

"Because he couldn't lift them, you loosed gink! Get after him, and shoot him to pieces!" said Cactus Pete hoarsely.

The single track among the slain horses showed that only one Indian had been at work; and the mark of the moccasin told that it was a Red man, not a white. And that the savage had no firearm was fairly clear, or a shot would have rung out ere this. Taking courage from that knowledge, the horse-thief gang rushed into the timber in search of him.

Cactus Pete, however, checked himself, and ran back to where the Kid was bound to the tree. He was savagely anxious for vengeance on the ruthless Redskin who had dismounted the bunch; but he was more anxious about the prisoner, who was worth a thousand dollars to him.

"Thunder!" he yelled.

Behind the tree to which the Kid was bound was a stealing figure in a tattered blanket, knife in hand.

Bang! Chief Many Ponies leaped away into cover as Cactus Pete came rushing upon him, firing as he came.

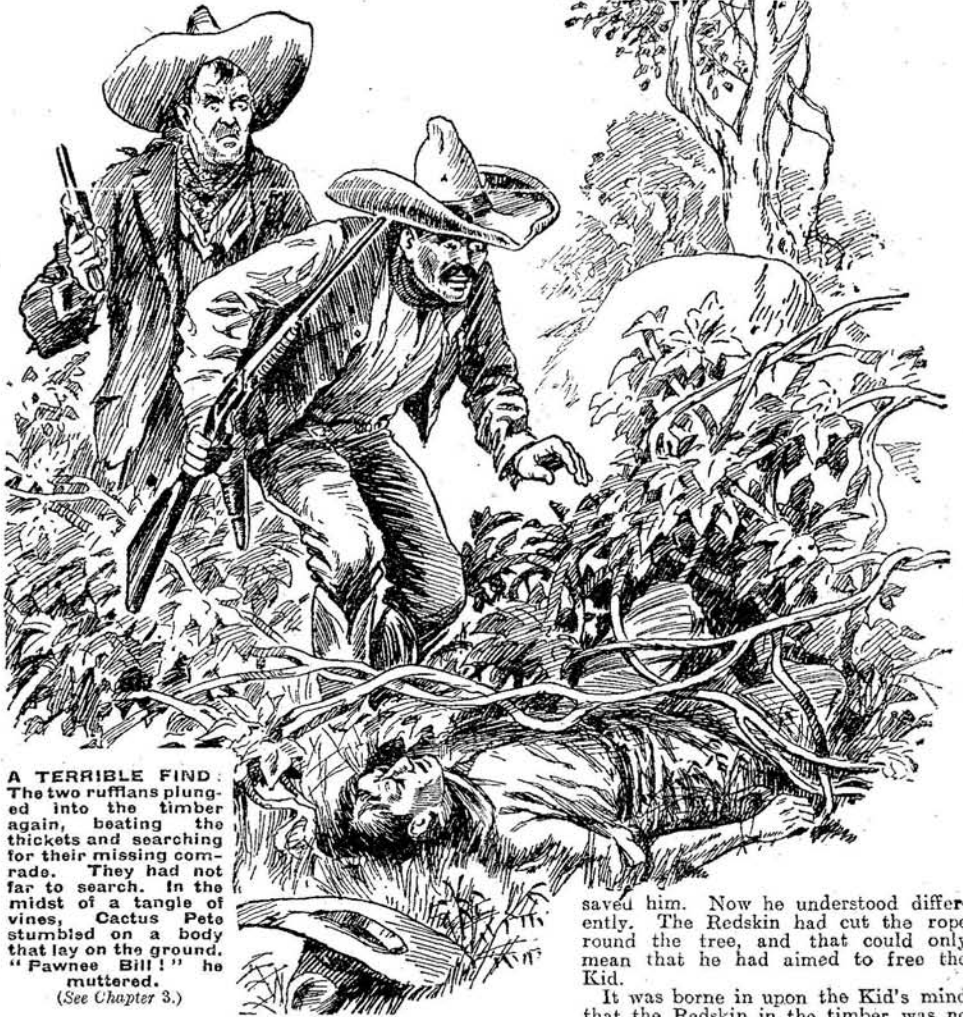
The ruffian halted, panting before the Kid.

"Gee! I guess that Red nearly got you!" he panted.

The Kid nodded coolly.

He had heard the creeping Indian behind the tree, and he had expected the knife. But he had disdained to call out to the horse-thieves. Prisoner as he was, he had not expected the Redskin to spare him, little dreaming that the

He had taken it for granted, when he heard the Redskin creeping there, that the unseen brave came as a foe, intending to plunge his knife into the heart of the white man who was bound and helpless. He had reckoned that it was Cactus Pete's swift return that had



A TERRIBLE FIND: The two ruffians plunged into the timber again, beating the thickets and searching for their missing comrade. They had not far to search. In the midst of a tangle of vines, Cactus Pete stumbled on a body that lay on the ground. "Pawnee Bill!" he muttered. (See Chapter 3.)

Apache who lurked in the timber was an old acquaintance and a friend.

"I reckon the Red was after my scalp, feller," said the Kid, with perfect coolness. "It was sure a near thing."

"I guess I'd let him lift it, too, only I want to tote you safe into Blue Pine and rope in a thousand dollars!" snarled Cactus Pete.

"I sure ain't asking you to protect me, feller!" said the Kid disdainfully.

Cactus Pete snarled out an oath and turned away from him. The other three ruffians had disappeared in the thickets, and could be heard shouting to one another, and occasionally loosing off a shot. Cactus Pete strode away towards the horses to secure the grey mustang, the only mount now left in the bunch. "Gee!" whispered the Kid.

He had made a sudden strange discovery. As he moved, the rope that bound him to the tree-trunk fell loose.

For a moment or two the Kid sat quite still in astonishment. The rope that passed round the tree-trunk had been cut through. It could only have been cut by the Indian who had crept behind the tree.

The Kid was amazed.

saved him. Now he understood differently. The Redskin had cut the rope round the tree, and that could only mean that he had aimed to free the Kid.

It was borne in upon the Kid's mind that the Redskin in the timber was no foe to him, but a friend. But for Cactus Pete's intervention he would have freed the Kid from the bonds on his limbs, as well as from the rope that fastened him to the tree. So the Kid figured.

"Gee!" murmured the Kid again. He looked round. But nothing was to be seen of the Redskin, hunted through the timber by the four horse-thieves.

No doubt he had slunk into the deepest cover, or taken to the branches of the cottonwoods, wide-spreading and thick with foliage, where it was scarcely possible for Cactus Pete and his gang to seek him.

Shot rang through the timber as rustlers hunted for the Indian, shots and oaths and trampling footsteps sounded incessantly. But there was no sound that told that the Redskin had been found.

The Kid was not idle in those moments. The release from the tree-trunk gave him more freedom of movement, and he was wrestling with the rope on his arms, seeking to loosen it.

The stalwart Kid exerted all his strength, struggling with the rope until

the sweat poured down his face. But the rustlers had taken care to secure him; the rope was strong and the knots were tight. The Kid ceased his struggle at last, almost exhausted by his efforts, and almost as tightly secured as before.

Cactus Pete was standing at a little distance, keeping guard over the grey mustang, and occasionally firing a shot into the trees. Kansas, Pawnee Bill, and Laredo Jim were out of sight. But their leader shouted to them at last to desist from the useless search.

It had lasted long, but the lurking Redskin had not been found.

"Let up, you 'uns!" shouted Cactus Pete. "Let up! I guess we want to hit the trail before sundown!"

Kansas and Laredo Jim came out of the thickets, panting, and joined their leader.

"I guess that durned Red has taken to the trees," said Kansas, with a stare up at the thick, spreading branches overhead. "I guess I ain't a pesky monkey to go after him there, Pete."

"Dog-gone him!" snarled Cactus Pete. "We got to let him slide; it's more'n time to hit the trail."

"One cayuse for the heap of us!" said Laredo Jim. "I guess we'll have to ride that mustang in turns, Pete, with the rest hoofing it!"

"Sure!" growled Pete.

"Dog-gone that durned Red! It's all of thirty-five miles to Blue Pine!" growled Kansas. "We ain't hitting Blue Pine this side of to-morrow, Pete, on foot."

"I guess I know that!" snarled Cactus Pete. "Say, where's that galoot Pawnee? Why in thunder don't he show up?"

He shouted angrily to the member of the bunch who had not yet reappeared from the thickets.

"You, Pawnee Bill! Come out of it, you gink; we're going to hit the trail!"

There was no answer from Pawnee Bill; no sound of rustling in the timber, no sound of shooting. Silence reigned as Cactus Pete's angry roar died away.

"Bill!" roared Cactus Pete angrily. "You dog-goned geck! Ain't I a-shoutin' to you to let up! Come back, you loosed gink!"

Only the echo of his voice answered. "Thunder!" ejaculated Laredo Jim suddenly. "That Injun sure ain't got Pawnee Bill, Pete!"

Cactus Pete started.

"Bill ain't no such fool!" he snarled. "I guess— He broke off and yelled again to Pawnee Bill to return.

But there was no answer, and no footstep. And the three ruffians looked at one another with scared faces. They had separated in the timber, hunting for the Redskin. And the thought was in all their minds now, that the hunted savage had found one of the hunters.

"Let's git!" muttered Kansas uneasily. "If that gink, Bill, had got himself sent over the range, more durn fool he! Let's beat it!"

"We ain't going without Bill!" growled Laredo Jim.

"I guess he's got his."

Cactus Pete grated his teeth.

"We got to look for him," he said. "You stop here with this hoss, Kansas, and keep an eye on that fire-bug yonder! You come with me, Laredo, and keep close to me, and shoot on sight if you see that gol-darned Red!"

"You bet!"

The two ruffians plunged into the timber again, beating the thickets and searching for their missing comrade.

They had not far to search,

In the midst of a tangled mass of trailing lianas, Cactus Pete stumbled over a body that lay on the ground. He bent down, with an oath.

"Pawnee Bill!"

"Thunder!" breathed Laredo Jim.

"He's got his, Pete! Look!"

Pawnee Bill lay on his back among the lianas, his eyes wide open and staring up at his comrades. But the staring eyes could not see them. The rough, flannel shirt was thick with blood, from a terrible wound in his breast, where the Redskin's knife had found his heart.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Hoot of the Owl!

"BEAT it!"

Cactus Pete spoke in a hoarse tone.

There was no longer any thought in the minds of the horse-thieves of searching the timber for the hidden Redskin. The fate of Pawnee Bill had sickened them of that. They had only one thought now—to get out of the timber, out into the open plains, where there was no cover to conceal the treacherous Redskin. Every shadow in the deep timber was full of terror for them now.

The grey mustang was unpicketed, hastily loaded with as much of the truck as he could carry, and led away. The Rio Kid, jerked to his feet by a rough hand, had the rope cut from his legs, so that he could walk. In a bunch, staring back uneasily over their shoulders, the horse-thieves left the timber, taking their prisoner with them.

Safe out of the shadows of the trees they slowed down, and Cactus Pete looked back with a vicious curse.

"I guess I'd give all we're getting for the Kid to lay that Redskin out!" he said hoarsely. "I'd sure give a whole heap of dollars to get him afore my gun. But—"

"Beat it!" grunted Kansas. "I guess I wouldn't go back into that timber for all the dollars in the bank at Blue Pine. I'd sure like to shoot up that Injun; but I ain't looking for him any more."

"Not in your lifetime!" said Laredo Jim.

The Rio Kid grinned.

"That Red sure has got you scared stiff," he said lightly. "Say, you guys, let me loose, and I'll sure go back and look for him!"

Cactus Pete gave him a suspicious glare.

"That Red cut you loose from the tree," he muttered. "I guess I found the rope out. You savvy that durned Redskin?"

The Kid laughed.

"I reckon I ain't set eyes on him," he answered. "But I sure hope he'll get you and your gang, Pete, even if he gets me at the same time. I reckon I'd hit the long trail with pleasure, if you guys was hitting it along with me."

"Shut up, you!" snarled Pete.

He stared back at the timber. He dared not enter its dark shades again, with the Redskin lurking there; but he was reluctant to go without vengeance on the unseen, unknown Indian.

"Aw, beat it!" exclaimed Laredo Jim impatiently. "That Red lifted poor Pawnee's gun, and I guess if he knows how to handle it, we ain't too safe standing here chewing the rag."

As if to give point to the words, there came a sudden crack from the timber—the crack of a revolver. Cactus Pete started and howled out an oath as the Stetson hat spun on his head. The bullet had gone close.

"Beat it!" yelled Kansas.

And he grasped the grey mustang's reins, and hurried the animal on, Laredo and Cactus Pete following fast, the latter dragging the Kid after him. The Kid, at least, was in no hurry. The Redskin, whoever he was, had proved that he was no foe to the rustlers' prisoner. And the Kid would have been glad to remain within range of his shooting. But Cactus Pete dragged him savagely on, and as the Kid gave him all the trouble he could, the ruffian jerked a revolver from his belt, and jammed the muzzle to his chest.

"Beat it, you!" he hissed. "By thunder, you beat it, you durned lobo-wolf, or I'll leave you dead on the llano, here in your tracks."

"It's your say-so, feller," grinned the Kid. "You can put away your hardware. I guess I'm coming quiet."

"Hustle then, durn you!" snarled Cactus Pete.

Another shot rang from the timber, but the horse-thieves were already out of effective range.

At a safe distance Cactus Pete called on his followers to halt. Rifle in hand, he looked back at the distant clump.

"If that Injun breaks cover—" he muttered.

For several minutes the bunch waited and watched. But there was no sign of the Redskin. Evidently he did not intend to break cover. They knew that his eyes would be watching them from the trees, but the cautious, cunning savage was not exposing himself to a shot.

With a curse Cactus Pete slung the rifle over his shoulder again.

"Git on!" he growled.

And the bunch pushed on, and the clump of cottonwoods grew hazy in the distance behind.

With a curse at every step the bunch tramped over the rugged, rolling prairie. Side-Kicker was loaded with their "truck," but the ruffians took turns in riding him, in spite of his load. They gave no turn in the saddle to the Rio Kid, however. The Kid tramped on unresting, his aching arms bound down to his sides with the strong rope. Walking, as a means of locomotion, the Kid hated, like all cow-punchers. The high-heeled riding-boots were not suited for hoofing it, and it was weary work over rugged ground.

But there was no help for it, and the Kid took it as cheerfully as he could. But the three horse-thieves did not take it cheerfully. They cursed and swore at every step as they dragged their weary limbs along in a blaze of heat under the sinking sun.

But for the ruthless deed of the Redskin in the timber the bunch would have been mounted, the Kid tied on the mustang, and the ride swift to Blue Pine—to blood-money for the bunch, and the calaboose for the Kid. So the Kid, weary as he was, did not regret that the bunch were hoofing it. One night, at least, they would have to camp on the plain. And the hours of darkness would be full of chances for the Kid.

His captors were growling with rage. They rested in turn in the saddle of the grey mustang; but they could only proceed at a walking pace, as two of the bunch had to go afoot with the prisoner. Weary mile after mile passed under their tramping feet as the sun sank lower and lower in the west towards the mountains of New Mexico.

The rim of the red sun dipped in the west. Kansas, with an oath, came to a halt.

"I'm beat! We got to camp!"
 "I guess if we kept on we'd strike Blue Pine by morning," growled Cactus Pete.

But he spoke without heart.
 "Forget it!" jeered Kansas. "I guess I'm camping, anyhow."
 "We got to camp, Pete," growled Laredo Jim. "I guess my laigs is fair dropping off'n me."

The sun was gone, and darkness falling upon the boundless prairie. The bunch camped, tethering the grey mustang to a peg in the ground. Cactus Pete, with a savage eye, examined the Kid's bonds, and wound a rope round his legs again, and knotted it with cruel tightness.

"I guess I ain't taking no chances with you, darn you!" he growled.
 "You better not," said the Kid quietly, "for I'm telling you, Cactus Pete, if I get a chance at you, you're a dead hoss-thief."

With another length of rope the ruffian secured the Kid to a peg. The bunch ate their supper of bully beef and flapjacks, without offering any to the Kid. Not even a panikin of water moistened his dry lips. Supplies were short with the gang, and they had none

to waste on their prisoner. They rolled themselves in their blankets at last and lay down to sleep, round the bound Kid, beside the weary mustang, and silence fell on the lonely camp in the midst of the vast prairie.

But while the three ruffians snored round him, sleep did not come to the Kid. He was weary to the bone; but the aching grip of his bonds kept him awake. And he was thinking—thinking of the solitary chance that remained to him. Cactus Pete and his bunch evidently did not fear or suspect that the unknown Redskin might have tracked them from the timber, ten or fifteen miles across rugged prairie. Neither would the Kid have suspected it, but for the hunch he had that the Redskin had aimed to help him.

From the silence and blackness round the lonely camp, as the night grew older, came the hoot of a night owl.

The Kid heard it without heeding. The night owl's hoot was no unfamiliar sound.

But he took note of it at last. It was repeated, again and again, and each time the Kid thought it was nearer to the camp. That was strange enough, when once he gave it his attention.

And he noted, too, that the hoot ended in a prolonged and dropping note that was unusual. And, suddenly, the Kid gave a start as he remembered.

It was no owl that hooted in the darkness outside the camp. It was an Indian signal. And that peculiar note; he remembered it now, remembered it from the time when he had camped in the chaparral with a wounded Apache whom he had cared for. And into the Kid's heart there came new hope, into his face a flush, and a gleam into his eyes.

For he knew now who was the unseen Redskin of the timber. He knew that that Redskin had followed the trail of Cactus Pete's bunch, and he knew that in the blackness of the prairie, signaling to him that he was at hand, was the outcast Apache, Chief Many Ponies.

THE END.

(Is there any hope for the Rio Kid? Will the outcast Indian chief, Many Ponies, succeed in getting this young outlaw out of the clutches of Cactus Pete & Co. See next week's powerful tale of the West, entitled: "A DEBT REPAID.")

FAMOUS SCOUTS of the WAR!



Another tribute to a great soldier-scout, whose life has been one long thrill!

3.—Field-Marshal Sir William R. Birdwood, Bart., G.C.M.G., G.C.S., K.C.S.I.

ONE of the most famous Scouts in the Great War was Sir William Birdwood, who for some time held the post of Chief Commissioner for Scouts in India.

He enlisted in 1883 in the Royal Scots Fusiliers at the age of seventeen, and he has seen more fighting and taken part in more thrilling scraps than practically any man alive. In fact, it is safe to say that there have been few battles since he became a soldier in which he has not participated.

His life has been one long thrill, and the sun of his hair-breadth escapes is too numerous to mention. For instance, in the Tirah Campaign some thirty-two years ago he was mentioned in dispatches and commended for his sterling courage and resource. Then came the famous Boer War, in which he acquitted himself magnificently, being mentioned no less than five times in dispatches.

Always in the thick of the fray, he escaped death time after time, seemingly by a miracle. In a scrap near Pretoria in the Boer War his horse was shot away from under him, yet he escaped unhurt. But he did not come out entirely unscathed during this South African campaign, for he was badly wounded on more than one occasion.

For some time Sir William was Military Secretary to Lord Kitchener, both in South Africa and India. That was why he was nicknamed "Secretary Birdwood" by some Army wag, after the "secretary bird," a member of the vulture family, which is to be found in most parts of South Africa. This bird is so named because its quilled feathers give it a clerkly appearance. This nickname stuck until Sir William became commander of the Australian and New Zealand forces at Gallipoli.

Sir Ian Hamilton, commander-in-chief at Gallipoli, paid a striking tribute to Birdwood when he wrote in one of his dispatches:

"Lieut.-General Sir W. R. Birdwood has been the soul of Anzac. Not for one single day has he ever quitted his post. Chery and full of human sympathy, he has spent many hours of each twenty-four inspiring the defenders of the front trenches, and if he does not know every soldier in his force, at least every soldier in the force believes he's known to the chief."

Such a tribute was only meet, for indeed Sir William was tremendously popular with the men under his command and, what is more, they trusted and admired him for his courage, coolness, resource, and high qualities of leadership. He kept up his reputation by having innumerable narrow squeaks at Gallipoli during some of the fiercest and most deadly fighting of the Great War.

On one occasion Sir William experienced the weird sensation of having his hair parted by a bullet instead of with a brush and comb. It knocked his hat off, scared the top of his skull, inflicting a painful cut and rendering him practically insensible.

But when his aides-de-camp implored him to leave his position and go to a dressing station behind the lines he bluntly refused. What was a wound in comparison with his duty! That was the viewpoint he took, and so he stayed.

No wonder so great a soldier, so magnificent a daredevil, so fine a Britisher, is looked up to and admired by every Boy Scout and every boy outside the great movement!

When Sir William Birdwood was asked to set down his opinion of the Boy Scout movement, just after the War, he wrote:

"Although some time has elapsed since I held the appointment of Chief Commissioner for Scouts in India, I have naturally retained a live interest in the welfare and progress of the Boy Scouts' Association. That this movement had great possibilities no one doubted, but I think few people, even among its most enthusiastic supporters, could foresee the success and prominence which it has achieved throughout the British Empire, to the most distant Dominions, and particularly in the willing, loyal, and valuable service which our Boy Scouts have rendered to their country during the Great War.

"One cannot fail to realise the great value of this organisation. We may indeed be proud of the past, of our glorious traditions, and of what our fighting forces have done for us; but it is on the coming generation that the future of our great Empire is to depend. In their hands is the preservation of these noble ideals for which the nation has willingly made the greatest sacrifices."

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**IN THE
HANDS of
CANNIBALS!** - AND NO CHANCE OF RESCUE!

*See the Rousing Long Tale of
the Southern Seas inside!*

YOU WANT A THRILL?—THEN READ THIS ROARING TALE OF THE WEST!

A DEBT REPAID!

by RALPH REDWAY



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Camp on the Prairie!

THE Rio Kid lay and listened. Blackness hung over the prairie. Hardly a star gleamed in the dark sky over the camp where the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande lay a prisoner.

Round him lay Cactus Pete and his gang, sleeping in their blankets. The Kid's mustang, tethered close at hand, slept in the thick grass. But the Kid was wakeful.

Ropes were knotted on his sturdy limbs, and a rope held him to a peg driven in the ground, close by the side of Cactus Pete. Escape for the boy outlaw seemed impossible. Twenty miles of rugged prairie lay between him and the cow-town of Blue Pine, whither the gang were taking him when dawn came. The Kid reflected grimly how glad the sheriff of Blue Pine would be to see him. Cactus Pete and his gang, more than suspected of horse-stealing, were not liked in the cow-town, or any other cow-town in Texas; but they would be made right welcome if they brought in such a prisoner as the boy outlaw who had so long defied capture. Horse-stealing and cattle-lifting and maverick-hunting were Cactus Pete's usual game, but the reward of a thousand dollars, offered for the Rio Kid, awaited him if he handed over the Kid to the sheriff of Blue Pine.

At one time in his adventurous career, the Rio Kid saved the life of an outcast Indian Chief, an episode he soon forgot. But Chief Many Ponies has not forgotten, and the time arrives when he is able to repay the debt he owes this young outlaw of Texas!

And the Kid was in his hands, a helpless prisoner.

But the Kid, as he lay, listened. From the darkness surrounding the camp of the horse-thieves, the hoot of the night-owl came to him; a sound of hope to the ears of the Kid. From of old the boy outlaw remembered that signal, and he knew that Chief Many Ponies, the outcast Apache, lurked in the darkness near at hand, seeking to help him. Cool as he was, the Kid's heart was beating fast. Other hope there was none. He had tried his strength on the ropes with which the horse thieves had bound him, and his strength had failed. He lay with aching limbs, a powerless prisoner; awaiting the dawn, when the bunch would hit the trail for Blue Pine; and once the door of the calaboose closed upon him the game was up for the Kid; his long, wild trail at an end. Only that hooting signal from the darkness of the night gave him hope.

The Rio Kid had a wild reputation in

his own country. Many a hold-up and a shooting, of which he had never heard, was laid to his charge. If he had done reckless deeds, he had done also good ones—many a time. He had succored the wounded Apache, cared for him in sickness, saved a life that no other white man would have deemed worth the saving; never expecting to see Chief Many Ponies again, never expecting to be even remembered by him. But it seemed that a kind action was never wasted. In his extremity, it was the outcast Apache, the thief and loafer, who was seeking to save him. Chief Many Ponies had not forgotten.

The hoot of the owl came again from the darkness. It was very near now to the camp of the three horse-thieves.

The Kid listened. If the ruffians round him awakened— What the Apache's intentions were, he could not guess, but all depended on silence and caution. Chief Many Ponies, in his day, had been a great warrior, but that day was long past. The outcast, the drunken hanger-on of the cow-town saloons, was no warrior now. If the horse-thieves awakened, on their guard, the Apache had little chance of helping the Kid. For that reason, the Kid made no response

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to the signal repeated again and again by the unseen, creeping Redskin. The slightest sound might have given the alarm.

There was a stirring in the blankets, and the Kid set his teeth. One, at least, of the ruffians had awakened.

Cactus Pete sat up, with a sleepy grunt.

The Kid lay still, listening with painful intentness. But the creeping Indian in the darkness was on his guard; he had heard some slight sound, and the hoot of the owl was silent.

Cactus Pete jerked himself out of his blankets and groped to the Kid. He had little doubt, however, of his prisoner's safety, but caution was second nature with the horse-thief. And he knew, as every galoot in Texas knew, how very slippery a customer was the Rio Kid.

His rough hand groped over the prisoner, feeling the knotted ropes, and he gave another grunt, peering at the Kid in the darkness.

"I guess you're safe, darn your hide," "You've said it!" answered the Kid coolly. "I guess no guy would get out of this rope in a hurry. Say, feller, you don't feel any hunch to let a galoot loose to get a little sleep?"

Cactus Pete chuckled hoarsely. "I guess not! I ain't taking any chances with you, Kid! Your hide is worth a thousand dollars to me."

"You sure are a pizen skunk, feller," said the Kid. "I guess there's more agin you, than agin me, if the sheriff of Blue Pine knowed all about you."

"Mebbe," said Cactus Pete, "but that don't cut no ice, Kid! There's a reward out for you, and there ain't none for me—and I guess all the guys in Blue Pine will be powerful glad to see me when I tote you in and hand you over."

"Dog don't eat dog, as a rule!" urged the Kid.

"Forget it!" jeered Cactus Pete, "and it ain't only the reward, Kid. I got a grouch agin you, darn you. You bulldozed me at Frio, dog-gone you; you was one that lent a hand when I was rid out of the town on a rail."

"I'd sure lend a hand agin," said the Kid, "and, more willing still, I'd lend a hand to put a rope round your pizen neck."

"I guess it's your own neck that will get a necktie, Kid," chuckled Cactus Pete; "they won't waste time on you at Blue Pine to-morrow. You won't stay long in the calaboose, I reckon. The boys will string you up to a cottonwood in short order."

"They ain't got me yet!" said the Kid.

"You reckon you'll get away from this?" sneered Cactus Pete. He groped over the Kid's bonds again, to make sure once more. "You're a darned slippery cuss, Kid, and when the sheriffs arter you you surely do get into a hole and pull it in arter you. But I got you by the short hairs now. If we hadn't lost our cayuses, I'd have had you at Blue Pine already—you'd have gone up at the end of a riza this hyer night, Kid. Dog-gone that Redskin!"

Cactus Pete swore savagely.

It was the loss of the horses that had compelled the gag to camp that night on the prairie. On foot the going was slow and hard.

The Kid smiled softly.

He, as well as the rustlers, had been puzzled by the killing of the horses, in the timber, fifteen miles behind the present camp. But he knew now why the lurking Redskin had killed the horses, sparing only the Kid's own mustang; now that he had heard the signal from Chief Many Ponies. And he knew, what

the horse-thieves did not suspect, that the lurking Indian of the timber had followed the trail of the bunch, and was now close at hand—probably within hearing of their voices at this moment, hidden in darkness.

Cactus Pete peered at him, and swore again.

"You'd have gone up already, dog-gone you, if we hadn't got to hoof it to Blue Pine! But we'll get you there to-morrow safe enough, Kid! Don't you make any mistake about that."

There was a movement from the other two ruffians: the voices had awakened them. Kansas and Laredo Jim sat up in their blankets.

"What's the lookus?" mumbled Kansas.

"Just looking at that darned fire-bug to make sure he's safe," answered Cactus Pete.

"I guess he's O.K.," said Laredo Jim. "He sure is."

Cactus Pete returned to his blankets. The three ruffians settled down to sleep again. And the Kid breathed more freely. No sound had come from the Redskin, lurking in the darkness close to the camp; not one of the bunch had any suspicion of his presence. They were sleeping again, and the Kid, wakeful, watchful, lay and listened.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Hand of the Apache!

THE faint rustle that came to the Kid's ears, in the long grass amid which the bunch were camped, might have been caused by the wind that stirred on the prairie towards the approach of dawn.

But the Rio Kid did not think so.

Silent, motionless, he lay and strained his ears. It might have been the wind, so light was the faint rustling; but it was not the wind. The creeping Indian was close at hand, and the Kid's heart beat faster. Cactus Pete and his gang were sleeping, deep in slumber after that weary tramp over the rugged plains. They had awakened once, but they showed no sign of waking again. Only the Kid awakened—and listened. And a black shadow, blacker than the darkness, passed before his eyes.

He did not stir.

Only softly, faintly, from his lips, fell the imitation of the night-owl's hoot, the signal that Chief Many Ponies knew. It was to tell the Redskin where he lay—which of the recumbent figures was a friend among the foes.

The soft sound, faintly audible for a moment, died away, and all was deeply silent again. But the Kid knew that the Redskin had heard it, and understood.

Silence!

The Kid felt a shudder creep through his limbs. What was the creeping Redskin doing in the silence, the darkness? Knife in hand, Chief Many Ponies was there to help his friend; and even had he desired, he would not have dared to waken the ruffians. Awake, any one of them would have been too much for the Apache: any one of them would have grasped a six-gun and riddled him with bullets. And treachery was the Redskin way: even had it not been needed, the Apache would have chosen to slay his enemies by stealth. What was happening close by the Kid in the darkness, unheard, unseen?

Almost it was upon the Kid's lips to cry out, to warn the ruffians of their peril, to send the stealthy Redskin scuttling back into the dark prairie. They were horse-thieves, rustlers, ruffians; but they were white men. They were of his

own race—and the call of blood was strong to any white man. And it was only one consideration that held the Kid silent, though his own life was in the balance. They had taken him, not because he was an outlaw, but because there was a price on his head—they had taken him for blood-money; they were dragging him to death because of the price on his life! They were human wolves, deeper down in the scale of humanity than the stealthy Indian whose knife was bared to shed their blood. To give them warning, and for gratitude to be handed over to the sheriff and his rope—the Kid figured that that was not good enough. And he shut his teeth hard, and was silent.

A faint sound came from the gloom—a sound that made the blood chill in the Kid's veins, in spite of his iron nerve. The sound was faint, but he knew what it implied.

Faint as it was, it stirred Cactus Pete in his slumber. The rustler slept like a wolf, with an ear open.

There was a sudden movement as Cactus Pete threw aside his blanket and started to his feet.

"What the thunder—!" came his gruff, savage voice.

The next moment he yelled furiously: "Injuns! Wake, you ginks, wake! Injuns!"

Bang! Bang!

His six-gun roared into the night.

There was a scuttling sound, a rustling of high, dry grass. The Redskin was gone. From the darkness far out on the plain came a yell—a yell to freeze the blood: the fierce war-whoop of the Apache. Loud and savage, throbbing with blood-thirst and ferocity, the Indian's yell rang through the night. The throbbing echoes died away, and all was silent again on the shadowed plains: but from the camp came crash after crash of revolver-fire, bullets whizzing right and left in the gloom. Two of the rustlers were firing fast and fiercely, blazing away hurried bullets in their rage and alarm; but the third lay still in his blankets, without sound or motion.

"Let up!" snarled Cactus Pete at last. "I guess that Red's got clear! The darned skunk's made his get-away."

"The dog-gone pesky scallywag!" growled Kansas. "I reckon that'll be the Red who killed our cayuses in the timber way back, Pete. He's sure followed our trail."

He peered down at the still figure in the blankets.

"Jim! Dog-gone him, he ain't woke, with all that shootin' and yellin'. What's got hold of Laredo Jim?"

Cactus Pete swore savagely.

"I guess that Injun got him afore he woke."

"Thunder!"

Kansas dragged the blankets from the figure of the rustler. There was no sound or movement from Laredo Jim.

"Dead!" breathed Kansas.

"He's sure got his!" said Cactus Pete, leaning down and scanning the face of Laredo Jim, dim and white in the gloom. "The Injun got him, sure."

He touched the still figure, and his fingers came away crimson. There was a deep knife-wound in the throat of the rustler. Only one faint cry had escaped Laredo Jim as the Indian's blade went home, but that faint cry had saved the lives of his associates. But for that sound that had alarmed Cactus Pete, the knife of the Apache would have claimed other victims. Well they could guess what the Redskin's intention had

been when he crept in the darkness to the sleeping camp.

Kansas shuddered, and cast uneasy glances round into the darkness, gripping his revolver.

"He's got Jim," he muttered, "jest like he got Pawnee Bill, way back in the timber! He see Jim! He'd have got us—"

"Dog-gone him!" Cactus Pete ground his teeth and throw another random shot into the darkness. "Durn him, what's his game—what's he got agin us? We ain't had no trouble with any Red, 'ceptin' them Yaquis we shot up down in the Rio Grande country, and there ain't no Yaquis hyer. That was an Apache yell he gave after he levanted. I guess I know the Apache yell; I've heard it in the Staked Plain. We ain't had no trouble with Apaches. Dog-gone him, what's he got this grouch for?"

Kansas did not answer. He was staring round in the darkness, fearful of seeing the glittering eyes and coppery face of a Redskin looming up in the gloom.

Cactus Pete remembered his prisoner, whom in the excitement he had forgotten. He stepped towards the Kid.

"Thunder! If that Red's got the Kid, too— I guess it's likely enough—him tied hand and foot."

guess I've known it happen afore. Thunder! If he's, in sight when the daylight comes—"

"I guess he won't be," said Kansas. "And I'm sure glad that we'll strike Blue Pine afore sundown to-morrow. I guess I don't want another night camping on the prairie, with that wild Red buck loose."

"Dog-gone him, we may get him at dawn!"

There was already a glimmer of light in the east.

To the two horse-thieves the coming of daylight meant safety and relief from watching and terror. But it did not bring hope to the Kid. With the rising of the sun over the rolling prairie,

said Kansas. "He wouldn't hang on arter daylight. He's gone."

Cactus Pete nodded, and thrust his six-gun back into the holster.

"I reckon he's hit the horizon," he assented. "Durn him! I'd give a heap



THE KID'S PERIL! Headless of the prisoner, dragged with bump on bump at the end of the rope, Cactus Pete spurred the grey mustang madly, driving him to a furious gallop. Behind the horse, the Kid was mercilessly dragged.

(See Chapter 3.)

The Kid smiled in the darkness.

"I guess I'm still to home, feller," he said. "Say, what's all this hyer rookus about? Was that an Injun?"

"It sure was an Injun," growled Cactus Pete, relieved to find that his prisoner was still alive, "and I guess if I hadn't wakened, you'd hev gone on the long trail with us, durn you!"

"I sure wouldn't have any kick coming, feller," drawled the Kid. "My prospects ain't bright for to-morrow, they sure ain't."

"Can it!" growled Pete.

There was no more sleep for the horse-thieves that night. While the last hour of darkness slowly crawled by they sat gun in hand, watching, eyes and ears on the alert. A faint rustle, a shifting shadow, was enough to draw a hurried alarmed shot from them. But of the Redskin nothing was seen or heard, and they had little doubt that he was far from the camp.

But they dared not close their eyes. Why the Redskin was trailing them ruthlessly and deadly, was a puzzle to the two ruffians. Of Chief Many Ponies, and his old comradeship with the Rio Kid, they knew nothing.

"Some buck broken out of the reservation, I guess, and hunting for trouble," said Cactus Pete at last. "I

the Kid came near to giving up hope. The Redskin had struck—one of the horse-thieves lay dead in the grass. But in the daylight he could never venture under the guns of the white men; and it would be yet daylight when Cactus Pete and Kansas led the grey mustang into Blue Pine with the Rio Kid a prisoner. Chief Many Ponies had tried to help the paleface

who had befriended him but he had, after all, failed. With grim ruthlessness the Redskin had aimed to wipe out the bunch and relieve the Kid of his foes; but only one of the three had perished under his stealthy knife; and now that day had come the Apache could do no more. He would follow the trail again, the Kid reckoned; but it would only be to see the boy outlaw toted into Blue Pine and handed over to the sheriff. The Kid's face was grim as the golden sun shot up above the horizon and the light of day streamed down once more on the Texas prairie.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
In Ambush!

CACTUS PETE, with knitted brows, stared round over the grassy plain in the rising light of the sun. He did not reckon that the Redskin had lingered near the camp where he had done so fearful a deed, to face the vengeance of the two surviving rustlers. But he had a savage hope that he might yet be at hand—within range of a bullet. With keen eyes he scanned the prairie. But only the vast spaces of waving grass met his searching eyes. There was no sign of the Redskin. "I guess he's absquatulated, Pete,"

of dollars to draw a bead on his red hide!"

He stared round once more on the boundless prairie. There were hollows in the plain, ridges and hillocks of rough, high grass. It was possible, if not likely, that the Redskin was hidden in some nook of the prairie not far away from the camp. It was possible that, from cover in the high grass, he was watching the rustlers at that moment. And they knew that he had a revolver, taken from the man he had killed in the timber the day before.

"We want to watch out," growled Cactus Pete. "I reckon the skunk's gone, but we want to keep our eyes peeled. It's all of twenty miles to Blue Pine, and we mayn't meet up with any guy afore we hit the town. I reckon what's happened to Jim has made me feel some uneasy."

"I guess he's levanted," answered Kansas.

The two rustlers kept their eyes about them as they ate their breakfast before taking the trail. The meal did not delay them long. The hour was yet early, the sun only a little above the rim of the prairie, when they packed the "truck" on the back of the grey mustang and prepared to hit the trail. The Rio Kid was jerked roughly to his feet.

Cactus Pete unfastened the rope from his legs. His arms remained bound to his sides as before, but his legs had to be freed for him to walk. The Kid staggered as he was stood on his feet, and Cactus Pete grasped him roughly by the shoulder and steadied him.

"Stand up, dog-gone you!" he growled. "You got a long pasear afore you this morning, you galoot!"

The Kid shut his teeth to keep back

a sound of pain. His cramped legs were aching from the rope, his arms were almost numb. His eyes gleamed like steel at the rustlers.

"Beat it!" snapped Kansas.

He led the grey mustang, with its load, away from the camp. Side-kicker turned his head, looking back at his master. Kansas jerked savagely at the bridle and dragged him on.

"Git!" snarled Cactus Pete.

He gave the Kid a violent shove, and the boy outlaw started on his way, following the mustang. His aching legs almost crumpled beneath him, but he made an effort to keep on. He was in merciless hands. As he stumbled over the rough ground, Cactus Pete grasped his quirt, swung it through the air, and brought it down with a crash across the Kid's snoutcase.

"Now beat it, dog-gone you!" he roared. "You figure that we're hanging about on the prairie all day, waiting for you, Kid? Beat it, darn you, or I'll sure quit you like an ornery steer!"

"Gee!" said the Kid between his teeth, his eyes burning at the ruffian. "I guess I was plumb loco not to shoot you up, Cactus Pete, that time in the San Pedro country; I sure was!"

"Git!" roared the ruffian, and the quirt came down across the Kid's shoulders again with a savage crack.

The Kid stumbled on his way. But his aching legs yielded under him and he fell in the grass.

Kansas looked back. He was already at a distance with the grey mustang.

"Say, you ginks, you coming?" he shouted.

Cactus Pete answered with an oath. "Bring that cayuse back here, Kansas. I guess I'll run a riata from him to this dog-goned guy, and if he won't walk he'll be dragged."

"You've said it," grinned Kansas.

He led the mustang back. A rope, run from the saddle, was knotted round the Kid's waist. Cactus Pete dragged him up again.

"Now hit the trail!" he snarled.

"It's your say-so!" said the Kid between his teeth. "But, by thunder, if I get a dog's chance at you, Cactus Pete—"

"Drive that critter on, Kansas!" snarled Cactus Pete.

"You bet!" grinned Kansas.

He mounted the grey mustang, gathered up the reins and drove the horse onward. The drag of the rope pulled the Kid forward. He stumbled after the horse, succeeding now in keeping his footing on the rough ground. Cactus Pete followed him, cursing savagely.

"I reckoned I'd make you hump it," he said. "I guess you ain't got any hunch to hit Blue Pine in a hurry, Kid; but I reckon you're hitting that cow-town afore noon, all the same. Beat it, darn you, or I'll give you the quirt again!"

The Kid, in silence, stumbled on after the horse. Cactus Pete strode behind him, quirt in hand. There was no trail marked on the prairie, but the horse-thieves knew the country, and they headed direct for the distant cow-town. The way lay through a hollow between two high grassy swells of the prairie. Deep in the hollow was a swampy pool, the margin marked by the tracks of cattle that came there to drink, and the grassy bluffs on either side were patched with straggling thickets of mesquite and post-oak.

Again and again the grey mustang looked round at his master stumbling behind, as if in perplexity. But even

time Kansas dragged savagely at the reins, and gave the horse a cut with his quirt. The Kid gritted his teeth as a squall of pain from side-kicker reached him. More than his own mis-usage the Kid resented the mis-usage of his faithful mustang. But he was helpless and he could only store up anger and vengeance in his heart.

A mile, two miles, passed under the tramping feet, and the bunch entered the hollow between the grassy bluffs, benna, in the camp, where the body of Laredo Jim had been left, the snarling or coyotes followed them till they were out of hearing.

In the hollow of the prairie, where shallow water gleamed in the sun through patches of thicket, the mustang would have turned aside from the way to reach the water. Again Kansas dragged at the reins and lashed with the quirt and drove him on.

Suddenly the rider of the grey mustang gave a start and clapped his hand to his side. The Kid, seeing the action, stared at him—Cactus Pete stared blankly. The dull echo of a report from somewhere in the straggling mesquite was heard a second later—the report following the shot that had struck Kansas to the heart. Heavily, with hardly a cry, the ruffian pitched from the saddle of the mustang and slumped into the grass.

Cactus Pete gave a gasping cry.

"Kansas! By thunder!"

He tore the revolver from his belt and glared round him with wild, startled eyes. The next moment, with a bound, he reached Side-Kicker and placed the horse between him and the direction from whence the shot had come.

"Kansas!" he shouted.

But there was no reply from the fallen man. The bullet from the mesquite was in his heart, and the rustler had been dead ere he struck the ground.

"By thunder, Kansas has gone up!" muttered Cactus Pete, and, six-gun in hand, he glared over the back of the snarling horse, searching for the enemy who had fired.

But no enemy was to be seen. The man who had shot Kansas from the back of the mustang lay in cover in the straggling thickets.

"The Injun!" muttered Cactus Pete.

The Rio Kid's eyes were dancing.

He had given up hope of seeing Chief Many Ponies after the camp was struck and his captors headed for the cow-town. But the Apache had not abandoned him.

"Gee," murmured the Kid gleefully, "that Injun sure is some galoot! He sure is! I guess he figured that them pizen skunks was heading for Blue Pine. And he got ahead of them on the trail! Gee!"

Cactus Pete, glaring with rage and alarm, stared round for the enemy. He, too, like the Kid, had no doubt that it was the unknown Redskin again. The cunning Apache, figuring that the horse-thieves were heading for the cow-town with their prisoner, had lain in wait in cover among the mesquite in the hollow between the grassy bluffs. One of the rustlers had gone down under his fire and lay dead in the grass. Cactus Pete, the last of the horse-thief gang, stood gun in hand, covered by the halbed mustang, with fury in his face and fear in his heart.

"If that Injun breaks cover—" muttered Cactus Pete hoarsely.

He watched like a cat. The Kid looked round him anxiously. In open gun-play, gun to gun, he knew that a Redskin had little chance against a gunman like Cactus Pete. But Chief Many

Ponies knew that as well as the Kid, and he did not break cover. Neither did he pull trigger again. A shot would have guided return fire from the watchful rustler. Silence lay on the grassy hollow between the prairie bluffs, tense and deadly silence.

The horse-thief muttered curses while he watched and waited. His glance roved unasily across his shoulder.

The Kid read his thoughts, for the same thought was in his own mind. Chief Many Ponies was silent—but he was not inactive. The mustang stood between Cactus Pete and the direction whence had come the shot that had struck down Kansas. But the Kid knew, and Cactus Pete suspected, that the wily Indian, keeping in the cover of the straggling bushes, was circling round the hollow to take the gun-men from behind. Every minute that passed added to Cactus Pete's danger of getting his fire from a new direction.

The ruffian gritted his teeth. He gave the Rio Kid a deadly glare.

"I guess I'm hitting the trail!" he muttered. "I'm sure lighting out of this, and you can take your chance at the end of the rope, darn you. Dead or alive, I'll tote you into Blue Pine."

He holstered his revolver, and gave one searching glance round the wide grassy hollow. Then he leaped into the saddle, grasped the reins, and spurred the grey mustang savagely. The startled horse leaped forward, and the drag of the rope tore the Kid from his feet.

heedless of the prisoner, dragged with bump on bump at the end of the rope, Cactus Pete spurred the grey mustang madly, driving him to a furious gallop. Behind the galloping horse, the Kid was mercilessly dragged. There was no more mercy in the heart of the scared ruffian than in a wolf's. It was death to the Kid—it was a dead man that the fleeing ruffian would have dragged behind him over the rugged prairie, had that wild ride gone on.

But the dazed, half-stunned Kid felt a sudden cessation of the drag of the rope.

With dizzy brain, the Kid lay in the grass, his breath, almost his senses, knocked out of him; only knowing that he was still, that the rope no longer dragged, and then gradually becoming aware that the muzzle of his faithful mustang was nuzzling him as he lay. Side-Kicker was at his side, his intelligent eyes gleaming at his master; and the Kid dizzily saw that the saddle was empty; but he had not even heard the shot that had hurled Cactus Pete from his seat.

"Old hoss!" gasped the Kid, as his brain cleared. "Old hoss, that was a close call, it sure was!"

He struggled to a sitting posture in the grass, and stared wildly round him. On his ears burst a wild discordant sound—the yell of the Apache. Chief Many Ponies, in his tattered blanket, the draggled feather in his matted locks, was speeding towards him, knife in hand. A moment more and the Redskin's knife slid over the ropes, and the Rio Kid was free.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Hitting the Trail!

"WAH! It is good!" granted the Apache.

The Rio Kid stretched his aching limbs.

The Apache crouched in the thick grass by his side, his black eyes watching, gleaming. As the Kid would have risen to his feet, the bronze hand of the Indian held him back.

Bong!

From across the hollow came the roar of a six-gun. The bullet hummed by over the head of the Rio Kid.

"Search me!" said the Kid. He understood. The Indian had shot at Cactus Pete as he galloped, and the ruffian had fallen from the mustang. But the horse-thief was still to be reckoned with.

The Kid's eyes gleamed. "Injun," he said, "I guess I'm powerful glad to see you, and you've sure done me a good turn. But jest leave that pizen skunk Cactus Pete to me. I sure want to handle that dog-goned geck."

Chief Many Ponies nodded. "My brother has spoken," he said, with a solemn dignity that contrasted strangely with his tatters. "It is good!"

Bang! bang! came the roar of the six-gun. Cactus Pete was firing desperately. He lay where he had fallen from the mustang, a dozen yards away. There was a streak of crimson across his savage, bearded face, from which the blood flowed. The Indian's bullet, intended for his brain, had missed by inches, with the horseman in rapid motion; it had gashed across the gunman's face, and the shock had hurled him from the saddle, leaving the grey mustang to run free. But the wound was slight. The ruffian was far from disabled. And in rage and terror he pumped out bullets from his six-gun in the direction where the Rio Kid and the Redskin lay in the grass. Even yet, the ruffian did not guess that it was the Kid's rescue that the Redskin intended, and he had no doubt that the Apache had sunk into the grass beside the Kid, to drive his knife to the heart of the boy outlaw. And then would come his own turn—unless his six-gun saved him. He fired again and again, till an empty click warned him that his gun was expended, and then he hurriedly reloaded, fearing a rush. With the reloaded gun gripped in his hand, he crouched in the grass, waiting, watching, in terror and rage.

"Say, you gink!" Cactus Pete started violently. It was the Kid's voice that called. The ruffian realised that he had not fallen under the knife of the Redskin, who had sunk down in the high thick grass beside him.

"You dog-goned, pesky skunk!" came the Kid's voice. "You hear me, you pizen polecat!"

Cactus Pete panted hoarsely. The truth dawned on his mind at last; the Kid, helpless within reach of the Apache's knife, still lived. It was to save the Kid, that the Apache had trailed the bunch of horse-thieves. Cactus Pete understood now.

"You durned fire-bug!" he yelled back desperately. "Come out in the open, darn you, and I guess I'll give you yours."

The Kid chuckled. "I guess I'm coming, you pizen snake," he said, "I'm coming, you coyote, and I'm coming a-shooting."

Silently the Redskin passed the revolver to the Rio Kid. The Kid's own guns were in the holsters on the mustang. But it was a good Colt that the Kid gripped in his hand, and his fingers closed joyfully on the butt. He was a free man again, with a six-gun in his hand, and his long and bitter score was about to be settled.

"Come out, dog-gone you!" howled Cactus Pete, in the desperation of terror. "I guess I'm waiting."

"I sure won't keep you waiting," called back the Kid. "I'm coming a-shooting, Cactus Pete!"

He leaped up from the cover of the

high grass, and ran towards the rustler, firing as he went. One hurried shot that flew wild and wide came from Cactus Pete, and then the ruffian's courage petered out, and he sprang up from the grass, holding his hands above his head.

"Let up, Kid!" he panted. The Kid's eyes blazed at him. The revolver was aimed at the face of the ruffian who stood with his hands up.

"You durned pesky polecat!" yelled the Kid. "Take a holt of your gun, you yellow coyote, afore I shoot you up in your tracks! Ain't I giving you an even break, you lobo-wolf!"

But Cactus Pete stood with his hands above his head. He dared not grip his gun with the deadliest shot in Texas holding a Colt in his hand before him.

The Kid, with a muttered curse, lowered his gun.

"You pizen skunk," he said, "I guess you get away with it, but, by thunder, I'll quirt you afore you beat it."

Ho picked up the rustler's guns, and pitched them into the shallow water of the pool in the hollow. Chief Many Ponies glided up, knife in hand, his eyes intent on the rustler. There was a yell of terror from Cactus Pete.

"Let up, Injun!" said the Kid. "Dog-gone you, stick that rib-tickler in your leggings! You ain't carving that galoot. Let up, I'm telling you." He pushed the Redskin back.

"Wah!" grunted the Apache. "Heap good kill."

The Kid grinned. "I guess you're right, Injun; but you ain't carving a white man. Let up, feller!"

The Indian unwillingly stood back, his black eyes wolfishly on the rustler. The Rio Kid took a quirt in his hand. "You durned lobo-wolf," he said.

"You was powerful handy with this, and I guess you're going to get what was coming to you."

For a good ten minutes, the Rio Kid was busy; till his strong arm ached again, while Cactus Pete yelled and howled and writhed under the lashes.

Chief Many Ponies looked on grimly. His way would have been to drive a knife to his enemy's heart.

With a heavy hand, the Kid laid on the quirt, while the horse-thief howled and writhed, and when he ceased at last, Cactus Pete lay groaning in the grass.

"I guess that lets you out!" growled the Kid. "I guess I sure ought to send you after your dog-goned pards, you pesky skunk; but I reckon you won't forget that quirting in a hurry!"

He turned his back on the groaning ruffian.

Under the blazing sun, a horseman, mounted on a grey mustang, rode across the rolling prairie, and by the side of the mustang loped an Indian in a tattered blanket, keeping pace with the horse with the tirelessness of a Redskin. The Rio Kid and Chief Many Ponies went together; together, for the time, the outcast Apache and the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande had cast in their lots.

It was sundown when a dusty, haggard, tottering figure limped into the cow-town of Blue Pine. What Cactus Pete had to tell, caused a hurried hunt for the Rio Kid. But they hunted for him in vain; night and the prairie had swallowed the Kid.

THE END.

(Next week's issue of the POPULAR contains another roaring long complete yarn of the Rio Kid. "AMBUSHED!" is a story you mustn't miss reading.)



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