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YOU'LL GET ALL THE THRILLS YOU WANT ON—

The PERIL TRAIL!

By
Ralph Redway.

It takes more than a bunch of wandering Indians to get the better of the Rio Kid, Boy Outlaw!



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Drop!

DON'T touch a gun!" It was a cool, drawing voice, almost friendly in its tones. But the Rio Kid knew that it meant business; and his hand, which had moved instinctively towards the walnut butt of a Colt, stopped. The faint rustle behind him had warned him that there was some galoot in the mesquite; but the warning voice immediately followed the rustle. And the Kid, without turning his head, knew that there was a gun looking at him.

"You get me?" went on the drawl. "Sure!" assented the Kid, still without turning his head; and he went on coolly chewing beans and bacon.

The Kid was sitting on a log, on the edge of a patch of timber. Before him stretched the brown prairie, rolling away, ridge after ridge, towards the bluffs of the Staked Plain. On that boundless expanse, as far as the eye could reach, there was no living thing to be seen, save the Kid's mustang, grazing at a little distance. Behind him was the timber, a clump of cottonwoods and tangled pecans and mesquite.

The Kid had figured that he was alone there—he would have bet a Texas dollar to a Mexican cent that there was no human being within thirty miles of him. But the rustle in the mesquite, and the drawing voice, told a different tale.

The Kid was caught napping, there was no doubt about that. If the man in the mesquite was an enemy the Kid was at his mercy.

But the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande had been through too many dangers to raise his hair over one more. He knew that there was a gun looking

at the back of his head, within a few feet; and he went on munching his midday meal with undiminished appetite.

He heard a laugh behind him. "You sure are a cool cuss, Kid!" "What you calling me?" asked the Kid.

"I guess you're the Rio Kid!—I guess I knew who you was the minute I spotted that cayuse. I've sure seen him before."

"There's more'n one grey mustang in Texas, hombre," answered the Kid. "Say, ain't you stepping out to show yourself? It sure gets my goat to hear you talking to the back of my cabeza."

"Put your hands up first, Kid!" "How'm I to eat with my hands up, feller?"

"I guess I ain't waiting!" There was a note of menace in the voice behind the Kid.

"Anything to oblige, old-timer!" said the Kid; and he lifted his hands over his Stetson.

There was another rustle, and a footstep, and the man came out of the mesquite, and stepped round the Kid. The boy outlaw, sitting on the log with his hands up, looked at him curiously. A hard face, with keen, watchful eyes, looked back at him—eyes as cold as ice, the eyes of a gunman.

A look of recognition dawned on the Kid's face.

"I guess I've seen you, hombre," he remarked. "I reckon I seen you shooting up the town at Packsaddle once on a time. You're Slick Singer, the gunman!"

The cold, hard eyes searched the Kid's face.

"I guess I wasn't mistaken," said the gunman. "I knowed that cayuse of yours when I saw him from the timber.

And, now I get a look at you, I know you, Kid! Keep 'em up!"

"What's the big idea?" yawned the Kid. "You aiming to handle the thousand dollars they're offering for me at Frio?"

"I guess it would be easy money if I was!" grinned Singer.

"Mebbe," said the Kid, "and mebbe not! It's a long step from the Staked Plain to Frio, feller. You sure got the drop on me now, and I ain't arguing none with a six-gun. Your call, pardner."

"Keep 'em up!" repeated the gunman. "I guess I know how quick you are on the draw, Kid; but if you touch a gun it's the last thing you'll do this side of the big divide."

"You've said it!" agreed the Kid. Keeping his six-gun aimed at the Kid's face, Singer stepped towards him, and drew the two long-barrelled, walnut-butted Colts from the Kid's holsters.

He tossed them into the grass a few yards away.

The Kid smiled. "Feelin' safer now, feller?" he asked amicably.

"A whole lot!" assented Slick Singer. "You're too mighty sudden on the shoot to please me, Kid. I guess we can talk turkey without your guns handy. You can get on with your feed."

The Kid dropped his hands, and resumed eating beans and bacon. Slick Singer sat on a fallen trunk, a couple of yards from the Kid, and lowered the six-gun to his knee. But the muzzle was still trained on the disarmed Kid.

"You don't want to worry none, Kid," he said. "I ain't aiming to rope you on your cayuse and tote you into town. I ain't aiming to shoot you up. I guess I've taken away your hardware because you're too mighty sudden with a gun. Say, what you doin' in this country?"

"Jest taking a pasear around," answered the Kid. "There's places in Texas where I ain't popular, feller. There's some sheriffs mighty anxious to see me, but I ain't honing to see them a whole lot."

Singer grinned.

"I guess you ain't been heard of for a long time, Kid. You've been lying doggo?"

"Just that!" agreed the Kid.

His face clouded for a moment as his thoughts went back to happy days on the Bar-One. But the Bar-One and the Bar-One bunch were far from the Rio Kid now. It had been a happy interlude, that was all; and once more the boy outlaw was riding a lonely trail.

"And what you doing here?" he asked in his turn. "You ain't a galoot for prairie trails. But you look like you been hitting the trail hard."

His eyes ran curiously over the gunman. Singer was in riding clothes, well-cut; but they were torn and dusty from a long trail. The Kid grinned.

"You been handling a gun too free over a poker game and had to hit the horizon sudden?" he asked.

"Not any!" answered the gunman. "I guess I'm on a trail, but I ain't had to run, Kid." He made a gesture towards the high bluffs of the Staked Plain in the distance. "That's my trail—but I ain't running. And I guess you're trailing with me, Kid."

"Sho!" said the Kid in surprise. "I guess you're the guy to help me out," said Singer. "Like you said, I ain't a galoot for prairie trails. If it was a game of poker or euchre, I guess I could lay over any guy in Texas. But trailing in the Staked Plain is sure another game."

"It sure is," assented the Kid. "But if you ain't running from a looped rope what you want in the Staked Plain?"

"Looking for a guy!" said the gunman laconically.

"And you want me to help?"

Singer nodded.

"I guess the minute I knowed it was you, sitting here chawing beans, I got the big idea," he said. "You're jest the guy I want to help, Kid—and I reckon you ain't refusing." He made a motion with the six-gun and grinned. "We're going to work in cahoots, Kid. You're the man I want."

"You dog-goned gun-slinger!" said the Kid. "If you're looking for a guy to shoot him up, you ain't getting any help from me!"

"I ain't said that I was goin' to shoot up any guy—I said I was looking for one!" said Singer. "Keep cool, hombre. I guess we're going to talk turkey."

"I guess I ain't talking turkey to a galoot with a gun in his grip! If you got a proposition to put up, put your hardware away!"

"Look here, Kid—"

"Aw, can it!" said the Kid. "You ain't the hinder galoot I can work in cahoots with, Slick Singer. You're a bad egg, I guess—and I ain't got no use for you! Forget it!"

The gunman's eyes glinted.

"You don't want to hear what I got to spill?" he asked.

"I sure don't."

"I guess a thousand dollars would come in useful, if I walked you into town for the reward!" said the gunman. "You want to talk civil, Kid—I've got you where I want you."

He made a motion with the six-gun again. Under the tin plate on his knees, the Kid's hand had slipped into the pocket of his chaps.

"Don't lift that gun, hombre!" said the Kid quietly. "I got you covered from my pocket, and I've had you covered whole minutes while you was slinging you chin. If you lift that gun

off'n your knee, Slick Slinger, I guess—"

The gunman, with a startled curse, swung up the gun. At the same instant, there came a crack from the hidden derringer in the pocket of the Kid's chaparejos, and Slick Singer, with a shriek, rolled backwards over the trunk where he sat, and pitched heavily into the grass.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Upper Hand.

SLICK SINGER sat up dizzily, and passed his hand across his head. His fingers came away wet and red. His dazed eyes turned on a calm figure seated on a log near at hand, and met the smiling glance of the Rio Kid. For a long minute, the gunman stared at him in dazed silence, while his wits slowly came back to him. The Kid was clearing the tin plate of beans, finishing his interrupted meal. Slick Singer's hand went to his belt, but there was nothing there for him to draw. His gun and his knife lay in the grass at the Kid's feet, and the Kid's own guns were in the boy-outlaw's holsters again. The tables had been turned—the Kid was armed, and the gunman from Packsaddle was unarmed—and he was at the mercy of the outlaw puncher whom he had threatened. The bitter rage and chagrin in his face made the Kid smile.

"You feel like a mule had kicked your cabeza?" asked the Kid, as the gunman passed his hand over his head again and groaned. "You want to feel pleased that I didn't drive that pill right through it, instead of clipping off'n a lock of your hair and plugging a hole through your Stetson. I guess you got off cheap after crowding me like you was doing, Slick."

"You—you creased me, you dog-goned cow-wrangler," snarled Singer.

The Kid nodded.

"Yep; just like you was an ornery steer that wouldn't come to the rope," he assented cheerfully. "Next time you crowd me, and take off my hardware, Slick, you want to remember that I pack a leetle gun in my chaps, and that I can shoot from the pocket, jest as easy as you can draw a bead with a six-gun in the open. Dog-gone you, ain't you never heard that the Rio Kid is no slouch on the shoot, Slick?"

Slick Singer sat where he was, passing his hand again and again over his head. There was a bitter ache in his head, but he knew now that the damage was slight.

"You ain't hurt a neap, feller," said the Kid good-humouredly. "You got off cheap. A guy flourishin' a six-gun around me, don't always get off with a scrape on his scalp. No, sir! I guess you was lucky, not to get fixed for a front seat in a funeral."

The gunman gritted his teeth.

"I reckon I was a bonehead not to let daylight through you when I had the drop!" he snarled.

"Aw, what would that buy you?" said the Kid. "I could let daylight through you now, if I wanted, and I ain't making a hole through your carcass. What's your grouch agin me? If I'm an outlaw, you're a gunman—and I guess Texas would be better off to lose you than to lose me, Slick. You're a darned lobo-wolf and it sure will do you good to get your teeth drawn a few."

The Kid finished his beans. He rose from the log and yawned. The cold, glinting eyes of the gunman watched him.

"I reckon you've got a cayuse in the

timber here somewheres," the Kid remarked.

"Yep!" grunted Singer.

"I ain't hurrying you none, seeing you've got a pain in your roof," grinned the Kid, "but you're going to mount and hit the trail soon, Slick. I want to see the last of you. Where's your cayuse?"

"Jest back in the timber on a trail-rope," said the gunman sullenly. "You ain't come down to stealin' a hoss, Kid?"

The Kid laughed.

"Not any! I guess I'll get him for you, while you nurse your cabeza! I sure want to see the last of you."

The Kid picked up the revolver and knife he had taken from the gunman, and slipped them into a pocket. He had already run the rule over the hard-eyed man from Packsaddle, while he lay senseless, to search for hidden weapons. He turned towards the timber.

"Say, you don't want to trouble," muttered Singer. He staggered to his feet, his face white, and streaked with the blood that ran down under his hair, "I guess I can get that hoss."

"I want to smile!" chuckled the Kid. "I guess you could get the hoss, Slick, likewise the rifle that I reckon you'd be carrying on the saddle. But you ain't taking no pot-shots at me with a rifle, hombre. I reckoned I'd have to wipe you out next time, and I ain't honing to spill your juice. You stick where you are till you see me again."

And the Kid went into the timber, the gunman scowling blackly after him as he went.

He came back in a few minutes, leading a dark chestnut cow-pony by a length of trail-rope. As the Kid had surmised, there was a rifle packed in the leather scabbard strapped to the saddle.

Slick Singer was seated on the log now, still rubbing his aching head. The Kid gave him a smile.

"Here's your cayuse, feller! You feel like hitting the trail?"

"Nope!" growled Singer. "I was camped for noon in this timber when you horned in, and I guess I ain't in a hurry to move."

"Jest as you like," assented the Kid. "But if you stay on, Slick, I'm sure taking your guns along with me. I ain't honing to get a ball in the back of my head when I ride."

The gunman scowled.

"I'll ride as soon as you like," he grunted. "Anyhow, I guess I want to hit the Staked Plain before sundown."

"Git on your cayuse, then," said the Kid.

Singer mounted the cow-pony. The Kid coolly returned the revolver and the knife to the gunman's belt. But a long-barrelled Colt was in his own hand now, and the gunman did not need telling that if he touched a weapon, it would be his last act on this earth. He was scowling blackly, but there was an amused smile on the face of the Kid.

"You want to hit the trail without looking back, feller," said the Kid. "I'd hate to take a man's guns away in this section, but if you aim to use a gun on this baby, you want to be slick about it, I'll sure get you. Now you want to travel."

"You ain't hearing that proposition I was goin' to put up to you?" muttered the gunman.

"It don't interest me a lot."

The gunman gritted his teeth. He gave the Kid a long, black, vengeful look, and then touched his horse with the spur, and rode away into the prairie.

He rode at a gallop in the direction of the high, steep bluffs that marked the edge of the Staked Plain.

The Kid stood and looked after him, the gun still in his hand.

If Slick Singer, at a distance, had turned to try his luck again, with revolver or rifle, the Kid was ready for him. But the gunman from Packsaddle had had enough of the Rio Kid's shooting.

He rode on without even turning his head, hitting in a direct line for the distant bluffs.

In a few minutes the horseman was small in the distance, and at length he

mustang loped on into the trackless waste, under the slanting rays of the sun sinking towards the sierras of New Mexico.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
The Navajos!

"I NJUNS!" grunted the Kid. He stood by the water-hole, where his mustang was drinking, and listened to the gunfire that came to his ears from the distance. Shot after shot echoed on the wind, and, with the shooting came a shrill, ringing yell, only too well known to the Kid's ears.

Shot after shot, rolling from the distance, and again a yell on the wind. The water-hole was near the mouth of a deep, wide barranca that rived the plain, piled with rugged rocks on either side. And it was from the winding barranca that the sounds of warfare came. The thought crossed the Kid's mind that his old pardner, Chief Many Ponies, and his mob of ragged outcasts, might be mixed up in the trouble that was going on along the barranca. But as he listened to the yelling he was relieved. It was not an Apache yell that he heard.

"Navajo!" said the Kid, speaking to the grey mustang, as was his habit. "Some gang of thief-Navajos, old hoss, and I guess we ain't hornin' into the trouble—you and me. I guess we're hitting the back trail away from that pesky barranca, old hoss, and leaving them to it."

Side-Kicker lifted his head from the water.

The Kid had filled his can, and slung it to his saddle. It was in his mind to mount and ride, and keep clear of



The Kid went on eating his food, knowing full well that a revolver was being pointed at his back. "Don't touch a gun!" came a quiet voice from the trees.

was lost to view in the waving grass, against the bluffs that barred the skyline.

The Kid returned his gun to the holster.

With a thoughtful shade on his brow the boy outlaw packed his camp fixings and walked over to the grey mustang. He mounted Side-Kicker and rode away from the timber, at an easy pace. His own destination was the high table-land of the Staked Plain; but he followed a direction that would hit the line of bluffs, at a considerable distance farther west than the spot for which Slick Singer had headed. The Kid did not want to fall in with the gunman again.

By a dry gully that split the side of the table-land, where in the rainy season a torrent roared down to the lower plains, the Kid rode up to the higher level, loose stones clinking from the mustang's hoofs as he clambered.

He came out on the summit of the great mesa at last, and pulled in his mustang to look around him.

Flat and arid, broken here and there by arroyo and barranca, the surface of the Llano Estacado stretched before him, and in the clear air the Kid could see a great distance. But he could see no sign of Slick Singer, and he reckoned that he was done with the gunman of Packsaddle.

"Beat it, old hoss," said the Kid, shaking out his reins, and the grey

It was the Kid's third day in the lonely wastes of the Staked Plain. For three days the Kid had not seen a soul, or the trail of horse or man.

But the solitude pleased the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande. It was to seek solitude that he had left the lower plains, and turned his back on the cow country. Since he had left the Bar-One Ranch the Kid had been at a loose end, careless whither he rode. In the Kicking Mule country he had been free, for a time, from the pursuit that constantly dogged his steps; but Fate had driven him forth once more from that happy refuge. The Kid reckoned on lying doggo for a time in the solitudes of the Staked Plain, where no sheriff or town marshal was likely to ride. And he reckoned, too, that by chance he might fall in with his old acquaintance, Chief Many Ponies, the derelict Apache.

But the sound of gunfire, and the yell of a Redskin did not please the Kid's ears. He would have liked to meet up again with Chief Many Ponies, but he did not want to fall in with any of the wandering gangs of Apaches and Navajos, outcasts from the reservations, who haunted the inaccessible recesses of the Staked Plain. Thieves, every man of them, ragged and savage and merciless, they would have shot him down for his horse and his guns without scruple. And the Kid was not looking for such unprofitable trouble.

the trouble. A rookus between two gangs of outcast Redskins was no business of his, and he had no desire to get mixed up in it. But he paused and listened. The yell that came to his ears was a Navajo yell; he knew that. But if the Navajos were in conflict with some rival gang of Apache or Yaqui, the Kid reckoned that the other side would be yelling, too. But from the other side there came no sound.

"Old hoss," grunted the Kid, "them Reds is aiming to cinch a white man. That's the how of it."

To ride away and leave a white man fighting for his life among a gang of outcast Redskins was not the Kid's way. The call of the race was too strong for that.

The Kid grunted discontentedly while he was taking the rifle from the leather case at his saddle, and examining it. He had ridden into the desert to lie doggo, but it seemed to be his fate to hit trouble wherever he rode. But though he frowned he did not hesitate. Leaving Side-Kicker by the water-hole, the Kid trod on foot into the barranca, his rifle under his arm, silent, cautious, prepared to ascertain what was going on before he chipped in; but prepared to chip in if his help was wanted by some white man cornered by the Redskins.

Shot after shot was ringing, and he could hear the spattering of lead on the rocks of the barranca. The great rift in the plain wound before him, and he could not see more than a dozen yards ahead at any moment. A louder yell from the Redskins showed that he was drawing near to the scene of the trouble. On either side of the Kid the steep walls of rock and sun-baked earth and sand rose to a height of sixty or

seventy feet, and the ground was strewn with massive, rugged boulders. There was ample cover for the Kid as he advanced, and he took advantage of it. Silent as a creeping Indian he reached a bend in the winding rift, and looked beyond it, and came in sight of the "trouble."

Five Redskins in ragged leggings and blankets, with dragged feathers in their tousled, matted hair, were within thirty feet of him. The black and white on their blankets would have told the Kid that they were Navajos, if he had not known it already. And a dirtier, raggeder crew of outcasts the Kid had never seen—evidently a gang that had long been wandering in the desert since they had broken out of some reservation in New Mexico. They were crouching in cover of rocks and ridges, their rifles and their fierce, black eyes turned upon a rocky ledge high up the side of the barranca, where the Kid guessed at once their intended victim had taken refuge. As the Kid looked on there came a shot from the ledge, spattering down among the rocks where the Redskins crouched.

It was answered by a burst of fire from the Navajos, and a savage yell. Lead spattered over the face of the rocks round the ledge.

But the ledge was twenty feet above the ground, and the man there was crouching low, and he was not easy to reach with a bullet from below. And his enemies could not clamber up to him without exposing themselves to his fire.

The Kid, looking on and coolly sizing up the situation, reckoned that the white man could hold that position as long as he liked, unless he was struck by a chance shot ricocheting from the rocky wall above the ledge. But he could not have got away—that was another matter. The gang below had only to wait.

At a little distance from the Redskins, among the rocks, the Kid detected a bunch of tethered shaggy ponies; and he started a little as he saw a handsome chestnut cow-pony tied up with the shaggy, ragged horses of the Redskins. He knew Slick Singer's cayuse at a glance.

"By the great horned toad," muttered the Kid, "it's sure that pesky gunman from Packsaddle that's horned into that wasp's-nest!"

There was no doubt of it. The man crouching on the rocky ledge high up the side of the barranca was the gunman whom the Kid had met on the plains three days before. He was fated, after all, to meet up with Slick Singer again.

The Kid figured that Singer had been camping in the barranca, and that the gang of thief-Navajos had come on him suddenly; he had gained the ledge, and was holding them off. But they had got his camp and his horse, and now they wanted his scalp.

The Kid made no sound, and the Redskins did not glance round in his direction. Few white men rode the lonely ways of the Llano Estacado, and the Redskins did not imagine that another paleface was on hand.

Another shot came from the ledge, spattering harmlessly among the rocks; and another burst of fire from the Navajos answered it.

There was a sharp cry from the ledge, and for a moment a Stetson hat rose into view; the man had been touched by a ball glancing on the rocky wall behind him.

One of the Redskins, prompt to take advantage of the chance, fired again, THE POPULAR.—No. 534.

and there was another cry. The Stetson hat disappeared, and over the edge of the rocky ledge a rifle came clattering down.

A yell of savage delight broke from the five savages. The white man above was wounded, and he had dropped his rifle as he was struck, and that was enough for the copper-skinned outcasts.

Yelling like demons, they broke cover and raced for the steep side of the barranca, to clamber up to the ledge.

The Kid's rifle leaped to his shoulder. In a minute or less, now that there was no fire from above, the Navajos would have reached the ledge, and Slick Singer would have been a dead man. The Kid was not standing for that.

Crack, crack! rang his rifle, and two of the clambering Navajos screamed and rolled down the rocks.

The other three stopped their rush, glaring round with wild rolling eyes, startled and unnerved by the sudden attack in the rear.

Crack, crack came ringing from the Kid's rifle.

He was not shooting to kill. A marksman like the Kid could have potted the Redskins like so many prairie rabbits as they stood exposed to his fire, but the Kid hated to wipe out even a thief-Redskin if he could help it. But every bullet struck an arm or a leg, and almost in as many seconds four of the gang were rolling down the rocks, shrieking; and the fifth yelling with terror, made a frantic rush for the spot where the horses were tied, dragged a pony loose, and threw himself across it and rode madly up the barranca to escape.

The Kid, grinning, pitched lead after him, shooting the dragged feathers from his head-dress till the Navajo vanished with a thunder of hoofs and wild yells of fear.

"Aw, beat it, you dog-goned coyotes!" roared the Kid, as he reloaded his rifle. "Say, you want to beat it pronto, or you're sure for the happy hunting grounds! Beat it, you pesky gophers!"

But the four wounded Navajos did not need telling to beat it. They scrambled and staggered to their horses, dragged themselves on the shaggy backs, and rode the way their comrade had gone, the Kid laughing, shooting away their feathers till they vanished. The thunder of hoofs and the terrified yells of the outcast Redskins died away up the barranca.

The Kid stepped out from the rocks and looked up at the ledge.

"Say feller," he called out, "I guess you're all O.K. now! Show yourself, hombre, if you ain't got your ticket for soup!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Friend in Need!

HERE came no reply to the Rio Kid's call.

He waited, but only the echo of his shout answered him from the rocky walls of the barranca.

From the man lying on the ledge came no sound or sign.

The Kid whistled.

"By the great horned toad, that gun-slinger garoot sure has got his!" he murmured.

And the Kid clambered actively up the rocky ascent to the ledge twenty feet above. He reached it swiftly.

Slick Singer, the gunman, lay stretched there motionless. There was a revolver in his hand, which he had drawn after his rifle dropped, but the effort had been his last. He lay senseless on the rock.

"Aw, great snakes!" grunted the Kid,

He dropped on his knees on the narrow ledge. With swift fingers he examined the gunman's wound. The bullet had passed through his shoulder, and there was a thick effusion of blood. Without help Slick Singer would have perished from loss of blood where he lay, but there was help for him now.

The Kid's wild life had taught him a rough surgery; Singer was not the first "winged" galoot that the boy puncher had tended. He staunched the wound, bound it with strips from the gunman's flannel shirt, and then, lifting the heavy, inert body, carried Singer down the rocks to the floor of the barranca.

A long, shrill whistle from the Kid brought Side-Kicker trotting along the barranca. From his slicker pack the Kid took bandages; with water from his can he washed the wound, and then bandaged it more scientifically.

All the time the gunman lay unconscious, his hard face colourless, his hard eyes closed.

His work done—all that he could do—the Kid stood up and regarded Slick Singer, with a perplexed and frowning brow.

He had refused to ride in company with the gun-slinger of Packsaddle, but he had the man on his hands now. The wound was bad enough, but Singer only required care to recover from it. But there was no one to give him care but the Rio Kid; to leave him was to leave him to his death.

"Aw, it sure does get my goat!" growled the Kid. "You durned, dog-goned bonehead, you, why can't you mind your own pesky business and keep from hornin' into another guy's troubles? That pesky gun-slinger's life ain't worth a Continental red cent, and I reckon there's more'n one guy in Texas would be mighty pleased to hear that he'd gone over the range. And now you got him to tend, you ornery gunk, you!"

But, though the Kid grumbled at himself, it made no difference to his intentions. He could not leave the gunman to his fate.

Slick Singer's eyes opened at last.

He stared round him wildly, and his hand tumbled feebly at his belt.

The Kid grinned.

"Say, feller, you ain't wanting a gun," he said. "This here baby ain't a Redskin. Don't you know me, you geek?"

Singer blinked at him dizzily.

"The Kid!" he muttered.

"Jest that guy!" said the Kid cheerily. "And mighty lucky for you I was ridin' this way, hombre!"

The gunman's dizzy glance wandered round him.

"They're gone," said the Kid. "I guess they lit out like they was sent for—and they sure took suthin' along to remember me by. Them Reds is powerful sorry for themselves by this time!"

"They—they caught me by surprise," muttered the gunman. "They came on me camping—durn their copper hides—and I had jest time to grab a rifle and get on the ledge. I reckoned I was a gone coon."

"And you was if I hadn't horned in," said the Kid. "Didn't I tell you you was no use for ridin' trails in the Staked Plain, you bonehead? You're a big chief, Slick, in a rookus in a poker joint in a cow town with a six-gun on your hand, but you ain't the goods for Injun fighting in the desert. You want to hit it for home as soon as you can ride."

The gunman shook his head feebly.

"Aw, I'll say you're a durned ornery
(Continued on page 28.)

THE RIDDLE OF THE BAMBOO RODS!

(Continued from page 22.)

Taro's broad, pock-marked face turned to Drake, and he shook his head. "They no wake up for three, four week yet," he said. "That why my master, the baron, send me off quick. When they wake up they eat way through the end of bamboo and fly off."

Locke beckoned to Drake and Begg to draw nearer to the desk; then Taro, having told his tale, leaned back in the armchair with a phlegmatic, blank expression on his face.

"I am assured that this chap is telling me the absolute truth," the Baker Street detective said. "And the senior's half-lying story to me rather bears it out. He did mention about the West Indies and Jamaica, and that was enough to carry his bluff through if anyone recognised him."

"I also thought from the outset that he was much more eager to get in touch with Taro than to avenge the death of his partner, although he made a great display of grief."

"In fact, I was rather sorry, Drake, you gave it away that you knew where Taro was living; but, as it happened, it worked out all right, for I went to the trouble to telephone a message to Begg here, asking him to get down to the Warrborough Hotel at once."

"He had to find out Taro's room and wait there. I suspected from the outset that it was the Jap who had taken that single piece of bamboo-cane, and as soon as I had clapped eyes on the senior I felt absolutely certain that he was the man who had a tussle with Begg in that car. He was bearing evidences of the conflict, and his description was near enough to that which you gave me."

Listening to Ferrers Locke's quiet explanation, the matter seemed simple enough now, but Humble Begg spoke in his dry, quiet way.

"I don't suppose many men would have reason to doubt your story, my dear Locke," he said. "In any case, I am very glad that you have cleared up this affair, so far as the hostel is concerned."

They spoke together for a few moments longer, then Humble Begg arose to his feet.

"What do you intend to do now, Locke?" he asked.

"Deliver this stick of bamboo into the rightful hands," said the detective quietly. "Senior Raphaelo certainly has given cause for punishment at my hands; but"—and here Locke's eyes twinkled—"the man has failed in his object. We hold the queen wasp, the breeder. When this is taken over to the plantation, and set free, what will happen? Lincoln's place will be freed from the pest, and he will then be able to set to work to rebuild that which he has lost. Raphaelo has lost his partner, and he has so implicated himself with things over here that I doubt whether he will show up on his island. At all events, we can be assured now, with Lincoln coming to collect this bamboo rod, and sufficient protection, Raphaelo's game is lost."

And so it proved.

The next day the valuable bamboo rod was handed over to Lincoln, who turned up, after a delay on the ship. When he had heard of Ferrers Locke's work in the case there was no doubt about his gratification. He owed his all to the famous detective, and he was not slow in saying so. What became of Senior Raphaelo no one ever knew. He vanished, as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up, which was just as well for that unpleasant gentleman. And so ended another great triumph for Ferrers Locke, detective.

THE END.

(Another detective-thriller next week, chums — "THE THIEF!" Starring Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake in dramatic adventures and sinister mysteries.)

THE PERIL TRAIL!

(Continued from page 6.)

"gink!" exclaimed the Kid impatiently. "What you want gunning around in the desert?"

"I told you—I'm looking for a guy I—"

"You won't find nothing in the Staked Plain, except turkcy buzzards—and you'll sure give them their next meal if you don't watch out!" growled the Kid. "Say, you figure you can sit on a cayuse? I guess them Reds lit out in a hurry, and you sure couldn't see their heels for dust. But they're likely to have friends around; and we don't want to wait here till they come back with the whole posky family to raise our scalps. I guess we got to hit the trail pronto, or else hit Jordan!"

He fetched the chestnut cow-pony to the spot and lifted the wounded gunman to the saddle. Slick Singer swayed there; his eyes half-closed.

"You got to hang on!" said the Kid.

"I guess I can hang on," muttered Singer.

The Kid mounted Side-Kicker, and took the reins of the chestnut. He rode down the barranca, leading the gunman's horse,

"He rode out of the barranca to the sandy plain above, and struck across the plain at a rapid trot. By his side the gunman rode, clinging to the saddle, a helpless burden on the Kid's hands. And the Kid wondered disconcertedly what was going to be the end of that wild adventure in the desert of the Staked Plain.

THE END.

"THE PRISONER OF THE LOST VALLEY!" is the title of next week's roaring Western yarn, featuring the Rio Kid, Boy Outlaw!



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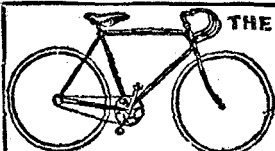
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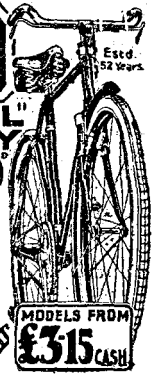
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By Ralph Redway.



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Quest in the Staked Plain!

THE Rio Kid came down the rugged slope into the arroyo, with an antelope slung over his shoulder. The sun, slanting westward to the sierras of New Mexico, burned hot on the arid surface of the Staked Plain. But in the deep arroyo, where a tiny stream trickled among the rocks, it was cool and shady. On a little path of vegetation beside the stream, two horses were feeding; the Kid's grey mustang, and the chestnut cow-pony that belonged to his companion. Near them, on his blankets, lay Slick Singer, the gunman of Pack-saddle; and the gunman's hand went instantly to his rifle at the sound of footsteps. But he relinquished the weapon at the sight of the Stetson hat and goatskin chaps of the Kid.

The Kid tramped up, and tossed down his burden in the grass.

"I've sure brought in some supper," he remarked. "But we ain't starting a fire till sundown; I guess the smoke would put the Injuns wise for ten miles around."

"We been here a week," said the gunman, "and we ain't seen hide nor hair of Injuns, Kid."

The Kid grunted.

"I guess them guys is likely to show up just when they ain't expected," he answered. "We're a hundred miles from a white man hyer, feller; but I guess we ain't one mile from some gang of Apaches or Yaqui."

The Kid sat down on a boulder. The gunman stretched himself on the blankets again, his eyes on the Kid's sombre face. The Kid was silent for a few minutes, and when he spoke at last, it was abruptly.

"Say, we been here a week, like you allowed," he said. "I guess you're mended now, hombre. You can sure sit a cayuse to-morrow."

Singer nodded.

"You got over your wound," said the Kid. "I guess I wasn't going to leave you on your lonesome, so long as you couldn't kick. But you're mended now, and you can ride. I reckon we break

camp at sun-up to-morrow. And we sure ride different trails."

"You ain't honing for my company, Kid?" said the gunman, with a sneer. "You've said it; I sure ain't," said the Kid. "It beats me to a frazzle what you honed into the Staked Plain for; it ain't no place for a poker sharp and a gun-slinger like you, feller. I guess I wasn't going to let them Nevajos chaw you up, and I couldn't quit so long as you was on your back; but now—I guess we ride different trails to-morrow."

He paused.

"I ain't getting back into Texas," he went on. "There's a bunch of rangers looking for me, and I ain't honing to meet up with them any. But I guess I'll guide you back to the cow country."

THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW, GALLOPS HEAD-FIRST INTO ANOTHER BREATH- TAKING ADVENT- TURE THIS WEEK!

if you want, and see you safe. You want to hit for home, feller."

"I ain't hitting for home," said the gunman. "You can quit if you like, Kid; I ain't got no kick coming, if you quit. But I got to find a guy afore I ride out of the Llano Estacado."

The Kid's expression was uneasy.

"I sure asked you to trail with me, Kid," said Singer.

"I ain't trailing with you," growled the Kid. "You ain't the heft of galoot I can trail with, and I don't trust you worth a continental red cent. I guess you got some gun-game on, though I ain't wise to it. You're a bad egg, Slick Singer."

"Mebbe—and you sure are mighty particular for an outlaw that's wanted by half the sheriffs in Texas!" sneered the gunman.

The Kid's brows knitted.

"You don't want to talk that-a-way," he said. "You want to keep a bride on your rag, feller, if you want to keep healthy."

"Don't get mad, Kid," said Singer, amicably. "I reckon if you knowed what I was after in the Staked Plain, you'd help me out."

"That ain't likely," said the Kid. "I don't know what you're after, but I reckon its suthin' low-down. You ain't the critter to run straight on any trail, Slick Singer, and I'm telling you so. And if you don't cotton to that, you pack a gun, and I guess you're mended enough to use it."

The gunman's eyes glittered.

"I've horned into the Staked Plain to find a guy, like I told you way back on the prairie," he said.

"Some guy that you aim to shoot up, I guess," snapped the Kid, "and I ain't the rube to help you get him."

"Dog-gone you, let a galoot speak. It's a kid."

"A kid?" repeated the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande.

"Jest a kid—rising fifteen," said Singer. "You don't reckon I'm aiming to shoot up a boy, I guess."

"Carry me home to die!" said the Kid, in astonishment. "You want me to believe that there's a boy of fifteen loose around in the Staked Plain, and you're aiming to find him and tote him home? Make it an easier one."

"It's the truth."

"Sho!" said the Kid.

"And he's a relation of mine—sort of second cousin," said the gunman. "My cousin, Buck Singer, hit the Staked Plain years ago—he had to get out of Texas for his health. He shot up a man in a rookus back at San Antone. He was killed in the Staked Plain by a gang of Yaqui; but he had a pard who got away, and that guy,

allowed that the Injuns kept the boy a prisoner. That was five years ago."

The Kid eyed the gunman of Packsaddle. He had wondered a good deal what brought Slick Singer into the desert.

"I sure ain't surprised none, to hear that a relation of yours had to hit the horizon for shooting up a guy," he said. "That sounds the true stuff. And he brought his son with him to this desert."

"He sure did—a kid of ten at that time," said Singer. "His father, one of the biggest ranchers in the San Antonio country, washed him out, and never wanted to hear of him or the boy again. But the old man's dead now; and if Buck Singer was alive, he'd walk into a big ranch at San Antonio, and fifty thousand dollars in the bank. And Buck being wiped out by the Yaqui, his boy Dick will walk into the Singer fortune—if he's found."

"Sho!" repeated the Kid. "That's what I got to find out," went on Singer. "If the boy's dead, like his father, I want to know; and if he's alive, I guess I'm toting him home to San Antonio to step into his fortune. That's how it stands."

The Rio Kid whistled. "And where do you come in?" he demanded. "This kid, Dick Singer, may be your own flesh and blood; but you ain't the guy to horn into a hornet's nest of Redskin jest nor that. You better put your cards on the table, feller!"

The gunman grinned. "I guess I can, in if I find the boy," he answered. "He will sure be good to the cousin that found him, and made him a rich man. He will have pockets full of dollars when he's back at San Antonio, and I guess he won't be ungrateful."

"That's a cinch, I reckon," said the Kid, with a nod.

There was a silence. "I sure did not figure it was that-a-way," said the Kid at last slowly. "I guess I don't aim to touch any of the boy's dollars; but I'll sure do my darndest to get him away from the Yaqui, if they've got him. I sure will! And I reckon I'm the man you want for this hyer trail. I've ridden the Staked Plain before, a whole lot of times, and there ain't a lot of it I don't know. There's a camp of Yaqui on Windy Creek—located in a valley, with dry desert round it for miles, and I guess mighty few white men have been there and got away alive. I guess—"

"You've said it, Kid!" exclaimed Slick Singer eagerly. "Buck's party was heading to Windy Creek when they was wiped out five years ago by the Yaqui. Buck had heard that there was gold in the creek—"

"There sure is, if a guy had a chance of washing it out," said the Kid. "But them Yaqui is pizen. And for miles round that valley there's nothing but dry desert and rattlesnakes and tarantulas. I guess they'd be likely to take a boy prisoner, and adopt him into the tribe, because that's an Injun custom; but I reckon any man gettins' near that valley is apt to find a front seat in a funeral."

"That cuts no ice with me," said Singer, "and I guess it cuts less with you, Kid."

"Correct!" said the Kid. "Feller, if I'd knowed this was your game, I'd have rode with you when you asked me. You can sure count me in."

The gunman held out his hand. "Snake on it, Kid," he said. And the Rio Kid, after a second's hesitation, shook on it.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
The Yaqui!

SAGE brush and burning sun—sand flies and prickly bush, and a hot wind that was like the breath of a furnace. For days, long, weary days, the Kid and his companion had been struggling in the desert, in an arid, thirsty land, tenanted by no living thing but crawling lizards and deadly tarantulas.

The Kid had ridden the desert before; in the great desert of Arizona, in the thirsty region of Sonora he had ridden; but he had never struck a harder country than this in the heart of the Staked Plain. It was a remote region, far from the settlements that were creeping into the Llano Estacado, abandoned to the serpent and the vulture. Water-holes were few, and hard to find, and never a track of a man or a horse met the eye.

But sometimes, from the dreary sage, a white skull grinned, sometimes dry bones cracked under the hoofs. Men had been that way before, looking for pay-dirt, and they had left their bones in the desert; victims of the wandering gangs of Apaches or Yaqui, or of hunger and thirst.

The Kid had set his hand to the task, and he did not figure on turning back, and the gunman of Packsaddle showed a grim determination that rather sur-

prised the Kid. Without the Kid's aid and guidance, the gunman would never have struggled through the dry desert alive, and the hardships told more on him than on the hardy Kid. But he never flattered, or gave a thought to turning back. And it puzzled the Kid.

He had joined up in cahoots with Slick Singer to find the boy who, if he yet lived, was lost among the Yaqui. That was the kind of thing the Kid was likely to do. But it was not in Slick Singer's line by a whole lot. No doubt he hoped that his relative would be, as he expressed it, "good" to him when he was restored to freedom and fortune. But that seemed to the Kid a slight motive for the danger and privation, the wearing fatigue, that the poker sharp of Packsaddle was facing undimly. There were easier ways of making money for a galoot like Slick Singer.

Still, there it was. Singer was seeking the boy, and the Kid was helping him. If the man had some secret motive, beyond what he had told the Kid, it remained a mystery.

The Kid was the guide in this journey through the dry desert. He knew the Staked Plain, and he had heard of the camp of the Yaqui at Windy Creek from talk among the Apaches. Of its location he was not certain. All he knew was that it was

(Continued on next page.)

Get ready to cheer the

RIVAL BLUES!

Banter and Facts about the Great Boat Race!



On Saturday next, the 12th, there will be enough breath expended—in shouts and yells of encouragement—on the banks of the Thames, between Putney and Mortlake to blow the giant airship R100 six miles out of her course, if she happens to be about!

At the first Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race which took place at Henley-on-Thames, in 1829, there was a yelling crowd of 20,000. At that time there were no railways south of York shire, so all things considered that was a jolly fine attendance. With aeroplanes, motor buses and cars, motor bikes, push bikes, speed-boats, tube railways, and coolers to help folk togeth'er at this year's scene of strife there should be sufficient lookers-on to develop the necessary combined lung-power for the feat above-mentioned.

The total cost of the Boat Race is about £2,000. Translate that into penny buns—something short of half a million if you had some thrown in to make-weight, for buying in bulk—and heap them up in the Thames along the course, and there'd be such a stoppage of traffic that—oh, well, finish working it out for yourselves!

They rowed the Centenary Boat Race last year—the eighty-first race—and finished up honours even—"at square." But Oxford wasn't, for the crew of the Dark Blues were all out—knocked to the wide. The Light blues had a walk-over—or rather paddle-over—winning by seven lengths in 19 minutes 24 seconds.

Cambridge won the toss last year, and chose the favourable side of the

river. They say a Scotsman collared the coin almost before it had finished spinning. The same old libel, of course!

A cool hundred quid a minute is the sum which the two Universities have to spend on the Race the average time taken to cover the course being twenty minutes. From Putney to Mortlake is four and a quarter miles, that stretch of river being shaped like a horse-shoe.

The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Boats ought to step in on the 12th, for though the boat weighs only about 240 lbs., the men who pack themselves into it weigh six times as much.

Long and skinny you might dub these craft, for they are each about 62½ feet long by 2 feet in beam with skins ½ inch thick. It is because the boats are so thin-skinned that the crews dare not wear boots. And they are only 9½ inches deep.

The oars weigh 9 lbs. each, and cost £2 7s. 6d. apiece and each time they are dipped into the water—eight in each boat—bang goes £2 or thereabouts, representing each oar-dip's share of the grand total cost of the Race. Each boat costs about £120 a new one being made for each Race.

Don't laugh at the crew if they finish at the post or knocked up—sagging about like sacks of sawdust. Each rower develops an average of 1½ horse-power over the full course. Yes, they're as beefy and brawny as they make 'em.

a fertile valley lost in the midst of the desert, where a tribe of Yaqui had pitched their camp, to keep away from the Indian Reservations. It lay somewhere in a low range of barren-looking hills that rose dimly beyond the plain, and for days the Kid had been seeking sign of it.

Near sundown, the Kid pulled in his horse on a sandy ridge, and shaded his eyes to gaze across the dreary expanse before him. Singer halted by his side. He brushed flies from a sweating face, and cursed.

"I guess we're hitting that Injun camp, feller," said the Kid, after a long survey "I can sure see smoke agin them hills yonder."

"I can see nothing," grunted the gunman.

"I guess you ain't got the eyes to see, hombre," said the Kid good-naturedly. "You savvy more about a deck of cards than the desert. We want to stop right here."

"How come?"

The Kid grinned.

"If we get near them Yaqui in the daylight, feller, I guess our scalps is going to ornament their lodge-poles," he answered. "I guess there's more'n a hundred of them bucks, and I ain't honing for a rookus with a crowd like that. They ain't got to see us around."

"That's so," agreed Singer. "But, I—"

"I guess, after sundown, I'll do some scouting," said the Kid. "Jest now we're camping down."

The gunman nodded, and they dismounted, tethering the horses in a hollow under the ridge. Dried beef and lukewarm water, and not much of it, made their meal, which they ate in silence. Unattended as the desert looked, the Kid had picked the camp with care. They were screened by thick bushes of sage and tall cacti that covered the sandy ridge. And the Kid's caution was rewarded, for, an hour or so later, when the sun was dipping behind the hills, the silence was broken by the sound of hoof-beats.

The Kid started and listened.

"Injuns, I guess, he said.

Singer grasped his rifle.

"You don't want to handle that pop-gun," said the Kid. "They won't see us hyer, unless they ride right into us, which I reckon ain't likely. We got to lie low and watch feller."

He listened.

"There's six hosses in that bunch," he said, after a few moments.

"How d'you know?"

"I got ears," said the Kid. "They're riding along the bottom of the ridge, and they sure won't hit near us. You keep quiet while I get an eye on them."

The Kid crawled away through the sage, to look down the slope of the ridge at the passing horsemen.

With a dull thudding of hoofs on the sandy plain, six riders came into his view. They were passing along the foot of the ridge, heading towards the distant blur on the hills that the Kid's keen eyes had picked up as the smoke of the Indian lodges.

There was a rustle in the sage beside the Kid, and he looked round angrily. Slick Singer had crawled after him, trailing his rifle as he came.

"You durned bonehead!" muttered the Kid. "Couldn't you keep close? If them Injuns spot us, we're dead meat!"

Singer made no answer. Lying in the sage he watched the bunch of riders that came nearer and nearer, along the foot of the slope fifty or sixty feet below.

THE POPULAR.—No. 585.

"Great gophers!" murmured the Kid suddenly.

His eyes were fastened on one of the riders.

Five of them were Yaqui bucks, copper-skinned, with matted black hair stuck with draggled leathers, in tattered blankets and leggings. But the other—

The other was a boy, and at the first glance, he might have been taken for a Redskin. He was dressed in tattered buckskin leggings and deerskin shirt like the rest, and his face was burnt dark by sun and weather. But it was a white man's face the Kid knew.

He pressed Singer's arm.

"Quiet!" he breathed, "and look—that guy trailing behind the bunch—he's white!"

"By the great horned toad!" breathed Singer.

His eyes were fixed on the white boy who rode with the Yaqui.

The bunch were almost directly below the watchers on the ridge now, passing within sixty feet. Not a glance was turned towards the ridge, the Yaqui evidently had no suspicion that strangers were there. Two of the bucks carried antelopes over their saddles, and they were plainly returning from a hunt, in which the white boy had taken part.

"Say, feller, I guess that'll be the kid we're looking for!" breathed the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande. "We sure are in luck! Say, you figure that you know his looks?"

"It's Dick Singer!"

"You banking on that?"

"He's his father over again—I'd know him a mile off!" muttered the gunman.

"This sure is luck," said the Kid. "We found out that he's alive, and we sure know where to look for him."

He watched the Redskins passing. A slight sound at his side caused him to turn his head towards Singer again.

The gunman had pushed his rifle before him, through the openings of the sage, and was training it on the passing bunch of Yaqui.

He was taking steady aim, and his eye gleamed through the sights.

The Kid set his teeth.

His hand reached out and grasped the barrel of the rifle, pushing it forcibly aside.

"You cursed bonehead," hissed the Kid. "You want to bring the whole tribe down on us."

Singer muttered a curse.

"Let my gun alone, durn you!"

"Not by a jugstul! If you pull that trigger, you pesky gink, I'll sure crack your cabeza with the butt of a Colt!" hissed the Kid savagely. "Let up, you locoed geck!"

The bunch of Redskins, with the boy, were past now. Only their backs were to be seen as they rode on towards an opening in the distant hills.

For some seconds, Slick Singer struggled to release his rifle-barrel from the Kid's grasp. But the Kid's hand was on it like iron, keeping the muzzle deflected away from the bunch of Yaqui.

"Let up!" hissed the gunman. "Let up, durn you!"

"I guess you're loco," snarled the Kid. "Give over, you bonehead! By the great horned toad, I'll crack your cabeza if you don't let go that pop-gun. Slick Singer!"

With his left hand, the Kid drew a Colt from his holster, grasping it by the long barrel. Slick Singer released the rifle, just in time to prevent the boy puncher from making good his threat.

The thudding of hoofs died away to-

wards the distant hills. The bunch of Yaqui disappeared from sight.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Parted Trails!

THE Kid rose to his feet.

The look on his face was deadly, as he faced the gunman of Packsaddle. His eyes glinted at the savage, sullen face.

Slick Singer eyed him evilly.

He could read the Rio Kid's thoughts in his looks; for the Kid, by a flash of understanding was wise to him now. What had puzzled the Kid for days past, had become suddenly clear.

"You pesky polecat!" said the Kid, between his teeth. "I never trusted you—I'd as soon have trusted a rattler. But you sure did string me along—till now! You pize! skunk!"

"What are you getting at?" grunted Singer. "I guess I'd have potted them Yaqui, and got—"

"You'd have roused out the whole tribe with a single shot," said the Kid. "We'd have had to mount and ride for our lives—and I guess that'd have suited you fine, you skunk, if you'd got away with that shot. It was the boy you was pulling a bead on!"

"Aw, forget it," snarled Singer.

"It was that boy, Slick Singer, you was aiming to drill!" hissed the Kid, his eyes gleaming. "You'd got your rifle bearing on him, fair and square, when I stopped you, 'ou coyote. I guess I'm wise to your game now, Slick Singer. I guess I know why you're trailing in the Staked Plain you skunk. You ain't aiming to save that boy and tote him home to San Antonio to come into his fortune. You're aiming to shoot him up!"

"What would I want to shoot him up for, durn you?" growled the gunman uneasily.

"Who gets that ranch at San Antonio, and the fifty thousand dollars, if Buck Singer's son ain't found and toted home?" demanded the Kid.

The gunman made no answer.

"That's the how of it, I reckon," said the Kid. "You pizen polecat, you are trailing here to get that boy out your way, and you was aiming to make use of me to help you do it. I guess I'm wise to your game now, Slick Singer, and it ain't no use for you to tell me any more lies."

The Kid's hand was on a gun.

The temptation was strong on him to draw, and shoot the ruthless rascal in his tracks. He had been puzzled, but he called himself a gink for not having guessed his companion's true intention before. Now that he understood, all was explained. And his desire was strong to let daylight through the scallywag who had aimed to make him a party to a crime.

"Own up, you durned snake!" snapped the Kid. "I'll say it ain't no good trying to string me any more!"

The gunman gritted his teeth.

"If you hadn't been the world's prize boob, you'd have got wise to it sooner," he sneered. "You figure that I'm trailing in this cursed desert, for the sake of a boy I ain't seen for five years, and don't care a continental red cent about? I guess it's me for the ranch at San Antonio, and that boy ain't going to stand between me and a fortune. I sure come next on the list, if I find that boy and spill his juice, afore the rangers find him."

"The rangers?" said the Kid.

"Aw, can't you guess that the lawyers at San Antone are having the boy hunted for, now he's worth near a quarter million dollars," snarled Singer. "They got Hall and his rangers to hunt for him, and I guess we ain't a long way ahead of the rangers."

"I guess the rangers won't run down them Yaqui in a hurry," said the Kid. "By the great horned toad, I guess I want to blow your pizen brains out over the sage, Slick Singer. It it wasn't for bringing the Injuns down on us with a shot, I guess I'd do it. You pizen scallywag, you've played me for a sucker!"

"Stand in with me," said the gunman. "You know the game now, Kid, and I guess I'll make it worth your while to stand in with me. Getting that boy away from the Yaqui won't be easy, but hanging about the lodges and getting him with a pot-shot, will be jest pie. I'll see that you get a handful of the dollars—"

The gunman broke off with a howl, as a clenched fist was planted full in his face.

He went over backwards as if he had been shot, and the Kid glared down at him as he struck the earth.

Singer's hand went to a gun as he lay.

In an instant, the Kid's Colt was aimed at his savage, furious face.

"Let up on it, you polecat!" said the Kid. "Let up, afore I spill your juice over the sage!"

The gunman, with a curse, relinquished the weapon. He glared up at the Kid with eyes of burning hate.

"Dog-gone you," he muttered thickly. "Dog-gone you, Kid! Git to your cayuse and hit the trail, and leave me alone here, durn you!"

"I'll sure leave you alone here, you durned skunk," said the Kid. "But I ain't hitting the trail none. I ain't quitting till I got that boy away from the Yaqui, Slick Singer, and handed him over to his friends, where you can't get at him. I sure got a powerful mind to shoot you up afore I go, like the pizen skunk you are."

"You got no call to chip in!" snarled the gunman. "What's the boy to you, durn you?"

"You wouldn't understand, in a month of Sundays," said the Kid contemptuously. "I'll say I'm going to get that boy safe away, safe from the Yaqui, and safe from you, Slick Singer. And if you horn in on my trail agin, I'll shoot you up like you was a coyote. You want to hit for Packsaddle while you've got a whole skin; if you hang around here, I guess the Yaqui won't be long in getting your scalp. And they're sure welcome to it; that cuts no ice with me. I'm done with you, you gun-slinging polecat."

The Kid walked away to his mustang, mounted, and rode away, taking no further heed of the gunman.

The galloping hoofs of the mustang died away in the darkening plain.

The Kid's face was set and savage as he rode. But it cleared, as he galloped on under the stars. He grinned a little. The gunman of Packsaddle had drawn him into the game, for his own dastardly ends; and the Kid had no idea of getting out of it.

There was little likelihood, he reckoned, of the gunman carrying out his scheme successfully, unaided. If he lingered there, he was more likely than not to fall into the hands of the Redskins; and the Kid was quite indifferent to his fate. Whether he lived or died, mattered nothing to the boy outlaw; but the Kid was not thinking of hitting the trail, now that his connec-

Suddenly the gunman found sinewy arms round his neck, and he was flung to the ground. His revolver exploded harmlessly in the air.



tion with Slick Singer had come to an end. He had seen the prisoner of the Yaqui, and he meant to get that prisoner away, or leave his own bones in the Staked Plain. By treacherously calling in the Kid's aid, the gunman had defeated his own scheme; and the Kid found that thought amusing.

The Kid rode on in the gathering darkness, till he was close on the hills. Then he dismounted and staked out his mustang, and rolled himself in his blanket, to sleep till midnight.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

In the Hands of the Redskins!

"DOG-GONE that durned firebug!" growled Slick Singer, between his teeth.

The gunman of Packsaddle stood in the darkness, on the sandy ridge, beside his cow-pony. He was looking through the shadows towards the hills that hid the valley of the Yaqui; a dim blur in the star-shine on the Staked Plain.

Then he mounted his horse and rode down the sandy ridge.

The Rio Kid had long vanished; and where he was, and what he aimed to do, Slick Singer had no idea. He had said that he would rescue the prisoner of the Yaqui. If he got the boy away, the gunman's game was up.

Slick Singer headed for the hills, in the direction of the smoke the Kid had

seen before sundown—the direction taken by the hunting-party of Yaqui whom he had watched.

He reached the hills, under the stars, his eyes watchfully about him in the gloom. He feared to run into some Yaqui scout, and he feared a meeting with the Rio Kid. If the Kid intended to carry out his threat, he could not be far away. But the gunman saw and heard nothing of him; though, if he had known it, he rode within a hundred yards of the spot where the Kid had camped in the sage, and lay sleeping in his blanket by the side of his mustang.

Afar, in the darkness of the hills, a flicker of ruddy light came to the eyes of the gunman. He knew that it must come from a fire in the Indian village; he was getting close now. He halted, and dismounted, and selecting a spot where a tall cactus rose like a gaunt giant against the sky—a spot he would be able to find again—he tethered his horse. On foot, with cautious tread he advanced into the opening of the hills.

The opening between rugged, barren hillsides widened into a valley, where a stream ran, glimmering in the stars. Ample water fertilised the lonely valley, and vegetation grew thick along the stream, rich grass, tangled pecans, and tall cottonwoods. Slick Singer crept on silently, his eyes watchful as a wildcat's.

(Continued on page 28.)

The Prisoner of the Lost Valley!

(Continued from page 11.)

In that lost valley in the heart of the desert he reckoned the Indians would not be likely to keep watch at night; but he was not taking more chances than he could help. He stopped, at last, in a belt of pecans close by the creek, and scanned the scene before him.

There was a bunch of skin tepees, the dwellings of the Yaqui, near the stream. In the distance he could see moving shadows, of a herd of horses—cattle, too, he guessed. The outcast Redskins of the Staked Plain lost no chance of running off cattle from the ranges on the lower prairies. A camp-fire burned in the encampment; and he could discern a number of bucks sitting round it, wrapped in their tattered blankets, smoking. If he had hoped to see anything of the boy, he was disappointed.

He stood in the pecans, watching. The Yaqui evidently had no suspicion of an enemy at hand; they were quite secure in the lost valley, and that security was in his favour. The hour was growing late, and soon they would be sleeping in their lodges. To enter the village in the dark, and seek for the boy, was a desperate expedient; and Singer debated in his mind whether to hang about the encampment, and wait for daylight, in the hope of seeing the one whose life he sought. That, he reckoned, would be a safer plan.

The next instant he heard a rustle in the pecans, and he spun round, grasping a gun. Then sinewy arms were round him, and he was flung to the ground.

Bang!

He fired, and the sudden report of the Colt roared like thunder in the silent valley. There was a shout from the Indian encampment, as the Redskins leaped up, alarmed by the shot.

But the shot had no effect on Singer's assailant, for a grasping hand was on his gun-arm, and it was forced away as he pulled trigger. The bullet whistled away among the pecans. The gunman struggled—silently, furiously, desperately. But he was in the grasp of a powerful Yaqui buck, a sinewy knee was planted on him, pinning him down; and he could not free his gun-arm. A coppery face grinned down at him, with a savage grin. One of the Indian's hands relaxed its hold; and the next moment, the keen edge of a knife was pressed to the gunman's neck.

He ceased to struggle.

He stared up into the grinning, savage, coppery face, expecting instant death.

But the Yaqui did not plunge the knife home.

Loud shouts were ringing from the Indian camp; and the Yaqui yelled back. There was a trampling of moccasined feet; as a score or more of the Yaqui came running to the spot.

With despair in his heart, Slick Singer lay inert, in the grasp of his captor. A crowd of coppery savages gathered round him, staring down at him, jabbering to one another in the Yaqui dialect. Slick Singer understood not a word of that dialect; but he could see that the Yaqui were astonished to find a white man prowling round their camp. Many hands were laid on him, and his weapons were taken away; and thongs of rawhide bound round his arms and his legs. Three or four of the Yaqui lifted him in their brawny arms, and

carried him on to the encampment, the rest jabbering and yelling round him.

He was carried in among the tepees, to the camp-fire. The faces of squaws and papooses looked out of some of the wigwams, to watch him as he passed. Among them, the gunman glimpsed, for a moment, a face he knew—the face of a white boy; a face that was full of mingled terror and compassion; and the look on that face haunted the gunman's thoughts, in spite of his own deadly peril. The boy made a movement as if to approach him, but a Yaqui buck thrust him roughly back into the tepee from which he had emerged, and Singer saw no more of him.

The gunman was flung down by the camp-fire, and for long minutes he lay there, while the Yaqui talked in their own strange dialect, looking at him the while; debating his fate, he had no doubt. Once a tomahawk was lifted, and the gunman closed his eyes in expectation of death; but the blow did not fall. He was lifted again, carried to a wigwam, and tossed into it like a bundle of alfalfa, and left to himself in the darkness.

Bound hand and foot, with the rawhide biting cruelly into his limbs, the gunman lay, helpless, desperate; knowing only too well that that night was to be his last.

And perhaps, in those dreary hours of darkness and despair, something like repentance came into the hard heart of the desperado, as he thought of the pitying look on the face of the boy whose life he had come to the desert to seek.

From that look, and that alone, he derived a gleam of hope, for if there was one in the Indian camp who pitied him, who might seek to help, it was the one whom he would have sacrificed to his greed—the prisoner of the lost valley.

THE END.

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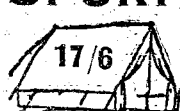
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A LIFE for a LIFE!

BY
RALPH REDWAY.



Slick Singer, the Gunman, sets out to kill the missing heir to the San Antone fortune—and instead he saves his life!

In the Lodges of the Yaqui!

JUMPIN' gophers!" the Rio Kid murmured under his breath. He stood quite still, crouching against the skin wall of a wigwam in the darkness.

There was a faint glimmer of stars in the dark sky. But in the lone valley in the heart of the Staked Plain, shut in by rugged hillsides furred with pine, the shadows were thick. The lodges of the Yaqui were dark and silent; only through the darkness came a murmur of the rippling stream, and a wailing howl from one of the Indian dogs straying round the encampment. Silent, cautious, stealthy, the Rio Kid had crept, in the darkness, into the camp of the Yaqui, taking his life in his hands. For discovery was death—one yell from a wakeful Redskin, and a crowd of enemies would have swarmed round the boy puncher, a hundred spears and tomahawks would have been raised to take his life. The Kid knew the risk well enough; but he was cool as ice as he threaded his way through the irregular lodges of the Yaqui camp.

Round him, all seemed sleeping, but for the straying dogs. But suddenly, quite close to the Kid, there was a footstep. From a log beside the dying camp-fire in the middle of the village, a figure in a tattered blanket and deerskin leggings had risen, and was moving towards one of the skin tepees. It was an Indian who had not yet gone to his lodge to sleep, and his footsteps were leading him directly towards the Kid. For the moment, the Kid fancied that he was seen, and his hand closed hard on the walnut butt of a Colt. But

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he did not draw the gun; he crouched close to the skin tepee, and waited, stilling his breath. He was wrapped in darkness where he crouched, though he could see the face of the Yaqui in the glimmer of the stars. But there was no sign of alarm in that coppery face, and the Kid realized that he was not seen.

He relinquished the butt of the Colt with an inaudible breath of relief. The Yaqui's life had hung on a thread, and the Kid's also; for he had left his mustang a quarter of a mile away, and he guessed that he was not likely to live to reach his cayuse if the Yaqui got wise to his presence.

The Indian—a chief, the Kid reckoned, by his head-dress—came directly towards the lodge against which the Kid was crouching. He drew aside the skin hanging at the entrance, and passed into the lodge. And the Kid breathed more freely. He figured that the Yaqui, the last wakeful one in the camp, was going to his blankets. And he prepared to move on his way, after giving the Redskin time to settle down. It was a difficult task the Kid had before him: to discover the wigwam which concealed the boy who was kept a prisoner by the Yaqui; a still more difficult task to get him away if he found him. An impossible task, perhaps; but the Kid had set his mind to it. He waited, silent, till all should be still again; and then the sound of a voice, speaking in English, came to him through the skin wall against which he stood. The Kid started; it was a guttural Indian voice that was speaking, but it was speaking in the tongue of the white men. The Kid listened in astonishment.

"Ugh! You sleep?"

The words were followed by a rustling, as of someone who stirred. It was a white man's voice that answered.

"I guess not, Injun!"

The Kid almost jumped in his surprise. He knew that voice; the voice of Slick Singer, the gunman of Pack-saddle.

"Carry me home to die!" the Kid

murmured to himself, "that dog-goned polecat's hyer! The Reds have got him."

The Kid grinned a little.

Evidently, Slick Singer was a prisoner in the hands of the Yaqui. That was where his quest of the boy, Dick Singer, had led him. The Kid had no sympathy to waste on him. He had ridden into the Staked Plain to find the heir of the San Antone ranch, who stood between him and a fortune; to destroy him if he found him. If he met his fate at the hands of the Yaqui, the Kid reckoned that nobody would miss him.

The guttural voice of the Yaqui chief went on again.

"Why you come to the lodges of the Yaqui? You look for gold in the Yaqui valley?"

"No!"

"Why you come?" persisted the Indian.

The Kid could guess that the Yaqui was puzzled by the coming of a solitary white man to the lost valley. There was no trail to that hidden encampment in the heart of the Staked Plain; for many a long mile the dry desert surrounded it.

"You come look find lost cattle?" went on the Yaqui.

"No."

"Why you come?"

The Kid wondered whether the gunman would reveal his reason for seeking the hidden camp. He was soon enlightened.

Slick Singer, struggling in the rawhide ropes that bound him hand and foot, sat up against the lodge-pole, and stared at the dusky form of the Yaqui chief in the gloom.

"I guess I'll put you wise, Injun! I came here to find a white boy who's been in your camp for five years."

"Ugh! Paleface speak of Little Antelope?"

"His name's Dick Singer," answered the gunman. "I know he's here—I've seen him. He came into the Llano Estacado five years ago, with his father and a party of prospectors. Your gang wiped them out—"

"Ugh! Injun no want white man

find gold in the Yaqui valley," said the Indian. "Kill all! No kill boy—Injun no kill papoose. Boy turn Injun; name Little Antelope."

"That's the kid! I'm not hunting for gold, and I guess you can run off all the cattle in Texas, and it won't worry me any," said the gunman, "I came here to find the boy. His friends want him back in San Antone."

"There was a grunt from the Yaqui. "I guess I'll give you horses, blankets, tobacco, fire-water, anything you like to name, for the boy and my freedom!" said the gunman eagerly. "Name your own price, Injun."

"Paleface heap liar," said the Yaqui. "You go, you no pay Injun. Ugh!"

"I guess—"
"Little Antelope Injun now. Paleface come take away little Antelope, paleface dio," said the Yaqui. "I have spoken." He quitted the lodge without another word.

The Kid heard a groan from the prisoner, as he slumped down again on the earthen floor of the lodge.

The figure of the Indian chief flitted in the starlight for a few moments, and vanished into another tepee. The Kid guessed that he had gone to his blankets at last.

For a long minute the Kid remained where he was. He could have cut his way through the skin wall of the lodge, and released the gunman. The fact that Slick Singer was his enemy would not have deterred the Kid. He would have risked much to save even an enemy from the merciless hands of the outcast Yaqui gang. But he shook his head. The gunman was there to seek the life of the boy who stood between him and a fortune; and to let him loose was to add to the difficulty of the Kid's task—already difficult enough, if not impossible. The path of crime had led the gunman of Packsaddle to his doom, and the Kid could not save him. He hesitated, but he moved away from the lodge at last to thread his way through the sleeping encampment, in a quest which the Kid himself realised to be almost hopeless, but which he was determined not to give up while a chance remained.

The Escape!

SLICK SINGER did not close his eyes as the dreary hours passed. The rawhide thongs cut into his limbs. He stirred, and stirred again, restless, tormented. The visit of the Yaqui chief had given him, for a moment, a gleam of hope. But the Redskin had only been curious to learn what had brought him to the lost valley; and he knew that the Yaqui were not likely to spare a white man who had found his way to their last refuge in the heart of the desert. The dreary hours that were so long in passing, were his last on earth, and he knew it only too well. On the morrow, he would be bound to a pole in the midst of a swarm of savages; the death-dance would be danced, and the whizzing tomahawks would fly. The sunrise of the morrow would be the last he would see. That was the end of his desperate quest of a fortune.

A slight sound in the silence of the sleeping camp caught his ear. He gave it no heed till he suddenly realised that he was not alone. He started and raised his head.

"Silence!"

It was a whisper in the gloom.

Slick Singer's heart throbbed violently. It was a boyish voice that spoke, and he knew whose voice it must be.

He remembered the pitying look on the face of the boy when he had been brought a prisoner into the camp. He had wondered, then, whether it was in the boy's mind to help him.

"Silence! If they hear us, they will kill me as well as you," went on the whisper.

"You're Dick Singer?" breathed the gunman.

"How do you know my name?"

"I guess I'm your relation," breathed the gunman. "I'm Slick Singer—your father's cousin. I—I came here to find you, kid."

In the darkness the ruffian's face was flooded with crimson. He had come there, it was true, to find the boy; but it was to take his life that he had sought him. There was shame in his face, remorse in his heart.

"You came to find me—to save me?" whispered the boy, and there was a note of gladness in his voice.

"Yes. Your grandfather's dead, and there's a big ranch and a fortune waiting for you at San Antone."

He heard the boy catch his breath.

"They killed my father." The faint whisper went on, after a pause. "Black Hawk's son was killed in the fight, and the chief adopted me in his place. I've often wished that they had killed me instead. They've made me into a Redskin, but I've always hoped that there would be a chance to get away. And—when I saw you brought in I made up my mind that I would help you—even if they killed me. But—silence!"

The gunman felt a keen edge of a knife glide over the rawhide ropes. The rawhide fell in fragments round him, and he was free.

His limbs were so cramped from the bonds that for some minutes he could hardly move. He lay breathing hard.

"Quiet!" the boy whispered. "They are sleeping, but the Redskins sleep like coyotes—a sound—"

"I guess I'm wise to that! You reckon we can get out of the camp?" muttered the gunman.

"As soon as you're ready, I will guide you. But a sound means death to both of us."

The boy stepped to the entrance of the lodge, and stood listening intently. Singer chafed his cramped limbs and rose at last to his feet.

His heart was beating hard. Life and freedom were before him, and success! Once away from the lodges of the Yaqui, and the boy alone with him in the desert—

The boy stepped back to him.

"Take this knife—I have another! We must go on foot—it would give the alarm to try to get horses. But I know the desert for miles—we can hide—"

"I've a cayuse staked out a quarter of a mile away," muttered Singer. "I guess he'll carry double if we can get to him."

"Then we've a chance!"

"I'm ready," said the gunman huskily.

"Follow me!"

The dim figure of the boy flitted from the lodge. Slick Singer followed him silently.

In the deep darkness that brooded over the encampment of the Yaqui, winding among the irregular lodges, the boy led the way without a pause.

A dog crossed their path, and howled. Singer grasped the knife almost con-

vulsively. But a soothing whisper from the boy quieted the dog. Little Antelope was known to the prowling brute. A few more steps, and the lodges were left behind.

They pressed on down the valley, towards the opening on the plain. With every step the gunman's heart grew lighter. There had been no alarm as yet, and if he could reach his horse—a cruel smile flickered over his hard, cold face. He had said that the cayuse would carry double, but it was not a double load that he intended for the horse. The life he had sought was at his mercy now.

Suddenly out of the silence came a loud yell from the direction of the encampment. Singer started and looked back.

The boy panted.

"They have missed me—I have been missed from my lodge. They have missed you, too, and guessed—"

Another loud yell rang through the night, followed by a roar of savage shouting.

"Run!" panted the boy.

They ran hard down the valley. From the darkness there came a distant clatter of hoofbeats. Pursuit was already on the way.

But the panting fugitives emerged on the plain now. The starlight fell round them on the level plain, studded with sage and cacti. The gunman's desperate eyes picked out the giant cactus near which he had left his tethered cow-pony.

"This way!" he panted.

A few minutes more and they had reached the horse. Slick Singer tore loose the tether and grasped the reins. The boy, panting at his side, was staring back towards the dark opening of the valley in the hills.

"Quick!" he breathed.

The eyes of the gunman were on him.

He needed no further aid from the boy who had saved him. The knife was in his hand. The boy who stood between him and a fortune, unsuspecting and defenceless, was at his side. For one moment the boy's life trembled in the balance. But the gunman of Packsaddle thrust the knife into his belt. Desperate and villain as he was he could not do it.

"You figure them bucks will kill you for helping me to escape?" he breathed.

Dick Singer nodded.

"Once before I tried to escape—and Black Hawk warned me—next time it was death!" he said. "But we've a chance."

Again there was a struggle in the gunman's breast—to mount and ride and save himself, and leave the boy to the vengeance of the Yaqui—it was easy! But something that he scarcely understood himself was working in that ruthless breast. The boy had saved him—risked his life to save him—the boy trusted him. It was the first time for many a long year that any human being had trusted Slick Singer, the desperate gunman of Packsaddle. The way to fortune lay open before him—and he did not take it.

"Git on the cayuse!" muttered the gunman hoarsely.

He mounted, with the boy behind him. A savage drive of his spurs, and the chestnut cow-pony broke into a gallop. The hoofs rang on the sandy plain in a rapid tattoo.

Behind, in the darkness, was the thunder of many hoofs. The Yaqui were mounted and in pursuit.

Closer and closer, as the gunman urged on the cow-pony, came the thunder of pursuing hoofs.

The cayuse was a good one, but he was carrying a double load and unless they gave the pursuers the slip in the darkness they had little hope of escape. One blow would have sent the boy toppling from the horse and left him to his death, and the cow-pony would have carried Slick Singer swiftly to safety. But that thought was not in Slick Singer's mind now.

He had ridden into the Staked Plain to take the boy's life, and once his rifle had been trained on him from cover, and only the Rio Kid's hand had averted the death-shot. And now he was giving up his own chance of safety to save the boy's life!

It was a change of heart that the desperado himself could hardly understand; and yet he knew that if they did not escape together they would perish together at the hands of the Yaqui—that nothing would induce him to ride on alone and leave the boy to his fate.

Harder and harder he spurred the panting cow-pony, while from the darkness behind the thundering hoofbeats and the yells of the Indian braves rang nearer.

The Kid's Close Call!

THE sudden outburst of alarm in the Yaqui encampment startled the Rio Kid. For more than an hour, after he had listened to the voices of the Yaqui chief and the captured gunman, the Kid had glided among the tepees, seeking some sign of the boy prisoner. Twice or thrice he heard muttered words from the dark interior of the lodges, but always in the guttural Yaqui tongue. The Kid cursed his luck which had led him by chance to the lodge where Slick Singer lay a prisoner, but helped him no further. But the Kid was patient, and chance might befriend him yet; and if he failed to find the boy before sun-up, he figured on taking cover among the rocks overlooking the encampment, and watching for a sight of him when day dawned, and for a chance of getting word with him. Sooner or later, the Kid reckoned, by night or by day, he would get in touch with the boy he sought; and long ago the outlaw of the Rio Grande had learned to be patient. But the sudden alarm that roused the sleeping camp put paid to the Kid's hopes and plans.

What it meant he did not at first gather. He knew that he was not discovered; it was not his presence that had alarmed the Yaqui. At the first shout from a wakeful Redskin the Kid crouched low in the narrow space between two wigwams, in black darkness, and did not stir—listening intently for a cue to the disturbance.

The shouts of the Yaqui soon told him what was toward. He knew much of the Yaqui dialect, and he soon learned that the white prisoner had escaped, and that the "Little Antelope" was missing. From what he had heard the Yaqui chief saying in the prisoner's tepee, the Kid knew who was meant by Little Antelope. He knitted his brows as he lay in the blackness while the Redskins shouted and yelled to one another. It was easy enough for him to guess what had happened; the fact that the boy and the prisoner were missing together

made it as clear to the Kid as to the Redskins themselves.

"Dog-gone it!" murmured the Kid. "That pesky boy has let that durned gunman loose and gone with him; and him watching for a chance to rub the kid out! By the great horned toad, if he harms that boy I'll trail him down and get him, if I have to follow him all the way back to San Antone!"

He heard the thunder of hoofs as a numerous party of the Yaqui rode down the valley, evidently in chase of the fugitives.

His heart was heavy with anxiety for the boy.

If Dick Singer fell into the hands of the Redskins it was likely to go hard with him. His life had been spared by the savage braves who had slain his father, and he had been adopted into the tribe; and the Kid had seen that the Yaqui treated him as one of themselves—they had shown him as much kindness as their savage natures were capable of.

His desertion, and his aid to the prisoner, both surprised and enraged the Redskins, as the Kid could understand from their excited talk that reached his ears. They were not likely to spare his life again. But it was less from the savage Yaqui than from the gunman that the boy had reason to fear danger, in the Kid's mind. He had fled with Slick Singer, never dreaming of the gunman's object in coming to the lost valley; and his life was at the mercy of the villain who had ridden into the Staked Plain for no purpose but to take it. The Kid's brow was black, and his heart was heavy. The fleeing gunman might escape, but it was little likely that the boy would live to see the dawn.

But the Kid, for the present, could not stir. The whole village was awake now, excited braves swarming among the tepees. A bunch of Yaqui had ridden down the valley in pursuit, but the greater part of the tribe were still in the encampment; their guttural voices reached the Kid from all quarters. He could not stir without betraying his presence, and that meant a desperate fight against overwhelming odds, and death. He lay low in the darkness and listened.

The thundering hoofbeats died away down the valley towards the plain. Several times the Kid heard more riders follow the same way. But there was no sound of returning horsemen. The fugitives had got clear of the valley, the Kid reckoned, and they had not yet been run down on the plain. The Kid's own position was dangerous enough. Unless the camp settled down again he could not retreat; and if morning found him still within the encampment, discovery was certain. And dawn was not far away now.

But the excited voices died away at last. Many of the Indians had returned to their lodges; others stirred the embers of the camp-fire in the centre of the village, and piled wood on it, and sat round the fire waiting for the return of the pursuers. In the dark sky over the hidden valley there was a growing paleness that hinted of the coming of day. The Kid knew that he could not afford to wait much longer.

He stirred at last.

Softly, cautiously, he rose to his feet and crept out from between the wigwams.

Without a sound, keeping as close as he could in the cover of the lodges, he crept on his way.

There was a sudden snarl as one of the shaggy, wolfish dogs that prowled round the camp leaped at him. The Kid struck the brute down with the

barrel of a Colt, and there was a fierce howl from the dog as it rolled over. He heard exclamations from the Indians round the fire, and there were footsteps among the lodges. The Kid threw caution to the winds now and started to run. As he ran, a dark figure crossed his path, and there was a Yaqui yell, and a fierce, copper-skinned brave sprang at the Kid with flashing tomahawk, yelling to his comrades as he sprang.

Crash!

The Redskin rolled at the Kid's feet from a blow by the Kid's iron fist.

The Kid leaped over the fallen Yaqui and rushed on. Pierce yells sounded behind him, and a whizzing spear narrowly missed the Kid and dropped yards in front of him. He rushed on desperately. But the Yaqui, aware now that there was an enemy in the camp, were swarming and yelling on all sides. The Kid almost ran into a bunch of them, and his six-gun spat flame and death. He was through, and speeding down the narrow valley towards the plain. If he could only reach the spot where he had left Side-Kicker—

The Kid ran fast through the darkness that was giving way now to the light of day. Behind him were rapid footsteps and panting breath. The puncher, accustomed to riding, ran awkwardly in riding-boots; the Kid, like all punchers, was no great hand at hoofing it. And the Yaqui, in their moccasins, ran swiftly. He heard the soft beat of pursuing footsteps draw nearer, and a shot from a rifle whizzed past him.

The Kid turned, with a blaze in his eyes and a six-gun in either hand.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

The bunch of Yaqui were almost upon him when the Kid turned and began to shoot. Right and left dusky forms reeled; even in the hot haste and the half-light, the Rio Kid was not the man to waste a shot. Four of the Yaqui went reeling under his fire, and the others, with fearful yells, broke away from it and scattered.

He turned again and tore on.

He left the valley behind him now; the open plain beyond the hills, glimmering in the first rays of dawn, was before him. The Kid tramped on fast over the sandy earth, among the sage and cactus and yucca. He was panting for breath, the perspiration streaming down his sunburnt face, as he came at last into the hollow, screened by sage, where he had left Side-Kicker.

"Old hoss!" panted the Kid.

The grey mustang was at his side in an instant. The Kid leaped into the saddle.

One glance he gave back at the opening in the low hills. A score of Redskins on foot were in sight; he had nothing to fear from them now that he was on the back of Side-Kicker. But behind them, issuing from the valley, came a crowd of Yaqui mounted on shaggy Indian ponies. The Kid gave them a look, and then touched his mustang with the quirt and galloped away.

The Kid figured that there was no cayuse in the ragged gang of Yaqui who could touch Side-Kicker in a race; and he was right. He galloped at top speed on the level plain, in the glimmer of the rising sun; and for many miles the pursuing Yaqui remained in sight, urging on their ponies, but the Kid dropped them at last and rode alone in the vast solitude of the Staked Plain.

A Ruffian's Repentance!

SLICK SINGER looked back.

The gunman's face was grim. But for the double load on his cow-pony the man from Packsaddle would have out-distanced the Redskins, and escaped in the darkness before the dawn came. But his cayuse, strong and wiry as it was, felt the weight of the double burden, and its efforts relaxed in spite of whip and spur. Once, in the gloom, the gunman thought that the pursuers had missed him; the galloping hoofs of the Indian ponies grew fainter in the distance. But if they had missed his track they found it again, and the thunder of many beating hoofs rang nearer and clearer once more.

The faint hope died in his breast. Looking back, with savage eyes, as the night paled into dawn, many a long mile from the lost valley in the Windy Creek hills, the gunman saw the fluttering feathers of the pursuers. Strung out in an irregular line, the best-mounted braves leading, more than a dozen of the Yaqui were still keeping up the chase.

There had been more at first, the gunman reckoned, but they had tailed off. That mattered little, however. There were more than enough of them to deal with him when they ran him down. But for the darkness they would have run him down before this, he knew, and now day was coming. The yells that floated to his ears on the wind told that the Yaqui saw him now, and, with desperate spur, he urged on the flagging cow-pony.

He felt the boy, who was seated behind him, holding on to him, shudder. "We are lost!" whispered Dick Singer.

"I guess I ain't banking on our chances!" muttered the gunman. "But they ain't got us yet."

His six-gun had been taken from him when he was captured, but his rifle was still in the leather scabbard attached to his saddle. The gunman released it and examined it.

The boy spoke again:

"The cayuse is failin'. I tried to save you—now save yourself. I will take my chance with the Yaqui—they may spare my life. There is a chance, at least; but none for you if they run you down. Slacken, while I drop off."

The gunman muttered a curse. It was what he wanted—or what he had wanted. Again and again during that wild ride, with death behind, he had been tempted to hurl the boy from the horse and leave him to his fate—to save himself, and to step into the fortune for which he had schemed. But he could not do it. Now he was tempted again. He had only to take the boy at his word!

"Can it!" he snapped. "I guess them Yaqui would give you your ticket for soup after you helped me get away."

"They've got us!" said the boy. He looked back. "They see us now; they're coming on hand over fist. There may be a chance for me—there's none for you. Let me drop!"

"Can it, I'm telling you!" snarled Slick Singer. "I guess it's both or neither, boy!"

"You came to save me," whispered the boy. "You risked your life to get me away. Now I will save you!"

The gunman felt a pang. The boy's trust in him, in his good faith, went strangely to his heart.

"Stick where you are!" he said.

"Then we are both lost!"

"I guess we ain't both lost!" said the gunman grimly. "The cayuse will carry one, and you're the one!"

"But you—"

"I reckon I'm taking my chance. I'll make them Yaqui pay high for my scalp!" said Slick Singer, between his teeth. "I guess I'm the galoot that is dropping off, and you're going on, Dick!"

them pay dear afore they wipe me out. You get me? Rids on hell-for-leather when I've quit!"

"I'm not leaving you to it!" muttered the boy stubbornly.

"Aw, you bonehead, what's the good of hanging on to me and getting chewed up, too?" snarled the gunman. "You got a chance, and you got to take it. By the great horned toad, I'm telling you, you got to ride on for your life when I quit!"

Under the steep side of the volcanic rock he drew in the panting, foaming mustang, and leaped from the saddle.



Crash! The Kid's iron fist caught the Redskin on the point of the jaw, and sent him spinning to the ground!

"Never!"

"Aw, can it!"

The gunman from Packsaddle had made up his mind.

He spurred on the weary cow-pony desperately, heading for a mesa that rose over the plain at a distance.

Escape for both was impossible. The Yaqui were drawing close now, and bullets were whistling past the fugitives. The cow-pony was still struggling on gallantly, urged by quirt and spur; but he was failing, and ere long the Redskins would be riding within reach, and their thrusting spears would end the chase.

Slick Singer's desperate eyes looked for a spot where he could make a stand and hold off the Yaqui while the boy escaped, and the mesa—one of the masses of high rock that dotted the plain—was as good a spot as he could have asked for. It rose abruptly from the plain to a height of fifteen or twenty feet, with steep sides, and almost level on top. The gunman rode for it desperately.

"Quit chewing the rag, Dick, and listen to me!" he muttered. "I'm dropping off when we get to the mesa—you see it yonder. I guess I'll stall off them Yaqui while you ride clear, and make

"Beat it!" he snapped.

And he struck the horse savagely with the quirt, and sent him careering on, with the boy clinging to his back.

There was a yell from the Yaqui. The nearest of them was not twenty yards' distant now.

With a curse, the gunman flung the rifle to his shoulder and fired. The leading Yaqui rolled off his horse, with a yell and a crash on the sun-baked plain.

Slinging his rifle over his shoulder, Slick Singer clambered desperately up the rugged, steep side of the mesa.

Thrice a bullet struck the rock at his side as he clambered up, spattering fragments round him.

But he dragged himself on, and rolled on the top of the mesa, panting. He did not rest a second. Lying on his chest on the summit of the high rock, he pushed his rifle out before him, ready to open fire if the Yaqui attempted to follow him up. His glance followed the boy.

Dick had scrambled into the saddle and reached the reins, and he strove to pull in the cow-pony. The gunman cursed as he saw the boy whirl the cow-

pony round, and come riding back towards the mesa.

He waved his hand, and yelled: "Ride, you young gink! Ride! Beat it, dog-gone you—beat it while you've a chance!"

The boy, with a set, white face, was riding back. But it was too late to rejoin the gunman. The Yaqui came up with a rush, and swept between him and the mesa.

"Ride!" shrieked the gunman.

The boy would have been surrounded in another minute. He gave a wild glance at the man on the mesa, and, realising that he could not rejoin him, he swung the cow-pony round again and galloped off.

In a few moments, Dick Singer

vanished in a cloud of dust. Some of the Yaqui, leaving the mesa, rode after the boy. But Dick Singer had a long start now, and he had disappeared among the ridges and fold of the plain, and the gunman guessed that he would be able to ride clear.

Four or five of the Yaqui were clambering up the rugged side of the mesa, and a coppery face rose over the level. With the muzzle of his rifle almost touching the fierce face, the gunman fired, and the Redskin went crashing down the rock to the earth below. Another face rose, and another, and twice the gunman fired, and the Yaqui rolled down. He watched savagely for another face to rise; but he watched in vain, the other Redskins had leaped back.

Slick Singer grinned savagely as he reloaded his rifle. The attack was stopped, but it was only stopped for the time. More and more of the Redskins would soon be arriving, and the end was certain. But he swore savagely that they should pay high for his scalp. And he had saved the boy. He had ridden into the Staked Plain to take his life, and now he was giving his own life to save him. And somehow the thought of that gave him courage and strength to face the inevitable end. And the end, now, could not be long in coming.

THE END.

(There's a surprise in store for all in next week's *Roaring Western Thriller*, entitled: "THE RIO KID'S QUEST!")

142 PRIZEWINNERS—RESULT OF "WHO'S WHO" COMPETITION!

"REX-ACME" MOTOR-BIKE GOES TO YORKSHIRE READER!

Is Your Name In The Specially ENLARGED Prize List Below?

In this competition one competitor sent in a correct solution to the four sets of puzzle-pictures. THE FIRST PRIZE—"REX-ACME" MOTOR-CYCLE—has therefore been awarded to:

G. Jones, 55, Church Lane, Normanton, Yorks.

Owing to the large number of competitors qualifying for the other prizes, a slight rearrangement in the awards has been necessary. WARNEFORD "DEMON" TRACTOR PLANES, as offered, have been awarded to the following fourteen readers whose efforts were next in order of merit:

A. Alderman, 50, Field Road, Forest Gate, London, E.7.

K. C. Bennett, 52, Erskine Park Road, Rushhall, Tunbridge Wells.

K. Bond, 102, Albert Road, Pockham, London.

K. Chappell, 54, Vernon Terrace, Sheffield.

J. R. Cross, 12, Colvestone Crescent, Dalston, London, E.8.

T. H. Gerrard, 61, Highfield Road, Coventry.

I. Harrison, 18b, Highcroft Villas, Brighton.

L. Harwood, Ella Villas, Kenneth Road, Thundersley, Essex.

R. Havell, 32, Winsley Road, Colchester.

G. C. Holley, 60, Arnold Road, Dagenham, Essex.

J. Kimberley, 109, Selsey Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham.

E. Leach, 32, St. Albans Road, Watford, Herts.

M. McLean, 95, Addycombe Terrace, Heaton, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

S. J. Rouse, 64, Roman Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk.

The value of the remaining planes offered has been considerably increased, so that each of the following 127 competitors whose solutions each contained four errors, shall also have prizes, and another, but still very attractive model of the famous "Warneford" tractor plane has been sent to each of them:

A. J. Aberley, Newborough, Burton-on-Trent.

R. H. Adams, 481, Valence Avenue, Becontree, Essex.

E. Akers, 45, Thirimer Road, Darlington.

A. J. D. Arthur, Les Colombes, St. Mary's, Jersey, C.I.; H. Astill, 9, Denton Road, Stonebridge Park, N.W.10.

F. G. Bird, 7, Nelson Road, Wanstead, E.11.

D. Bowles, 216, Tyburn Road, Erdington, Birmingham.

G. Brearley, 16, Back Cross Lane, Primrose Hill, Huddersfield.

E. Brice, 4, Nelson Terrace, The Mall, Faversham, Kent.

E. Broadbent, 33, First Avenue, Hove, Sussex.

J. Brooker, 79, St. James Road, Bermondsey, S.E.16.

C. Brookes, 10, Winchendon Road, Fulham, S.W.6.

F. W. Brown, 12, Somerfield Road, Finsbury Park, N.4.

E. Caudman, 23, Manchester Road, Southport, Lancs.

S. Chapman, 8, Bolivia Street, Weaste, Manchester.

G. Chappell, 54, Vernon Terrace, Sheffield.

F. Chesworth, 100, West Worsley Street, Salford, Lancs.

R. Chisham, 35, St. Chads Avenue, North End, Portsmouth.

R. Churchill, Rosendael, Bridge Hill, Epping, Essex.

E. Cockayne, 76, College Road, Kensal Rise, N.W.10.

J. J. Cockburn, 198, Willows Lane, Daubhill, Bolton.

A. Cole, 12, Whitacre Road, Bordesley Green, Birmingham.

R. J. Cracknell, 245, Eastcombe Avenue, Charlton,

S.E.7; H. F. Carr, Rockmount Hotel, Cobo, Guernsey, C.I.

J. Cunningham, 70, Udston Road, Burnbank, Lanarkshire.

A. F. Davidson, Sunnside, Killingworth, Northild.

A. Day, 223, Shirley Road, Birmingham.

J. Deakin, 33, Thornville Road, Darnall, Sheffield.

G. W. Dobson, 3, St. John's Road, March, Cambs.

F. Dorey, 22, Meadow Place, South Lambeth, S.W.5.

S. Edwards, 43, Huntingdon Street, Barnsbury, N.1.

J. Farrington, Ryecroft Hall, Audenshaw, near Manchester.

G. Fear, Castle Street, Upnor, near Rochester, Kent.

K. Fensome, 9, M.Q. R.A.F. Depot, Uxbridge, Middx.

J. E. Forbes, Alexandra Road, Sleaford, Lincs.

B. H. Foster, 54, Bridget Street, Rugby.

C. J. Franklin, 46, Dents Road, Bedford.

J. T. Franklin, 52, Skitts Hill, Braintree, Essex.

F. R. Gee, 39, Mouson Road, Harlesden, N.W.10.

J. Giapponi, 91, Dartmouth Park Hill, Highgate, N.19.

W. Golding, 278, West Green Road, Tottenham, N. 15.

A. D. Gosman, 71, Oakwood Avenue, Beekenham, Kent.

W. J. Grace, Te-Kiang, Elmsleigh Drive, Leigh-on-Sea.

G. Grady, 168, Mary Vale Road, Bournville, Birmingham.

R. Groves, 3, Belgrove, Mount Zion, Tunbridge Wells, Kent.

S. Hart, 13, Ash Street, Hertford.

G. Henderson, Market Square, Birr, Offaly, Ireland.

R. E. Henneman, 107, Tottenham Road, Palmers Green, N.13.

D. J. Hennessy, 1, Dawson's Terrace, Rock Street, Tralee, Co. Kerry.

F. Heron, 44, Stafford Street, Leicester.

F. E. Hobbs, 196, Gordon Avenue, Camberley, Surrey.

F. C. Holdstock, Shaftesbury, Brighton Road, Horsham, Sussex.

H. Johnson, 1, Fleet Street, Derby.

L. F. Johnson, 25, Victoria Road, Baby, Doncaster.

G. Jones, 32, Primrose Terrace, Shrewsbury, Salop.

C. Kittel, Oakfield, 4, Christchurch Avenue, London, N.12.

W. H. Laycock, 6, Aldfield Way, Pitsmoor, Sheffield.

J. E. Lee, 70, Garners Lane, Stockport.

H. Le Grice, 75, Bearwood Hill Road, Burton-on-Trent.

J. B. Lewis, Pant Farm, Cwmbach, Aberdare, Glam.

R. Lloyd, 55, Blantyre Street, Longton, Stoke-on-Trent.

K. Loader, 3, Monkton, Parleigh, Bradford-on-Avon, Wilts.

R. Longbottom, 48, William Street, Newark, Notts.

R. Lawson, West End Gardens, West Auckland, Co. Durham.

J. McBride, 17, Copperfield Avenue, Great Yarmouth.

D. McGregor, 11, Shieldmir Street, Wishaw, Lanarkshire.

B. McLaughlin, 25, Clarendon Road, Wallington, Surrey.

E. F. J. Marsh, 16, Falcon Terrace, Clapham Junction, S.W.11.

A. J. M. Milner, Stafford House, Stafford Road, Sidcup, Kent.

C. Moyle, 5, Gloucester Terrace, Sandgate, Kent.

R. Napier, 318, Byres Road, Hillhead, Glasgow, W.2.

M. Neale, 26, Ebenezer Street, Langley Mill, Notts.

H. Newbury, The Nook, Warshaw, near Southampton.

H. Nichols, 5, Chester Place, Norwich.

T. Norris, 32, Magdala Road, Cosham, Hants.

W. C. Norton, 3, Bolingbroke Grove, Wandsworth Common, S.W.11.

R. Nuttall, Whitcot, Bradford Road, Burley-in-Warriedale.

J. T. W. Page, 15, Lawrence Street, Chelsea, S.W.3.

E. Peters, 7a, Quarry Cottages, Mountain Ash, Glam.

R. Phipps, 14, Staunton Street, Deptford, S.E.8.

G. Pilling, 12, Towson Avenue, Langley Mill, Notts.

D. C. Powell, 45, Watermoor Road, Cirencester, Glos.

J. H. Pye, 8, Wycliffe

Street, Rock Ferry, Cheshire.

C. B. Quennell, 5, Woburn Place, Rushden, Northants.

J. E. T. Raper, 9, Elm Park Gardens Mews, Chelsea, S.W.3.

F. Ratcliffe, 412, Queen's Gate, Blackpool, N.S.

W. E. Rattenbury, 15, Strand Hill, Dawlish, Devon.

S. Roberts, 43, Elm Road, Crumpsall, Manchester.

J. R. Romaine, 44, Hutton Road, Little Horton, Bradford, Yorks.

J. Rose, 3, London Street, Andover, Hants.

W. S. Rowell, Toingrace, Newton Abbot.

H. J. Bush, 3, Boston Road, West Croydon, Surrey.

V. Russell, 12, Lawfords Gate, Bristol.

W. C. Sadler, The Shop, Ingoldisthorpe, King's Lynn.

D. Sayers, Railway Terrace, Tongham, Surrey.

K. Scott, 2, Newby Terrace, Stockton-on-Tees.

W. R. Scott, 57, Cranleigh Road, Buckland, Portsmouth.

F. D. Scruby, 8, Shrubbery Road, Streatham, S.W.16.

R. J. Sherwood, 33, Northampton Avenue, Farnham Road, Slough.

G. Shrewsbury, 5, Jennison Street, Bulwell, Nottingham.

E. Slaughter, 12, Seymour Gardens, Twickenham, Middx.

J. Smith, 5, Alicia Gardens, Kenton, Middx.

R. Smith, 18, St. Thomas Road, Spalding, Lincs.

F. Starling, 39, Woodstock Avenue, West Ealing, W.13.

B. Stevenson, 48, Keelings Drive, Trent Vale, Stoke-on-Trent.

W. Stevenson, 81, Burr Street, Luton, Beds.

J. Tait, Terrace Road, Carnoustie, Angus.

A. C. Tapsell, 25, Westbrook Avenue, Margate, Kent.

C. Tatham, 4, Stone Street, Cambridge.

R. Taylor, Hall Lane, Kelsall, near Chester.

S. Thompson, 53, Claverton Street, Pimlico, S.W.1.

F. Toward, 24, Primrose Terrace, Monkton, Jarrow.

B. Udy, 42, North Street, Fowey, Cornwall.

K. J. Walker, 21, Mackenzie Street, Derby.

R. Wedgwood, 21, Fletcher Street, Middlesbrough.

A. West, 22, King's Ride, Camberley, Surrey.

S. White, 8, Franklin Street, St. Paul's, Bristol.

G. H. Wiles, 476, Mawneys Road, Romford, Essex.

R. E. C. Wilcox, 8, Borneo Street, Putney, S.W.15.

R. Williams, 2, Fletcher Square, Littleborough, near Manchester.

R. P. Williams, 32, The Crescent, Pewsey, Wilts.

A. T. Willson, 67, Oldfield Road, Willesden, N.W.10.

J. Wilmot, 2, Council Houses, Compton, Winchester.

E. Wood, 73, West Grove, Gipsyville, Hull.

W. Woodruff, 221, Mount Street, Bradford.

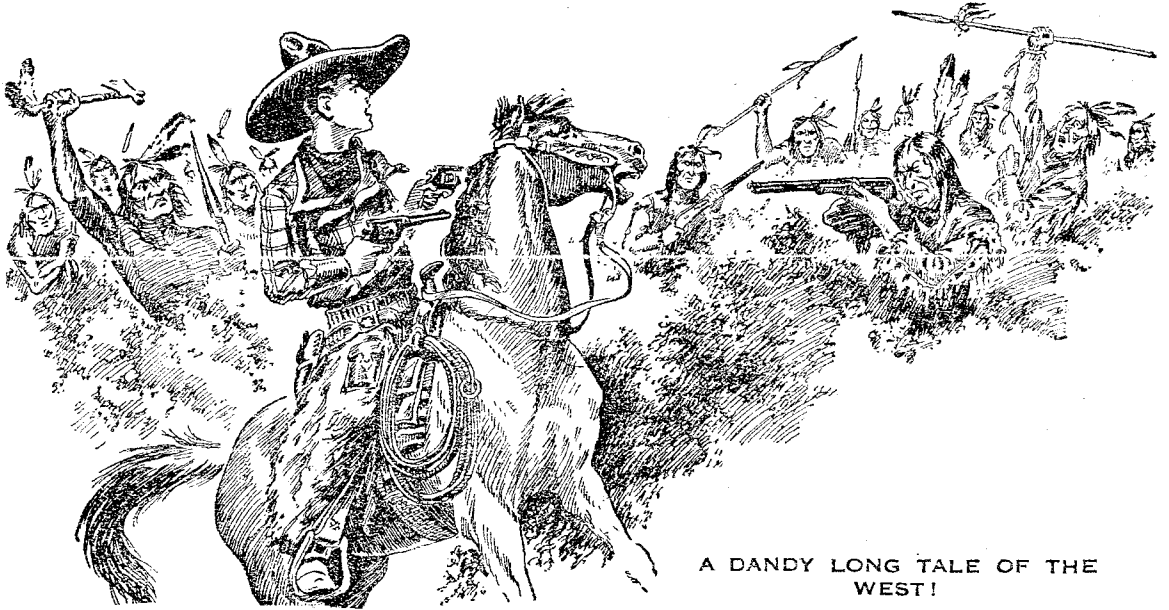
A. L. Wright, Vinny Ridge, Dulwich Road, Holland-on-Sea, Essex.

A. Wynn, 13, Kemp Street, Rochdale, Lancs.

The Correct Solution to the four sets of puzzle-pictures was:

- | | |
|-------------|---------------|
| 1. William. | 17. Albert. |
| 2. Jack. | 18. Roderick. |
| 3. Edward. | 19. Arnold. |
| 4. Andrew. | 20. King. |
| 5. Thomas. | 21. Vane. |
| 6. Harold. | 22. James. |
| 7. David. | 23. Teddy. |
| 8. Peter. | 24. Toole. |
| 9. Ernest. | 25. Stephen. |
| 10. Lionel. | 26. Toby. |
| 11. Owen. | 27. Eric. |
| 12. Robert. | 28. Herman. |
| 13. Earl. | 29. Jock. |
| 14. Philip. | 30. Max. |
| 15. Dick. | 31. Lance. |
| 16. Moses. | 32. Keith. |

THE RIO KID'S QUEST!



A DANDY LONG TALE OF THE WEST!

An Old Acquaintance!

CHIEF MANY PONIES peered through the screen of sage and greasewood, and his black eyes glittered at the horseman who was riding up the sandy ridge. He muttered a word in the guttural dialect of the Apache, and the tattered braves round him lay low in cover. A savage grin was reflected from one coppery face to another. There were twenty or more of the ragged Apaches crouching in the thicket that crowned the ridge, in the desert of the Staked Plain, and the white man, unknowing, was riding directly towards them—directly into their hands. Chief Many Ponies watched the rider as he advanced.

He saw a cow-puncher, mounted on a mustang covered thick with the dust of the plain; but the brim of the Stetson hat hid the face from his view. The Apache chief sank back into cover, and waited. The beat of the mustang's hoofs came to his ears, coming nearer and nearer. In a few minutes more the horseman would be among the crowd of crouching Redskins.

The Rio Kid rode on. His eyes were scanning the ground about him as he rode. But he was not aware of the camp of the Apaches in the thickets ahead. He was looking for sign—for long hours riding under the burning sun the Kid had been looking for sign.

Many a long mile lay between the Kid and the valley of the Yaqui, from which he had fled in the dawn. Long ago he had dropped the last of his pursuers. He was hunting now for sign of the trail of Slick Singer, the gunman of Packsaddle, who had escaped from the Yaqui encampment in the

lost valley, with the boy prisoner of whom the Kid was in quest. But what direction the gunman had taken in his flight, and whether the Yaqui had overtaken him, the Kid did not know. He had little hope that either the Packsaddle gunman or the boy still lived. But he aimed to know for certain before he hit the trail out of the desert. He scanned the sun-baked earth for sign as he rode up the ridge towards the thickets of sage and greasewood. There was no sign. But the Kid figured that from the top of the high ridge he might pick up some sight either of the fugitives, or of the pur-

lowered—reluctantly. But the word of Chief Many Ponies was law to the gang of ragged outcasts who followed his lead.

The Rio Kid's face brightened. He slipped his guns back into the holsters, and held out his hand to the copper-skinned chief.

"Say, feller, I'm powerful glad to meet up with you!" he exclaimed. "I figured that I might come across you in the Staked Plain, Many Ponies. And this sure is a sight for sore eyes."

Many Ponies, tattered and dusty in dingy leggings and ragged blanket and draggled feathers, saluted the Kid with the grave dignity of an Indian chief.

"The heart of Many Ponies is light to see his little white brother," he declared. "The little chief is welcome to the camp of the Apache."

The Kid slipped from his mustang.

Few white men would have been glad to fall in with Chief Many Ponies, and his ragged horde of outcasts in the desert of the Staked Plain. But the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande and the chief of the outcast horde were old acquaintances and friends, and the meeting was good fortune to the Kid.

"What you doing here, chief?" he asked.

Many Ponies waved a dusky hand towards the distant south-east. He did not need to answer in words—that gesture in the direction of the cow country was enough. The Kid's face clouded for a moment. Outlaw as he was, he was a cowman born and bred, and cattle-lifting got his goat. The Apaches were on a raid to lift cows from the ranges that bordered on the Staked Plain. But it was no business of the Kid's, and he dismissed it with a shrug of the shoulders.

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The Rio Kid Borrows a Redskin Tribe

To Help Him in a Strange Quest!

suing Yaqui on the boundless expanse of the level plain beyond. He pushed his mustang into the thickets of dusty sage and evil smelling greasewood, and a moment later dark faces and glittering, black eyes, and dusky hands grasping spear and tomahawk, rose round him in a swarm.

"Great gophers!" ejaculated the Kid. His guns were in his hands in a second. The rifle of Chief Many Ponies was aimed at his breast.

But neither the boy puncher nor the Apache chief pulled trigger. There was an exclamation on both sides of surprised recognition.

"Chief Many Ponies!" exclaimed the Kid.

"Wah!" The Apache chief waved back the crowd of braves that swarmed round the Kid. "Chief Many Ponies did not know that it was his white brother."

He dropped the butt of the rifle to the earth. The crowd of weapons that had been raised round the Kid were

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"I reckon you can help me, chief, if you want," said the Kid.

The Apache chief waved his dusky hand again, this time towards the watching crowd of bucks, and then touched his own breast. The Kid understood the silent language of the taciturn Redskin. The chief was offering him the services of himself and his scattered following.

"Good!" said the Kid.

"My brother's enemies are trailing him in the Llano Estacado?" asked Chief Many Ponies.

The Rio Kid shook his head with a grin.

"I guess the sheriffs ain't honing to trail me in the Staked Plain, chief," he answered. "I reckon they'd be food for the coyotes and the turkey buzzards if they did. It ain't that. I guess I'm looking for a galoot that's riding the Staked Plain, if the Yaqui haven't got him yet."

"The Yaqui are dogs," said the chief sententiously. "They flee like coyotes before the braves of the Apache."

"You've said it," agreed the Kid. "Them Yaqui sure is pizen. I guess I'll put you wise, chief. And if you want to help me out, I'll sure be powerful pleased. I been looking for a white boy that was a prisoner in the Yaqui Valley. There's a big ranch and a fortune waiting for him in San Antonio. But there was another guy looking for him—Slick Singer, the gunman of Packsaddle, that I reckon you've heard of."

The Apache nodded.

"That guy was roped in by the Yaqui," went on the Kid. "And I figure that the boy let him loose, and they got away together last night. The Yaqui was after them, but whether they got them or not, I ain't found out. I got to find out, chief."

Another nod.

"But that ain't all," said the Kid. "That fire-bug, Slick Singer, is after the boy to shoot him up. And I guess if the kid gets away from the Yaqui he won't get away from Slick. I'm sure a whole heap worried about that kid. I guess there ain't a dog's chance that he's alive yet. But if that gunman has wiped him out, I'm going to get that galoot." The Kid's eyes gleamed. "I'll sure trail him till I get him, if he's harmed that papoose. But hunting for them in the Staked Plain is sure like hunting a flea on a Mexican dog. Say, you want to help?"

"Chief Many Ponies can trail the wind in the desert," said the Apache. "My little white brother has spoken. It is enough."

"Good for you!" said the Kid.

The chief turned to his braves, and there was a muttering for a few minutes in the Apache dialect. He turned back to the Kid.

"My young men have seen the trail of many horses," he said. "In the sunrise we passed the trail."

The Kid nodded eagerly.

"I guess that'll be the trail of the Yaqui that was after them," he said. "I guess it's a Texas dollar to a Mexican cent that the Injatas have got them—but I sure want to know. We want to hit that trail, chief."

"Wah! It is good!" said Chief Many Ponies.

When the Rio Kid rode out of the thickets he was riding by the side of Chief Many Ponies, with the score of tattered Redskins following. Ere long they struck the trail of the Yaqui riders who had pursued Slick Singer and the boy.

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The Kid dismounted to examine the trail.

It showed the passage of many riders—not less than twenty-five, the Kid reckoned. Some of the tracks were fresher than others, and there was no sign of returning hoof-prints. It was easy for the Kid to read the sign. A bunch of the Yaqui, he reckoned, had followed Slick Singer in the night, and others had followed on at dawn.

But many hours had passed since that trail was made, and in those hours what had happened to the fugitives? That the Kid could only learn by following the trail. He remounted the grey mustang, and rode on with the Apaches.

The Man on the Mesa!

CRACK!

The rifle rang from the summit of the mesa, and the shot was answered by a Yaqui yell.

Slick Singer gave a snarl of savage satisfaction.

Another of the Redskins had gone to his account; though it made no difference, he knew, to the finish. They had him—they had him dead to rights. And all that was left to the gunman of Packsaddle was to die fighting, like a rat in a corner, and sell his life dearly.

He lay on the summit of the mesa—a steep mass of rock that rose fifteen feet or more from the level plain. The rugged sides were steep, almost as walls; not easy to climb with a desperate rifleman watching from the summit.

Twice the Yaqui had attempted to rush the mesa, and each time the gunman had driven them off, and round the lonely rock six or seven of the Yaqui lay still. And the rest, crouching round the tall rock in the cover of sand-ridges and bushes, watched and waited, every now and then losing off a bullet. But the lead whistled harmlessly over the desperate man who crouched above.

Round the mesa, mile on mile, as far as the eye could reach, lay the dry desert, with clouds of dust stirring in a hot wind, the level broken only by arid ridges and patches of dusty sage and greasewood, and tall cacti lifting their skeleton arms.

Overhead, the hot sun blazed, and the rock on which the gunman lay was almost burning to the touch. Heat as of a furnace tormented him, as he lay unsheltered in the pitiless blaze of the sun, and thirst parched him, and ached in his throat. Not a drop of water passed his lips during the long, hot hours, while he held his position against the Redskins, and the savages of the desert howled round him.

More than once the gunman had been tempted to let the enemy scale the mesa, and to end his torment in a last hand-to-hand struggle, and death. For there was no hope, no chance of hope. But the instinct to live, and to kill, was strong on him. There was a savage satisfaction in making the Yaqui pay dear for his scalp.

He watched with savage eyes. A Yaqui had stirred from cover, and the shot from the top of the mesa laid him out in the sage. A fierce yelling and a spattering of bullets on the rock answered.

"Dog-gone their red hides!" muttered Slick Singer. "Dog-gone 'em! They got me! But I guess the boy's safe!" It was strange enough that that

thought should give him satisfaction in the last hours of a wild and misspent life. The boy was heir to the big ranch at San Antonio, and if he had died in the Staked Plain his only relative would have stepped into his shoes. And it was with the ruthless intention that Dick Singer should die in the Staked Plain that the gunman had sought him. And he had found him in the encampment of the Yaqui in the lost valley. But it was as a helpless prisoner, doomed to death, that the gunman had reached the lodges of the Yaqui.

And the boy, knowing nothing of his ruthless scheme, had saved him, and fled with him, trusting his life innocently in the hands of the man who sought his death. And somehow that innocent faith had worked a change in the gunman's hard heart and scared mind.

His heart was not, perhaps, so hard as he had fancied; perhaps, when it had come to the test, he would have been incapable of the dastardly deed he had schemed. He hardly knew. But he knew that when the test came, his good angel had won, against the counsels of evil, and he had forced the boy to flight, and remained behind, dismounted, to face the pursuers.

Somewhere, in the far distance of the desert, the boy rode free, on the chestnut cow-pony. And Slick Singer, surrounded by merciless foes, waited for death.

Already the Yaqui had paid dearly. Seven of the savage braves lay dead round the mesa. At a further distance lay the chief Black Hawk. Others among the savage gang were wounded. But sixteen or seventeen savage braves still watched the mesa, and though they did not attempt to rush the rock again, the end could not be far off.

They had only to wait till fatigue and thirst delivered the paleface into their hands. Slick Singer longed for another rush, but it did not come. Long before the burning day was over he knew that he would be lying helpless there, conquered by heat and thirst, unable to defend himself when the Redskins came clambering up. And the Yaqui knew it, too, and they waited.

"Dog-gone 'em!" growled the gunman, between his teeth.

The hot wind scared his face; the dust of the desert was thick on his cracking lips, in his parched throat. The sun was past the meridian now, blazing down on him, scorching him with heat. A draggled feathered head-dress showed among the sage on the plain, and the gunman fired. But the bullet went wide, and he cursed. His dazzled eyes were losing their keenness, his scorched and burning hands their skill. The end could not be far off now. The rifle in his hands almost burned his fingers.

His haggard eyes swept the far plain from the height of the mesa. The boy was saved. He had seen the Yaqui who had ridden after him, ride back to join their comrades who besieged the mesa. The boy was saved. But nothing could save the man who had ridden into the Staked Plain seeking a fortune by a crime, and who had found there repentance—and death!

Dust-clouds, stirred by the hot wind, floated on the plain. A thicker cloud than the rest caught the gunman's eye, and he knew that it was caused by approaching horsemen. He watched it idly. No help could come to him. In that remote desert the only riders were the outcast Redskins—Yaqui, Navajo, and Apache—who preferred the deso-

late waste to the Indian reservations. Through the dust-cloud he caught the gleam of spears, the nodding of feathers. Another gang of Yaqui, he reckoned, coming to join the copper-skinned demons who surrounded him—there were more than enough of them already.

From the top of the mesa he saw the advancing riders long before they were visible to the Yaqui on the plain below. But when the Redskins became aware of them there was a sudden excitement among the braves who besieged the mesa. The gunman heard guttural exclamations in tones of excitement and alarm. A word floated up to his ears, "Apache!" And there was a sudden rush of the Yaqui, who had been lying in cover, towards the horses they had left in the shelter of a hollow at a little distance. The gunman knew now what was the matter. The newcomers were not a fresh gang of Yaqui, but some rival gang of Apaches, and they came as foes to his foes.

It meant nothing to him. From Apache he had as much to fear as from Yaqui. Any white man was fair game to any of the outcast Redskins who haunted the solitary desert. But he grinned over his rifle as the Yaqui broke cover and ran for their horses. Twice he fired among them, and one, at least, of the braves rolled over and did not rise again. He was losing his grip now, his shooting was wild. But one, at least, of the enemy had gone down.

The Yaqui mounted in hot haste, and dashed away over the plain. They did not ride to meet the approaching Apaches. Evidently they were thinking only of escape. The odds were on the side of the newcomers, and the Yaqui rode for safety. They gave no glance to the mesa, or the desperate man who had so nearly fallen into their hands. He was forgotten now, as the Yaqui urged their saggy ponies to top speed, with their backs to the advancing Apaches.

The gunman watched idly with dizzy eyes. The outcome of the trouble was nothing to him; his doom was the same.

He saw the Apaches sweep past the mesa at a furious gallop, and ride after the fleeing Yaqui. But one remained behind, and Slick Singer rubbed his dizzy eyes and stared again at the man in chaps and Stetson.

"The Kid!" he muttered hoarsely. "The Rio Kid!"

He rose to his feet, and waved wildly to the boy puncher. The sight of a white man in that wilderness of death was like wine to him. They had parted on bitter terms. The Kid knew his design, and had come near to shooting him out of hand when he discovered it. But the sight of the Kid brought hope to the man who had lain for hours in the torture of thirst, in the grim fear of death. He waved to the Kid, and shouted hoarsely in a cracked voice. Throwing down his rifle, he scrambled headlong down the steep side of the mesa.

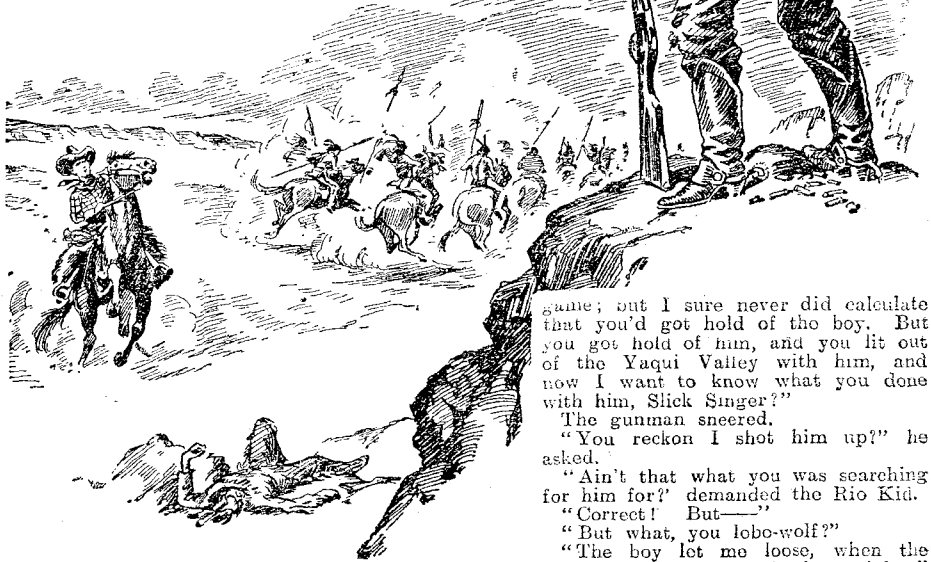
"Water!" The Rio Kid looked at him. His face was grim, his eyes glinting. But

he unhooked his can, and handed it to the gunman, and Slick Singer placed it to his lips, and drained the water to the last drop.

The Kid on the Trail!

THE Kid stood silent, waiting. His face did not relax; his lips were set hard, and his eyes glinted at the gunman. His hand rested on the butt of a gun. Slick Singer, having drained the last drop from the can, leaned on the mesa, panting. But the quenching of his thirst had given him new life, and he was pulling himself together. He fixed his haggard eyes on the Kid, and, reading the expression on the boy

Slick Singer rose to his feet, and waved wildly to the Rio Kid in the plain below.



game; but I sure never did calculate that you'd got hold of the boy. But you got hold of him, and you lit out of the Yaqui Valley with him, and now I want to know what you done with him, Slick Singer?"

The gunman sneered. "You reckon I shot him up?" he asked.

"Ain't that what you was searching for him for?" demanded the Rio Kid.

"Correct! But—"

"But what, you lobo-wolf?" "The boy let me loose, when the Yaqui had me fixed dead to rights," said the gunman. "After that—"

He broke off. The Kid scanned his haggard face curiously.

"After that, even you wasn't durned skunk enough to shoot him up?" "You get me!"

"Then where is he? You was cornered on that mesa. What's become of the boy? He ain't there?"

The Kid nodded towards the rock. "He sure ain't."

"I want to know," said the Kid quietly. "I know what you was after, Slick Singer; and if you done got away with it, you're a dead gun-slinger. If the boy's gone over the range, you go after him, pronto. Speak, you scally-wag, afore I let drive a bullet through your durned cabeza." He half-raised his revolver. "Where's that boy Dick?"

"You can search me." "You want me to believe you don't know?"

"Jest that." "Put it clear. What's happened to him?" said the Kid. "I ain't giving you the benefit of any doubt. If you've harmed him—"

The gunman laughed sardonically. "Spill it, you durned polecat!" snapped the Kid. "I'll say it ain't safe to keep me waiting."

"The boy's gone, on my horse," said Slick sullenly. "The Yaqui was riding us down, and the cayuse carryin' double, and I drove off the boss with the boy on it, and took to the mesa to hold off the Injuns. I guess he rode clear."

The Kid eyed him.

"You want me to believe that?" he said contemptuously.

"Jest as you durned well choose."

"You came to the Staked Plain to find him and kill him, because he stood between you and a fortune way back at San Antone. You want me to believe that you gave him your cayuse to escape on, and stayed behind to face the music on your lonesome—and you the hardest cuss in Texas, a gun-slinger that's shot up more galoots than he's got fingers and toes! Aw, give a guy something easier than that, Slick Singer."

"I guess you won't believe it," said the gunman, with a nod.

"I jest don't."

"But that's the how of it, Kid, believe it or not. After what he did, I jest couldn't hurt the boy—he trusted me."

"He trusted you?" said the Kid.

"He sure did not know you, Slick."

"He sure did not!" said the gunman. "And he trusted me, and I saved him; and if I got out of this cussed desert alive, it's me for Packsaddle and the poker joints, and the boy'll go to San Antone to his ranch and never see hide nor hair of me. But what's the good of chewing the rag—you ain't believing me."

"I sure am not!" said the Kid. "More like, I guess, that you gave him his last sickness, and left him to the Yaqui. But I ain't shooting you up till I make sure. I guess there's a dog's chance that you're telling me the truth; and I reckon I'm hunting for that boy. If I don't find him, Slick Singer, you need not tell me any more lies—it's you for the long jump."

Chief Many Ponies came riding back to the mesa. His braves followed him. The Yaqui were already far away, riding for their lives, and the Apaches had dropped the pursuit. They had roped in nine or ten horses belonging to the Yaqui, who had fallen round the mesa, and some of the braves dismounted to gather up scattered rifles and cartridges and tomahawks. All was grist that came to the mill of the tattered outcasts of the Staked Plain.

Many Ponies looked at the sullen-faced gunman leaning on the rugged side of the mesa, and looked inquiringly at the Rio Kid. The Kid's face was dark with thought. There was a possibility that the gunman had told him the truth, and that the boy yet lived. To one knowing Slick Singer as the Kid knew him, the chance seemed slight. More likely—much more likely—it was a false tale to avert vengeance. But there was a chance.

The Apache chief touched his tomahawk, with a significant gesture. Slick Singer stared sullenly on. His life was the Kid's, to spare or to take. The Kid shook his head.

"Not yet, chief! If that scallywag ain't harmed the papoose, I guess I want him to ride safe."

"Where papoose?" asked Many Ponies.

"That lobo-wolf allows that he rode off, when the Yaqui surrounded him at this mesa," said the Kid. "I guess if it's true I'll pick up sign. I've

trailed with that geek, and I know the track of his boss like it was my own. Say, you lend him a cayuse, chief, and rope him on it safe an' sound; while I'm hunting sign."

"Ugh! It is good!" said the Apache.

"Where'd you last see the kid, if you've told me straight?" asked the boy puncher, turning to Slick again.

"Yonder was the way he went." The gunman pointed. "I guess you'll find all that's left of Black Hawk, the Yaqui chief, on his trail. He was riding after the boy to spear him, when I shot him in the back from the top of the mesa."

"I guess I'll soon know."

The Rio Kid moved off to the spot indicated by the gunman. Two or three of the Apaches, at a sign from Many Ponies, seized the gunman and roped him on the back of one of the captured horses. He submitted sullenly; resistance was impossible. Then the whole party, with the prisoner in their midst, followed the Kid.

Slick's eyes dwelt on the boy puncher anxiously. His life depended on the Kid picking up the trail of the chestnut cow-pony, on which the boy had escaped.

The Kid moved along slowly, his eyes on the sun-baked earth for sign.

His face was clouded; he had little hope that the boy yet lived. But he was clinging to what chance there was. On one point he was grimly determined; if he failed to find the trail of the cow-pony, Slick Singer's life was numbered by minutes. The gunman's face was dark with anxiety as he watched the boy outlaw seeking sign.

Many Ponies joined the Kid. He pointed with a brown finger to a scarcely distinguishable mark on the hard earth.

"Cayuse pass here!" said the Indian. "I guess so," assented the Kid, with a nod. "But that ain't enough to tell me what I want to know."

He moved on, with his keen eyes on the ground. There was a sign that a horse had passed, but so faint that only the eye of a Redskin or of the Rio Kid could have picked it up. It was not sufficient to identify the track.

Step by step the Kid and the Indian picked up the trail and followed it, the Apaches following behind it, the gunman bound on his horse.

The Kid uttered a sudden exclamation and darted forward. There was a patch of soft sand, in which the marks of hoofs lay legibly written. The Kid dropped on his knees and examined the sign eagerly.

"By the great horned toad, that's the tread of Slick's cow-pony!" he muttered.

The gunman caught the words, and he gave a gasp of relief. The trail had been found.

The Kid rose to his feet.

"I guess you got a dog's chance for your life, Slick," he said. "That sure is the trail of your cow-pony. He went this way, and I guess he was going hard. You still allow that the boy was on his back?"

"Sure!"

"I'm following that trail," said the Kid. "If it leads me to the boy, you'll live, Slick Singer; if it don't, you're meat for the coyotes! You wait a piece."

The gunman, roped to the back of the Yaqui pony, waited, while the Kid talked to Chief Many Ponies. He needed no more help from the Apaches, and the chief was anxious to get on his own trail. A few words, and the Kid

grasped the dusky hand of his Indian pard, and they parted.

The Apaches rode away to the south-east, and soon disappeared in a cloud of dust. The Kid turned back to his mustang, and mounted.

With his riato tied to the gunman's horse, he led Slick Singer after him, as he pushed on the trail of the chestnut cow-pony.

Faint as that trail was, it was clear enough to the keen eyes of the Kid. He followed it at a loping trot, and behind him rode the gunman, bound to his horse, his hands tied down to his sides, and hope and fear mingled in his breast.

If the trail led the Rio Kid to the lost boy, his life was safe; but if it did not—The gunman's face was haggard as he followed behind the Kid through the long hot hours, in the silence and solitude of the desert.

The Home Trail!

THE boy lay sleeping in the shadow of a bush, his head pillowed on his arm—the sleep of weariness. Beside him lay the chestnut cow-pony, equally weary. How far he had ridden after escaping from the Yaqui at the mesa, Dick Singer did not know; but he had ridden until the flagging horse had stopped and refused to go farther.

He was safe from the Yaqui now; there was no sign of pursuit when the weary boy lay down to rest in the shade of the bush.

His thoughts, as he sank into slumber, were of the man who had saved him, who had driven the horse into flight, and remained behind to die at the hands of the Yaqui. By that act of self-sacrifice Slick Singer had saved him from the Redskins. But whether the boy, alone in the desert, could ever find his way out of the wilderness to the settlements was another matter.

Slick Singer had done all that he could, and the boy, who would gladly have stayed with him and shared his fate, thought of him with gratitude.

But his thoughts were dimmed by weariness, and he soon sank into a deep sleep, and lay unconscious of the hours that passed.

From the dusty sage a skinny animal, with glaring, hungry eyes, crept, and whined softly, watching the boy and the horse. Both were sunk in deep slumber, and did not heed the coyote. But the scavenger of the desert knew that they lived, and dared not touch them.

Another and another gaunt brute crept from the sage, till more than a score of the fierce-eyed animals squatted round, watching, waiting, but not daring to approach close. Still the boy slept.

He was unconscious of the sound of hoof-beats that broke the silence of the desert as the sun was sinking to the west. He did not hear the startled howls of the coyotes as they scattered and fled before a lashing quirt.

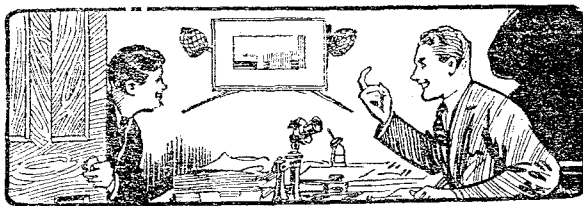
His eyes did not open till there was a heavy tread close by him and the sound of a voice in his ears.

Then they opened, with startled terror, and for one fearful moment he fancied that it was the Yaqui who had run him down. His hand went desperately to the knife in his belt. Then he saw that it was a white man who bent over him—a man in Stetson and chaps. His hand dropped from the knife; he raised himself on his elbow, and stared

(Continued on page 12.)

A CHIN-WAG

with YOUR EDITOR!



OH, WHAT AN ISSUE!

I'VE got so much to say about next week's issue—so many new and wonderful features to announce—that I really don't know where to begin. (This is where you chaps are going to sit up and gasp.)

Let's make a start by saying a few words about the Popolaki Patrol. I mentioned in last week's issue the start of a grand new series of stories dealing with the adventures of a patrol of Boy Scouts in the wilds of the Congo. This series starts next week! To those of you who might have missed my previous announcement of these stories, let me say

that the Popolaki Patrol are some boys. Headed by Lyn Strong, their leader, and backed up in their stormy adventures in the jungles by a giant native chief, Bobo, they will give POPULAR readers all the thrills they'll want for a long time.

There are five of 'em that wear the colours of the patrol—Lyn Strong, Fatty Page—who eats all day and night, Pip Parker—the smallest member, but nevertheless a tough 'un, Smuts—the Dutchman, and a great man in a fight, and Stacpoole—the dandy. (Stac's such a dandy that he carries a clothes brush in case he soils his trucks on trek.) Take a peeper at the sketch at the foot of this page—and you'll see what they're like.

The Popolaki Patrol will be here next week!

NOW FOR A SCREAM!

I suppose you're wondering what all these little figures are doing on this page, and what they're supposed to represent. Well, it's like this. I've been thinking of adding another new feature to the programme of the POPULAR. Then I had a brainwave—a 100 per cent, gilt-edged wheeze—in other words, a COMIC SUPPLEMENT! There, now you know what good news number two is.

My word, we are going strong! A laugh a day keeps the doctor away. Well, here's something to put all the does in the world out of commission: A comic supplement, with more laughs in it than you have hairs on your head—bald men and babies not counted!

Didn't I tell you I'd got a lot to say to you this week? Well, I've not finished yet. Look out!

This comic supplement, which starts next week, is going to make a sensation, believe me. All the best comic artists have been wearing out the seat of my visitors' chair and walking threadbare my carpets in their countless visits to my sanctum concerning this supplement. Many a head has been scratched—leave out that joke about splinters!—in the

endeavour to tickle up the jolly old brain box. And we—that's the artists and myself—have compiled what we feel sure will bring down the house—in jokes.

OUR COMIC CHARACTERS!

To start with, there's Monty Dagg, the sheriff who goes about dressed up to "kill." He's a nut, a dude, a soft-looking guy. But you mustn't go by appearances with this chap. He's all there when it comes to catching gunmen, hoboes, and such-like insects. Of course, he gets it in the neck at times, and at those times you really wonder whether you are going to bust a waistcoat button with laughing.

Jerry Jinks of Funnycutts School is another breezy joker who figures in our Comic Supplement. And with him are two flappers, the Head's daughters, who help to keep up the fun and spirit at Dr. Birch's Academy for young sparks.

Here's a little Eastern touch—Ali Hoop-la, and his snakey snake—a pair

stand on your feet and give three hearty cheers!

Who'd like a Bowman Engine? Or a Schneider Seaplanes? Or a box of Conjuring Tricks? Or a fountain-pen? Or a model yacht? Or a—steady, let's



get this right. Am I offering you these and many other gifts FREE? YES! Am I asking you to solve picture puzzles? NO! And this is where I ask you to take special notice!

In next week's issue you will find full particulars of a Grand Free Gift Scheme. In this there are no picture puzzles to be solved, no entry to a competition—nothing to do, in fact, but to send in your name and address on the specially provided registration form.

Each week, starting from next week, I shall allot a number of Free Gifts to registered readers—and when you see your name in the prize list, it will be necessary for you to claim your gift. Now there's nothing more simple than this—and the hundreds of presents I have to give away are sights to gladden the eyes of every boy and girl.

Engines, aeroplanes, seaplanes, conjuring tricks, fountain pens, tanks, Spring-heel Jack novelties, model speed boats and yachts, and many other things.

In next week's issue you will find the first list of readers' names to whom gifts have been allotted.

of fun-merchants you'll simply go crazy about. All likes to help the world go round on even wheels—but he's not always successful in this. Then we can't help bursting into song again (laughter, I should say) when he comes a cropper and sits counting the stars float about. Still, I must say Ali is a tough 'un to trip.

"I still have you, Sonny Boy." Yes, we've got old Sonny Boy billed in the supplement—and his pop, too. Good old pop—he's got such a sweet singing voice. Sonny Boy doesn't stand more than three feet, but what he lacks in inches he makes up for in jokes.

Now I've given you the once-over about the characters that are appearing in our new Comic Supplement—all you've got to do is sit tight and wait for it—next week.

FREE GIFTS FOR YOU!

Ah! Did I hear you say: "What's this!" in tones of great excitement? Yes, I think I did—and rightly so. For now I'm going to make you



THE POPOLAKI PATROL.

ing, beneath the bedclothes. In his mouth Cornelius carried a young rabbit, for Cornelius was an unblushing poacher. And as Cornelius proceeded to trot homewards, the eyes of Thunder and Blazes rested on him. Without letting go the ruins of the hat-brim Thunder and Blazes swept forward in pursuit like one dog.

Over the hat-brim went Beilby, his feet wrenched from under him, and over the hat-brim went Bindley also, prone in the dust. Cornelius looked over his shoulder, and began to hurry. Dropping the hat-brim, the two bulldogs raced their hardest, and Mr. Whiffler's horse, that had been sound asleep in the shafts, woke up and went jogging onwards.

"Oh, rats to the dogs!" said Bindley, picking himself up. "Ouch! I flopped with a bit of a jar."

Beilby picked himself up, too, not quite so mirthful as he had been. The lean face of Mr. Whiffler and the plump face of Mr. Bloomby worked spasmodically, and these gentlemen slowly, and with the greatest care, extricated themselves from the thorns. The alderman was out first, as there was not so much of him for the thorns to cling to. He folded his arms and glared at the ground in a terrible and tragic manner, and spoke in sepulchral accents apparently from the lowest button of his frock-coat.

"Capering whelp!" said Alderman Whiffler. "The time is not yet, but we shall meet again. Base poltroon, who dare not meet me man to man, but who walks abroad surrounded by a pack of ferocious mongrels and urges them on to devour me! Blatant, bloated blower! Ha, ha! Beware, Bloomby—beware-r-r-r!" The day will come, Bloomby, when I will crush you, or-ush you, er-r-rush you, ker-r-rush you, Bloomby, like a war-r-rum under my heel.

After this bloodcurdling prophecy, Mr. Whiffler turned and strode away, with a majestic air, quite forgetting in the tremendous agitation of his mind that he had come out with a hat and a horse and cart, and was going home without them.

Mr. Bloomby wiped the perspiration from his brow and removed a thorn from his neck.

"Here, you fork out quick, Mr.

The Rio Kid's Quest!

(Continued from page 6.)

up blankly at the tanned face of the puncher.

"By the great horned toad!" said the Rio Kid. "Say, sonny, I guess you'll be Dick Singer!"

"Yes," breathed the boy. "This sure is a sight for sore eyes!" chuckled the Kid. "I done found you, sonny!"

The boy sat up. "You don't want to worry none," said the Kid reassuringly. "You're with a friend now, boy, that'll see you safe to white men's country. Say, put a galoot wise. How'd you come by this boss?"

"He gave it to me," said the boy. "My Cousin Slick, who saved me. He gave the horse to me."

"Great snakes!" murmured the Kid. The gunman had told him the truth, and it astonished the Kid to know it. "They've killed him!" muttered Dick. "I would have stayed with him, THE POPULAR.—No. 587.

Bloomby!" said Beilby. "Look at that! All that's left of my new straw hat! Your beastly dogs have ripped it to rags, and I believe they've bitten me, too. What are you going to do about it?"

The mayor thrust a couple of notes into Beilby's clutching hand.

"Leave—pshaw!—leave me in peace!" panted Mr. Josiah Bloomby. "Leave me—pshaw!—in peace, that is all I ask!"

Beilby did not even say "Thank you!" He sprinted up the road. He had quite expected ten shillings, and hoped for a pound; but the mayor had given him two. Beilby let no grass grow under his boots, but left the district before Mr. Bloomby could discover his mistake and ask for the return of one of those precious scraps of paper. Two pounds for a last year's straw-yard, when he could buy a brand new one for four-and-sixpence!

It was a joy ride, a gilt-edged stunt that filled Beilby's greedy little heart with rapture. To get as much as he could for nothing was his one aim in life. His luck was at full tide, and in his joy he forgot the ink on his face, and cautiously opened the classroom door, intending to slip into his seat when he saw Mr. Pycroft's back turned.

The chance was there for the taking. Mr. Pycroft was at the blackboard writing.

"Kindly spell apparition, Sargent," he said, without turning. "The word—er—I am about to write."

Sargent was not sure how many p's there were in the word, but, prompted in a whisper by Raffel, he spelt it accurately.

"Good!" said Mr. Pycroft, as Beilby tiptoed to his seat in the back row. "Define its meaning, Haik."

"A—sort of spectre, sir, a—sort of ghost thing," replied Haik. "You see it, and you know it isn't real, and can't be there."

"Dear me," said Mr. Pycroft. "You see it, and you know it—er—can't be there, do you? In the name of the most elementary logic, Haik, can you see a thing that you know can't be there? What an extraordinary definition."

"I believe, sir, that a better definition would be a preternatural appearance, sir," put in Nathaniel Wilberforce Welby Stott.

"Thank you, Stott," said Mr. Pycroft,

but he drove the horse away, and the Yaqui were following; I could not get back to him. And they've killed him—"

"Forget it, sonny!" said the Kid. "They ain't killed that guy a whole heap; they sure ain't!"

The Kid turned away, and trod back to where he had left the gunman, beyond the bushes. Slick Singer eyed him.

The Kid drew his knife, and cut through the rawhide ropes that bound Slick to the horse.

"I guess this lets you out," he said. "I've found the boy."

"Alive?" "Jest alive and kicking," said the Kid. "He allows that you gave him the boss and made him ride, jest as you let on!"

The gunman grinned sourly. He slid from the horse, made a step towards the bushes, hesitated, and turned back to the Kid. There was a strange expression on his hard face.

"The boy trusted me—he trusts me!" he muttered. "You don't want to put him wise—you don't want to tell him what I rode into the Staked Plain for, Kid! You can go easy on that!"

"It is—er—better, but it is somewhat vague. Probably the dictionary will carry as a little further than that, but it is not satisfying, it is not—ha!—sufficiently complete. Let me see," went on the senior Housemaster, knitting his learned brows, and glancing round. "An apparition is— Goo-oo ood gracious!"

Mr. Pycroft's startled gaze fell upon Beilby. Even if Mr. Pycroft could not define the word to his own satisfaction, he had found an apparition. Nobody else had noticed Beilby in his secluded corner. Six hasty strides brought the Housemaster to the spot. He clutched Beilby by the collar, and dragged him across the class-room.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the juniors as Mr. Pycroft hauled forth his dusky victim. "Want any coal?"

The mirth died away. With their mouths open and their eyes big and round, the boys of the Fourth Form stared at the window. Mr. Pycroft, still holding Beilby, stopped too, staring like the others. Apparitions seemed fairly cheap that day, for Alderman Whiffler's horse had arrived, still wearing the alderman's tall hat, and that ancient and sagacious steed had thrust its bony neck into the class-room, and was falling into a gentle doze.

A howl of laughter shook the rafters, and it took something to shake those sturdy old beams. And then Cornelius the rat, who had been chased round the quadrangle twice by Thunder and Blazes, bounded into the cart like a yellow streak, every hair bristling. The two bulldogs followed. There was a horrible squelching of new-laid eggs, fresh eggs, breakfast eggs, and just ordinary eggs, a pandemonium of growls and barks and snarls and hisses, and then Cornelius alighted. Calcroft's famous midnight songster leapt clean over Mr. Pycroft's head and hurled himself out of the opposite window, with Thunder and Blazes still hot on the scent, tearing across the class-room in chase.

"Goo-oo-oo-ood gracious!" said Mr. Pycroft. "Goo-oo-oo-oo—"

He was too amazed to say anything more.

THE END.

(A stirring tale of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood, appears in next week's issue. Look out for the title "THANKS TO TUBBY!")

The Kid, with a curious look at the gunman of Packsaddle, nodded.

"I ain't putting him wise," he said. "You've let up on that darned gum-game, Slick; I guess you ain't the all-fired loco-wolf you figured you was. I sure ain't spilling the beans!"

And the gunman tramped through the bushes, and reached the spot where the boy lay. Dick sprang to his feet. The Kid heard his cry of gladness, and he whistled softly.

Three rode on the trail with the earliest gleam of dawn, and two days later they were riding the lower grasslands of Texas.

There, at a hospitable ranch, the boy for whom a fortune was waiting at San Antonio found friends, and he needed the Kid's help no more.

It was long afterwards that the Kid heard of him again—heard of him as a rich rancher at San Antonio; and of Slick, once the desperate gunman of Packsaddle, as foreman of the ranch.

THE END.

(Next week a grand new series of adventure yarns commences. First story: "THE POLAKI PATROL," It's great!)

MY PAGE

By WILLY WANGLE,
the Schoolboy Wizard



Willy Wangle has never yet been able to produce an elephant from a top-hat, nor has he managed to train a camel to get rid of its hump. But what he doesn't know about conjuring, conundrums, tricky games, simple illusions, match tricks, card-board model making, and hosts of other things, isn't worth knowing! In this page, Willy will endeavour to illustrate his powers of wizardry for the benefit of POPULAR readers, so that they might, afterwards, be able to "try these stunts" on their own friends.

HAIR-RAISING WITHOUT A GHOST.—I've discovered a jolly cute stunt. You get a piece of stiff brown paper and make your chum's hair stand bolt upright with it. Having performed that miracle, you promptly proceed to draw half-inch sparks from it. From the brown paper, I mean, not the aforesaid chum's hair. You spell this miracle, "e-l-e-a-t-r-i-c-i-t-y." I didn't invent the latter. They made it before my time. But here's the trick. Fold the brown paper into a strip four inches wide, starting with a piece about eighteen inches long and eleven inches across. Dry it thoroughly before a bright fire, then place it under your arm and suddenly whisk it briskly forth. The friction set up between your arm-sleeve, the brown paper strip and your coat, does the rest. The paper is fully charged with electricity, and you can knuckle a hefy spark from it or wave it over your friend's head and agitate his wig. Don't try it on a bald man—it won't work without hair!



Watch the hair rise, as you wave the magic paper.

Let everyone see the cork resting in the centre of your palm, and trot out the parrot cry, "There's no deception, gents! It's the quickness of the hand deceives the eye!" It'll have to be a very sharp optic that spots the hair, and of course you do everything but call attention to it. With all eyes goggling, give your open hand a quick flip—and the cork's gone, to the back of your hand. Repeat the flip as you turn the hand over, and the cork's gone again, this time back to your palm. Try the trick a time or two before you go on tour with it, and experiment until you get the invisible hair exactly the right length. Don't try it at all if you are one of those ham-fisted fellows whose mitts are as awkward as a mule's trotters.

as the schoolmasters say. What about "battery"? Had you there!

MENTION OF SCHOOLMASTERS naturally calls to mind sums. Ugh! But here's a different one. You want five matches—dead or alive—to work it out. Place four of them on the table to make two X's—that is, 20 in Roman numerals. Then you ask your bewildered chums to add a fifth match and yet take one away. It stumps 'em for sure! When they won't stand it any longer, show how it is done. Stick the fifth match in between the two X's. The Roman numeral XIX thus made stands, of course, for 19. Got it? Brilliant lad!

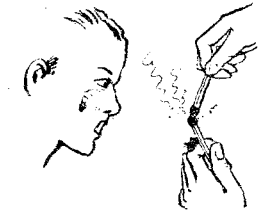


"An' does that mean I gatter give the ole chicken back?"

POOR BOOB!—A green little chemist on a fine summer day. Some chemicals mixed in a green little way. The green little grasses now tenderly wave O'er the green little chemist's green little grave.

THE HARBEST.—I was just in time the other day to dodge—by the skin of my pants—being pancaked between as fine a road smash as ever was. After the motorist and the motor-bikist had finished slanging each other they got down to concrete facts. The motorist glared at his smashed offside front mudguard, then at the bikist. "I oughter get a new wing out of you!" quoth he. "And," panted the bikist, plucking the spokes of his machine out of his hair, "you jolly well ought to have a harp as well!"

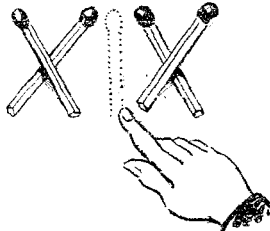
THE BIGGEST MUTT I ever heard of was an absent-minded poor fish I met at the last scout camp I honoured with my distinguished presence. They appointed him official egg-cooker. The first egg he started on he held in his hand whilst he boiled his watch for three minutes! Yes, some poor mothers do have fat-headed sons!



Look! Just a simple method of sticking two matches together, by their heads, without using glue.

TALKING OF HAIR, as we were just now, do you know that mysterious trick which all the best illusionists and conjurers trot out? Borrow a good long hair from an unshingled girl. Tie one end to a small cork. Tie t'other end to the middle finger of your right hand. The POPULAR.—No. 567.

BALANCING MATCHES.—That bit of doggerel by way of introduction to this natty match trick. Don't try it among a heap of wood-shavings, in the old newspaper cupboard, in a celluloid factory, or a fireworks works. We don't want a conflagration on our conscience! Here's the trick. Ask your chums to balance one common or garden match on the head of another. Then show 'em how you do it. With one match in your left hand, strike a second one. The instant it lights, press the head of the not-lighted match firmly on top of the other's head. As soon as the other lights up, blow both out. They'll be stuck together so firmly that they will stay united at any angle.



The one match that makes all the difference in the trick.

THE CHICKEN-STEALER was up before the beak. But they hadn't any direct evidence, not so much as a rooster's leather, to offer against him. The judge snapped: "You are acquitted!" The man goggled a bit. "Eh?" he said. "Acquitted!" barked the judge. "Oh, yer!" moaned the chicken thief. "An' does that mean I gatter give the blessed ole chicken back?"

Well, that's that! And please remember that I'm not to be held responsible if your pals hit you over the head after trying these on them.

Willy Wangle