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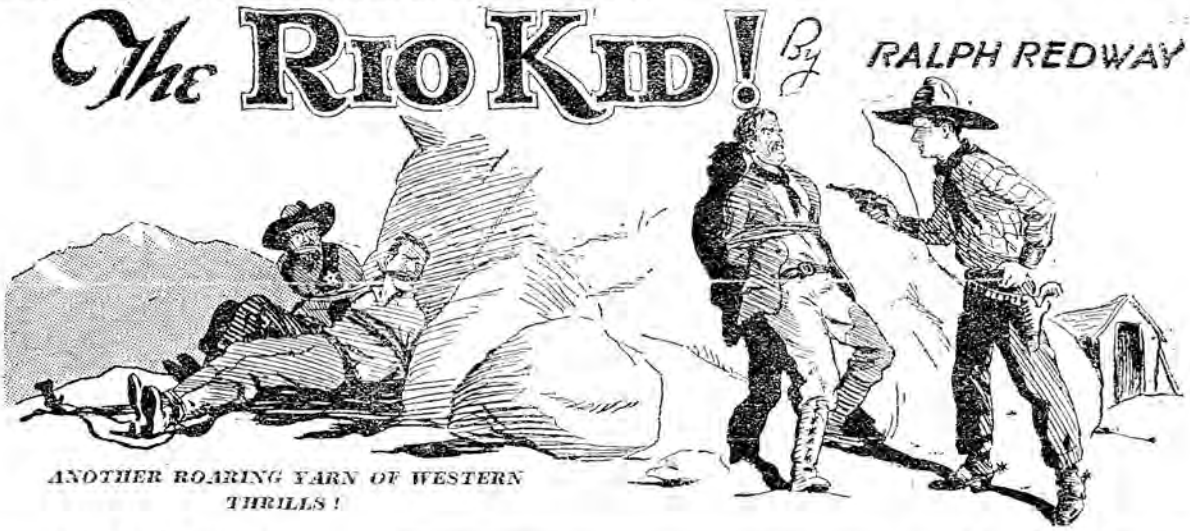
ROPED IN!

ROARING TALE OF THE WEST EVERY WEEK!

THE OUTLAW THEY COULDN'T CATCH!

There's a whole bunch of men and a sheriff closing round the Rio Kid in the wild Squaw Mountain. And still this elusive young outlaw manages to evade his numerous enemies!

The Rio Kid! By Ralph Redway



ANOTHER ROARING YARN OF WESTERN THRILLS!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Too Late!

HIGH over the summit of Squaw Mountain a silver crescent of moon sailed amid fleecy clouds. soft light glimmered down on deep valley and rocky arroyo, on nodding pines and trembling aspens. In the verdant valley where the Starbuck Ranch lay, the herds were sleeping; ranch-house and bunkhouse were dark and silent. In the deep, rocky canyon that opened on the valley from the west, splitting the mass of the mighty mountain, there was a jingling of spurs and bridles, and a pounding of hoofs. The sheriff of Pawnee Ford, with twenty armed men at his back, rode there, bunched before a tangled thicket that hid the cave in the canyon wall. Every man in the posse had a gun in his hand, every eye was on the alert. They were hunting the Rio Kid, and, though the Kid was a stranger in Wyoming, the men of Pawnee Ford had seen enough of him to be wise to it that they needed to be alert and watchful when they were close on his trail.

Jud Starbuck, the rancher of Squaw Mountain, pulled in his horse by the sheriff's side. He pointed with his quirt at the apparently impenetrable thicket that hid the rocky wall of the canyon.

"I guess that's the place, sheriff," he said, in a low voice.

The sheriff of Pawnee Ford stared at the dark thicket, high over which rose the wall of rock.

"There's a big cave in the rock behind the aspens." Starbuck spoke in a low voice, for the sheriff's ear only. He did not want the party from Pawnee Ford to hear. "I guess he's there, sheriff!"

"If he's there we've got him dead to rights, but——"

"He's sure there."

"How do you know?" The sheriff gave Starbuck a suspicious look. "There ain't a sign of trail on these rocks. I reckon no galoot would figure that there was a cave behind them aspens unless he knows this country like a book. That Texas puncher never found it for himself. Look here, Starbuck, if he's there he was hidden there by some of your cowmen."

Starbuck scowled.

"The bunch will always stand by a puncher when the sheepmen are after him," he answered, still in low tones. "I reckon my own bunch would pull guns on me if they knew I was giving the galoot away to you, sheriff. But that cuts no ice. I don't want that firebug on my range, and I'm telling you where to rope him in. I aim to keep in with the law, and to keep my outfit out of trouble. The puncher's there, if you want him. I'm not horning in; I guess all Squaw Mountain would want to lynch me if they knew I'd handed over a cowman. I've put you wise, and I'll git!"

Starbuck wheeled his horse and rode away down the canyon.

In a few minutes the clatter of his horse's hoofs died away, and he had disappeared in the valley.

The sheriff of Pawnee Ford dismounted. He signed to his men to follow his example.

"Keep your eyes peeled," he muttered. "If that puncher's there I reckon he's wide awake, and got a gat ready in his hand. He's sure handy with a gun, durn his hide. He knows what's coming to him for shooting up Billy Ward. You-uns watch out!"

"I guess he won't handle a gun agin if I get a bead on him," said Jim Ward.

"We've got to take him alive, if we can," said the sheriff. "But if he pulls a gun let him have it."

He drew a deep breath.

"Follow on!"

Gun in hand, the sheriff of Pawnee Ford began to push a way through the thicket towards the towering cliff beyond.

Jim Ward followed him, and the rest of the numerous party.

If the Rio Kid was still in the cave, where he had been concealed by the Starbuck punchers, there was no escape for him. Betrayed into the hands of his enemies by the Starbuck boss, he was at their mercy. But every heart was beating fast as the Pawnee Ford men pushed through the thickets. At every moment they expected to hear the roar of a six-gun. The puncher, who had narrowly escaped lynching at Pawnee Ford, was not likely to surrender, though the odds against him made resistance hopeless.

"Watch out!" breathed the sheriff as he came, at last, through the thickets, and the dark opening of the cavo yawned before him.

All was darkness.

From the cave came no sound, no movement. The whole party gathered at the opening, watchful as cats, ready to fire at a sound, at a moving shadow. But there was no sound, no movement. The sheriff kicked over dead embers of a camp-fire at the mouth of the cave. He stooped, and rose again, breathing hard and quick.

"Still warm!" he whispered. "If he ain't here he's been here recent. I guess he must be asleep."

"He'd sure hear the hosses, sheriff."

The sheriff gritted his teeth.

It was no light matter to enter the blackness of the cavern, where it seemed certain that a desperate man lurked, revolver in hand. It was Jim Ward who led the way in at last. The burly sheepman tramped into the cave, fully expecting a shot, but no shot came.

"I guess he ain't here!" said Ward, in a savage growl. "I reckon he heard us coming, and cleared."

"We'd have seen him in this moonlight."

"He sure ain't here!"

Ward struck a match.

The flickering light danced on the walls of the cave, and the men of Pawnee Ford stared round them uneasily, suspiciously. In the light, dim and flickering as it was, they were exposed to the fire of the hidden puncher—if he was there. But it was becoming clear now that the Rio Kid was not there.

"Git a lantern!" grunted the sheriff.

One of the men went back to the horses and returned with a lantern. He lighted it, and the sheriff searched through the cave.

It was empty! There were many signs that someone had recently camped there; but, whoever it was, he was gone—had been gone some time, it was clear, before Jud Starbuck led the posse to the canyon. The sheriff rapped out an angry oath.

This Week:
"HUNTED!"

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"Durn his hide! He's beat it!" He scowled savagely. "I guess the Starbuck punchers hid him safe, but he was wise to it that Jud didn't figure on letting him lie doggo in his range, and he vamoosed. Durn his hide!"

"He can't be fur off!" muttered Ward.

The Pawnee Ford party, savagely disappointed, tramped out of the cave again. They traversed the aspen thicket and the open canyon, staring round them. Moonlight fell clearly on the rocks, on the pines that grew up the precipitous sides. Somewhere at hand, they were sure, was the man they sought. But the hard rock left no trail of foot or hoof; the Kid might have been within a dozen yards of them, among the boulders, and they none the wiser.

"I guess we're beat this time!" growled the sheriff. "But we ain't quitting. We'll camp on the Starbuck range and comb Squaw Mountain for him. I guess a lot of the cowmen could put us wise if they liked. We'll search this canyon from end to end at sun-up. We will——"

The sheriff broke off as a clear, cool voice rang across the canyon from a high point on the cliff on the other side.

"Hallo, you-uns!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Kid Speaks!

THE Rio Kid was grinning serenely.

High up the northern wall of the canyon he lay in cover among the rocks, the black-muzzled mustang packed close in cover behind him.

Before him the rocky slope rose steeply from the canyon bottom, open to his fire. The Kid could not have picked a better place for defence. That rocky point could have been held by one man against a hundred, so long as his cartridges lasted.

Looking down from the rugged rocks, the Kid grinned at the bunch of horsemen forty feet below.

"Hallo, you 'uns!"

His voice rang out cheerily.

"That's him!" swore the sheriff.

Bang!

Jim Ward fired at the sound of the voice, and his bullet spattered on rock a yard from the Rio Kid.

The Kid laughed loud and long.

"I guess that won't buy you anything, you galoots!" he called back. "You're sure wasting your lead!"

"You durned galoot!" roared the sheriff. "You come out of that!"

"Not this evening, sheriff!" said the Kid cheerily. "I guess I'm bedded down comfortable. You want to remember that if you come up here it will be the last thing you'll do this side of Jordan!"

The sheriff glared up at the canyon wall. He could not see the Kid, though he was aware that the Kid could see him through some crevice in the rocks that screened him. He knew that a touch of the Kid's finger on the trigger would end all things for him, and his face was grim and a little pale. His men sat their horses silent round him. The whole party were exposed to fire from where the Kid lay in cover; and he could have picked them off like so many prairie rabbits.

"I guess we want to ride, sheriff," murmured one of the sheepmen uneasily.

But he hesitated to ride. The swiftest gallop down the canyon could not have saved the riders from the gun above. Five or six of them, at least, the Kid could have shot down before the party got clear. Jud Starbuck had aimed to lead them to the capture of the hidden puncher; but he had led them into a deadly trap.

But why the Kid had revealed his presence was rather a mystery to the sheriff's men. He could have lain undiscovered in his rocky eyrie, had he chosen, until they had ridden away.

"I guess I've got you where I want you, sheriff," went on the Kid's voice in the same, cheery tones. "You sheepherders sure ain't the galoots to trail a puncher. But I ain't looking for trouble, sheriff. I jest want to put you wise. You'll listen to me."

"You durn galoot——"

"Forget it, sheriff! It's my say-so now, and if you'd rather hear my gun talk, I guess I'm ready to oblige!"

"What do you want to say?" hissed the sheriff.

"What I've said before, feller! You roped me in for shooting up Billy Ward, and I guess I never heard of the hombre before you told me I had shot him up. You packed me in the calaboose, and I sure had a close call getting away from Judge Lynch. But I don't bear any malice, sheriff—any galoot might make a mistake. Now I tell you agin that I didn't shoot up Billy Ward, but I know the man who did."

"You're a durn liar!" roared Jim Ward. "You shot up my brother, and I'm sure going to get you for it!"

"If the galoot was your brother, hombre, I guess I won't plug you for calling me fancy names," said the Kid. "It would naturally get your goat. But I'm going to put you wise. The man who shot up Billy Ward was getting away when I met up with him, and I lent him my horse to vamoose on. I was sure plumb loco to do it, but there it is. And the name of that galoot is Jud Starbuck."

"Starbuck!" yelled the sheriff.

"Sure!"

"You durn——"

"Don't say it, sheriff. I reckon my gun might go off if you do," suggested the Kid.

The sheriff ground his teeth.

"I'm jest putting you wise," went on the Kid. "I'd sure be sorry to have to wipe out a whole family of sheepherders! I reckon sheepmen ain't worth powder and shot, if you come to that!"

There was a growl of rage from the Pawnee Ford party. All of them were sheepmen, and all of them embittered by the range war that was going on in the Squaw River country.

"I'll get you yet!" muttered Jim Ward savagely.

"I ain't the man you want to get," replied the Kid placidly. "I'm giving you the straight goods, fellers. I came up this mountain to get my hoss back from Starbuck, figuring that he would be glad to help a galoot that had saved his pesky life. But he's a yellow coyote from the toes up. He figures on fixing that shooting on me, and saving his own life by putting mine in the rope. Didn't I see him leading you galoots up here to the cave—where you'd have found me if you'd come a few hours earlier? I guess Starbuck reckoned I was there—and by this time he figures that you 'uns have shot me to little pieces. That's why I'm putting you wise. It's Jud Starbuck you want for shooting up Billy Ward."

"Is that the lot?" snarled the sheriff.

"That's the lot, feller! You can believe it or not as you durn well like!" snapped the Kid. "Now, if you want trouble, you can come a-hunting it!"

The horsemen stared uneasily up the steep, rocky cliff. The Kid had led his mustang up the steep ascent, by the bridle, picking his steps. Riding up was impossible. Clambering up on foot, exposed to the Kid's fire, was throwing life away. That was clear to the sheriff of Pawnee Ford and all his men.

"Git, while the goin's good, sheriff!" muttered one of the sheepman. "If that scallywag burns powder, we're done!"

"I'm going for him!" said Ward, between his teeth.

"Forget it!" said the sheriff. "We ain't a chance here. In the daylight we'll comb the mountain for him and rope him in!"

Ward, unheeding, threw himself from his horse, and, with a set, furious face, began to clamber up the rocky steep.

Bang!

A gun rang forty feet above, and Ward, with a yell, staggered back and fell to the earth.

"He's got his!" muttered the sheriff.

"Any more coming?" called out the Kid. "I guess I'll show you'uns how we shoot down in Texas!"

But the fall of Ward had shown the posse, if they had not known it before, that they had no chance. Some of the horsemen already had started riding down the canyon towards the valley.

"Pick up that galoot and tote him along!" chuckled the Kid. "He ain't hurt much—I guess I've only creased him, like we do an ornery steer down on the Rio Frio."

Jim Ward sat up dazedly, passing his hand over his head. The bullet had grazed his head, stunning him for the moment.

"You're all O.K., feller!" called out the Kid. "Only don't try it on again; you might get hurt."

Ward staggered to his feet.

"Git outer this!" muttered the sheriff. His life was at the mercy of the puncher he was hunting, and he was anxious to go.

He helped the dazed man to his saddle, and the Pawnee Ford party rode down the canyon. A light laugh from the Rio Kid followed them, as they disappeared into the valley.

The Kid sat on a boulder and smiled.

"Old hoss," he said, addressing the black-muzzled mustang—"old hoss, I guess you and me want to beat it, pronto. I guess them galoots will be after us at sun-up; and they'll strike hit the high spots and pick us off with rifles from up yonder. We want to beat it, old hoss!"

And, taking his mustang by the bridle, the Rio Kid led him away—by dizzy paths up the rugged hillside, by ravines and ledges where it seemed that only a mountain goat could have found footing. By the time the sun rose over the mountains of Wyoming, and shone down on the Squaw River and the gulches of Squaw Mountain, the Kid was far away; and when the sheriff and his men "combed" the canyon for him they found no trace of him.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Roped!

JUD STARBUCK scowled as he rode down the cattle-trail from his ranch to the lower slopes of Squaw Mountain. The rancher was in a black and bitter mood. Pro-

bably, at first, Starbuck had felt some twinge of remorse at his treachery in betraying the Texas puncher, who had saved his life, into the hands of his enemies. But if he felt remorse he had not hesitated. To the man with a yellow streak in him, in fear of being brought to justice for the shooting of the sheepman, the Kid had come in as a useful scapegoat.

He had shot down a man in hot blood; but in cold blood he was in fear of what would follow. The whole sheep country was up, to find the man who had shot up Billy Ward. The reckless rascal had raised a storm that he had not the nerve to face.

He could have endured a twinge or two of remorse had the Rio Kid been lynched, and the whole matter settled in the belief that justice had been done. But his betrayal of the puncher, whom his outfit had sheltered on the range, had gone for nothing: the Kid had evidently been suspicious, and had gone from the cave in time, and now he was lost on the wild wastes of Squaw Mountain.

That he had fled from the mountain was improbable; all the ways were watched, every road and trail guarded, while the hunt for him went on in the rugged canyons and gulches and arroyos. Somewhere in those rocky wastes the Kid still lurked, hunted, but so far free; and all the time he remained free on Squaw Mountain was a time of danger for the rancher.

Even his own men would have turned on him had they known of his betrayal of a refugee puncher to the sheepmen; all his friends and neighbours would have turned from him in disgust. It might come out; and, in the meantime, the sheriff and his men were camped on the Starbuck range, hunting for the Kid, and there was peril every day of a "rookus" breaking out.

Starbuck was the leader of the range war against the sheepmen; but he worked in secret, and an open defiance of the law was too dangerous for him. If trouble broke out on his range it would come home to him. Already he was more than half-suspected of being chief of the raids on the sheeplands, of driving sheep over cliffs and poisoning the water-holes, and other lawless deeds that were the tactics of the range war.

His outfit were on jeering terms with the sheriff's men camped on the range, and any day shooting might break out. And until the elusive Kid was roped in the Pawnee Ford men would not ride down the mountain. Every day that the Kid remained free was a day of danger to Starbuck; and if he had felt anything like remorse at first, it was swallowed up now in a bitter hatred for the boy puncher who was causing him so much trouble.

CORNERED! "I'm going for that scallywag!" growled Ward. He threw himself off his horse, and with a furious face, began to clamber up the rocks. Bang! The Rio Kid's gun rang out, and Ward staggered back. "He's got his," muttered the sheriff. (*See Chapter* 2.)

It had occurred to him, too, that the Kid, knowing now his treachery, might shoot him up from behind a rock or a clump of mesquite; and for that reason Starbuck avoided the lonely places on his range during the four or five days that followed the sheriff's failure at the cave.

That he was in danger now as he rode down the open cattle-trail towards Pawnee Ford, he did not reckon. He was some miles from his ranch now, and he guessed that the fugitive puncher was keeping to the uplands. But it was now, when he supposed the Kid to be far away, that danger was hanging over the traitor's head.

It came suddenly, and not in the form of a treacherous shot from cover, which Starbuck would never have feared had he known the Kid better. It was the whiz of a riata that suddenly broke the silence, and before the rancher knew what was happening, the loop of the lasso had settled over his shoulders. He made a fierce clutch at the rope—too late. It tautened; there was a sharp jerk, and Jud Starbuck was plucked from the saddle, to land on the hard trail with a crash.

For some moments he rolled there, his senses shaken and dizzy. A lithe figure bent over him, and his gun was jerked away and tossed into the bushes. The loop was drawn tighter and knotted, pinning his arms to his sides. His horse, startled and frightened, was already galloping down the trail. He stared up with dizzy eyes into the smiling face of the Rio Kid.

"I guess we've met up again, feller!" drawled the Kid. "I've sure been hunting you!"

Jud's face was white as chalk. He lay, with arms bound at the mercy of the puncher he had betrayed to death. But the Kid did not touch a gun. He grasped the rancher and jerked him to his feet.

"You kinder seem sort of surprised," drawled the Kid. "Did you figure out that you could sell me out, you yellow coyote, and get away with it? Not on your life!"

"What do you want?" breathed Jud.

"You!" said the Kid laconically.

"I—I guess——"

"Quit guessing, feller! I reckon you're going to take a little pasear with me. Any objections?" grinned the Kid.

Starbuck cast a fierce glance about him. The trail was deserted and lonely; evidently the puncher had waited for his chance. Jud opened his mouth to shout, in the hope that someone might be within hearing, and gasped as the muzzle of a six-gun was thrust into his jaws.

"Forget-it!" grinned the Kid.

Starbuck panted. The Kid jerked away his neck-scarf, and gagged him

with it. Then, with an iron grip on Starbuck's arm, he led him off the trail, into the grove from which he had flung the lariat. There the black-muzzled mustang waited, deep in the trees. With the rope, the Kid bound the rancher to a tree.

"I guess the sheriff is hunting me up the mountain, feller," drawled the Kid. "I reckon we got to wait for dark before we make a move. I want you, feller, and I ain't taking any risks of losing you—not none! You can chew on that scarf till dark, hombre!"

Till the sun set Starbuck remained bound to the tree in the deep heart of the grove, and the Kid, in cover, watched the cattle-trail. More than once Starbuck heard horsemen ride down the trail; once he heard a bunch of cattle driven past—his own cattle, driven down the mountain to be herded to the railroad depot. He heard the crack of quirts, and once the voice of his own foreman, Buck, and he bit and chewed desperately on the gag.

But he could make no sound, and darkness fell and found him still a prisoner, bound fast to the tree.

Savagely, apprehensively, he wondered what the Kid wanted with him. He could have understood the puncher shooting him out of hand for his treachery; but this he could not understand.

Under the stars Starbuck was loosed from the tree and tied on the back of the black-muzzled mustang, still gagged. The Kid took the bridle and led the horse away.

What was the puncher's object, where he was taking him, the rancher could not guess. By devious ways, by arroyo and draw and deep canyon, they wound about the rugged sides of Squaw Mountain, ever higher and higher.

Once Jud had a glimpse, in the starlight, of the valley where his ranch lay and heard the murmur of many cattle.

But the Kid led him on and on, into wild, rocky wastes, where he had picked up the paths, into barren recesses, where no trail could be followed.

It was in a deep, shadowy arroyo, high up Squaw Mountain, far from ranch or pasture, that the Kid stopped at last, and in the starlight Jud saw a little hut built of branches and rocks, and guessed this was the remote hiding-place where the Kid had sheltered since he had escaped from the sheriff of Pawnee Ford.

There he was taken from the horse's back, and the Kid tossed him, still bound, into the hut. In the darkness and terror the rancher of Squaw Mountain lay, listening to the departing footsteps of the puncher, till they died away in silence, and all was still.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
The Kid's Trump Card!

THE sheriff of Pawnee Ford swore wearily, and fanned his heated face with his Stetson. The morning sun, blazing down on Squaw Mountain, filled the gulch with shimmering heat. Four men of the posse were halted in the gulch, where for long hours they had been seeking to read sign, till they had stopped to rest in what shade they could in the heat of the day.

In other directions, the rest of the party were still on the trail; and lower down the mighty mountain five or six other posses were hunting for the elusive puncher. That he was still somewhere on Squaw Mountain the sheriff was certain; but there were square miles of rugged rock and tangled thickets and pinewoods to be searched, and all the sheepmen were growing weary of the hunt. But they kept on grimly to the task, sure that, sooner or later, the fugitive would fall into their hands.

The sheriff sat with his back to a boulder, fanning his perspiring face. The three men with him sought what they could of shade. Two of them lay asleep, their Stetsons over their heads to keep off the sun. Jim Ward sat on a rock, his rifle across his knees, his bearded face dark and grim.

"It's some hot!" grunted the sheriff. "And durn my boots if I think we're on the trail of that young five-bug, after all!"

Ward shook his head.

"I picked up sign down the gulch," he said. "Some galoot has sure been up this gulch, and I guess the cowmen never come up here—it's all rock, and not a yard of feed. The cows never wander this-a-way. I guess it was the galoot we're after."

"Right!" said a quiet voice.

From behind a rock, not six yards from the camped posse, a figure in wide Stetson hat and cowboy chaps rose, with a smiling face.

The sheriff started convulsively. Ward grasped his rifle; but the Rio Kid's voice rang out in warning:

"Drop it!"

A gun gleamed in either hand of the Rio Kid. The sheriff made no move to touch a weapon. And Ward, who had sampled the Kid's shooting before, slowly released his rifle, his eyes burning at the Kid. The two sleeping men started into wakefulness, staring blankly at the puncher. The Kid's keen eye ran over the four.

"Any galoot that touches a gun won't know what hit him," he said. "I've got you covered, fellers, and you don't want to forget it."

"Shoot, durn you!" snarled Ward.

"I guess I ain't come a-shooting, if you'll behave," grinned the Kid. "But I'll sure drop any man that gets fresh. I want you, sheriff, and I want you, Mister Ward. Them other two galoots can beat it, takin' the hosses. I ain't waiting, either. You've been hunting me four days—and I've been hunting you the same time—and I guess it's you that's come out at the little end of the horn. You're a durned bunch of mutton-eating sheep-herders, and you ain't worth shucks. But I've a hunch to prove up to you that you're after the wrong man, and that's my game now. You're going to get it clear whether you like it or not. Savvy?"

"What——" began the sheriff.

"Swallow it, feller, it's my say-so now," interrupted the Kid. "I'm waiting for them two galoots to hit the trail. My guns will begin to talk in one minute if they ain't gone!"

The Kid's face was grim over the levelled Colts. The sheriff, almost white with rage, gave a nod in answer to the inquiring looks of his followers. The Kid had them covered, and though he was only one against four, all the advantage was on his side. They knew what his shooting was like, and they did not want another sample. The two men, taking the four horses, moved away down the gulch, the Kid shifting his position a little to keep the tail of his eye on them as they went. Not till they were out of effective range did the Kid speak again, though all the time his guns unwaveringly covered the sheriff and Jim Ward. More than once Ward was tempted to seize his rifle and try a pot-shot. But the attempt was death, and he knew it. He stifled his rage, and waited.

"Now, fellers," drawled the Kid at last, "I'm going to take your guns, and I hope you won't object, because I should sure hate to blow the cabeza off a locoed sheepman. Keep your paws up!"

He belted one gun, and advanced over the rocks, keeping the other levelled. With their hands up, the sheriff and Ward awaited him, and not for an instant did the Kid's wary watchfulness relax. Coolly and quietly he disarmed them, throwing their weapons into a deep crevice. They watched him like panthers, but they had no chance to take the Kid by surprise.

And, mingled with the rage in their faces was perplexity. They could not understand the Kid's game. That he did not seek their lives was clear; but a fugitive, fleeing and hiding for his life, could not be seeking to burden himself with prisoners. But whatever were the Kid's intentions, he was going to carry them out, and the six-gun in his hand enforced obedience.

"Face round, and put your paws behind you!" said the Kid tersely. "No tricks, fellers, or you'll get it in the back of your cabezas, pronto."

With lengths of trail-rope he bound the arms of the two Pawnee Ford men behind them. They were helpless now, even if resistance had been possible before. They stared at the Kid with burning eyes. He smiled cheerily in return.

"I guess you was hunting bigger game than you figured, fellers, when you came a-hunting a galoot about my size," he bantered. "When I go over the range, I sure opine that it won't be a sheepman that gives me my ticket for soup. No, sir. But don't you get mad, fellers. I ain't going to hurt you none. You're going to take a little pasear with me, before your friends come a-looking for you and I have to shoot them up. I got to keep you quiet, but you ain't going to be hurt."

He gagged the sheriff and Ward with their own neck-scarves. Then he pointed up the gulch with his gun.

"You walk that a-way," he said. "I ain't taking you far—only up to a little place where I've been camped. I guess you're going to get some news there. Beat it."

With their faces crimson with rage and helpless fury, the prisoners moved, the Rio Kid following them as they went. Up the rugged gulch, through the torrid heat, they tramped clumsily, and over a rocky hillside, and through a pine wood, and then by a narrow arroyo, where the rocks left no trail. Weary, sweating, aching with rage, they tramped on, till the Kid called a halt at last, and they flung themselves down at the foot of a great rock.

Then with a rope the Kid bound their feet, and tied the rope to a tethering-peg jammed in a crevice of the stony ground, and left them. His footsteps died away, and the sheriff and his man, looking at one another's enraged faces, exchanged dumb glares of rage and wonder. The puncher could not have brought them there to leave them thus. They could not believe that; and yet, what was his game? Helpless, enraged, perplexed, they lay in furious silence, and at last, from the silence, came the sound of voices.

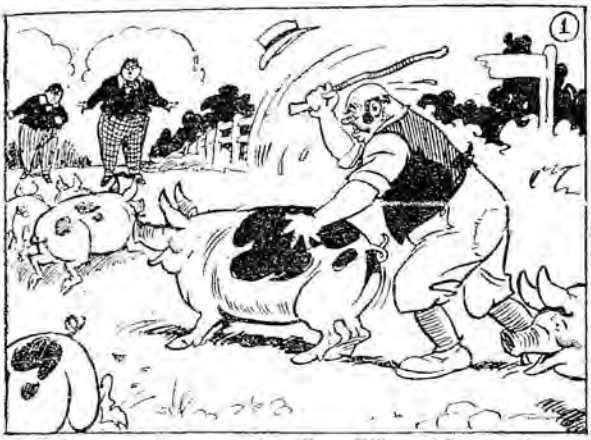
Voices—and they started and listened. No one was in sight. The voices came from round the great rock against which they lay. The speakers were not three yards distant, but no sign of them could be seen. Clearly, distinctly, the voices came, and the rage died out of the faces of the two sheepmen, as they listened in wonder.

(*Continued on page* 23.)

The BUNTER BROTHERS

— Merry Mirthmakers. —

THE TALE OF THE PIG-HEADED PIGS!



Whilst on the way to the village, Billy and Sammy Bunter came across a very infuriated farmer-chappie trying the strong persuasion stunt with his herd of pigs. But being pig-headed, those grunters refused to go the way they should.

When the farmer sighted the Bunter Brothers he gasped with relief. "Here!" he yelled to them. "Help me with these pigs!" he begged. Of course, what else could those cheery, fat youths do other than give the necessary aid.

They had never learnt the gentle art of pig-driving, but Billy and Sammy did their best. "On the ball!" yelled Billy, as he waded into those porkers. "Here, keep to the left!" shouted Sammy. "Mind where you're driving him!" cried Billy. "Look out, it's only one-way traffic this way!"

Oh, what a scene there followed! Oh, what a merry mix-up! The driving was not a success. And before long, pigs, Bunters, and farmer were involved in a struggling heap in the middle of the road. One large porker took Sammy between the legs, and gave him an upside-down view of things.

Then another pig barged underneath Billy's legs, and sent him over his back. The two fat youths clung with loving arms round two fat porkers, and the next moment there was a regular Derby down the lane. "Hi, come back!" howled the farmer. But those pigs did not come back.

They grunted on and on, bearing their unwilling riders, and right up to Greyfriars they scudded. When Gosling, the porter came out of his lodge, he saw two large chunks of bacon racing through the gates, carrying two "eggs"-cited juniors. The race was a dead-heat, and the Bunter Brothers were dead-beat!

"THE RIO KID!"

(Continued from page 6.)

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
Put Wise!

JUD STARBUCK rolled over on the floor of the jacal, and stared up at the Rio Kid as he entered.

For hours it seemed like days—the rancher of Squaw Mountain had lain there, gagged and bound, waiting; waiting to learn what his fate might be at the hands of the man he had betrayed.

He feared the Rio Kid's return; yet, feared, too, that the Kid would not return, that he was abandoned there to perish of hunger in that untrodden mountain fastness. With mingled relief and fear the rancher saw the Kid at last.

The Kid cut through the ropes that secured his feet, and jerked him up. Starbuck, his hands still bound, eyed him desperately. He could not speak. But the Kid removed the gag from his mouth, and he panted out a question.

"What are you going to do with me?"

"I guess I'll put you wise, pronto!" said the Kid. "You got to wait till then. This a-way."

He gripped the rancher's arm and led him from the jacal. Outside, the afternoon sun was blazing down on the rocks. Starbuck's cramped limbs stumbled as the Kid led him away. The Texas puncher halted at a great rock, and placed the bound man with his back to it. Starbuck leaned there, panting, as the Kid took a six-gun from his belt.

"You—you rustler, you're going to shoot me!" he panted.

"What did you figure on?" asked the Kid carelessly. "You're a poison rattler, Starbuck, and shootin' is too good for you. I guess what you want is a rope and the branch of a cottonwood. A heap of galoots in Pawnee Ford would be glad to give you what you've asked for, if they knew the yellow coyote you are. You sold me out to the sheriff, you durned reptile! I lent you my cayuse to get away from the sheepmen, and that's how you came back on me. Ain't that correct?"

Starbuck gritted his teeth.

"You'll get the rope for this!" he said hoarsely. "Let up, puncher—let up! Shooting me won't buy you anything. I guess I'll help you to get clear of Squaw Mountain, and back to your own country. I'll stake you the roll they took off you at Pawnee Ford. I'll ride you safe off Squaw Mountain with all my outfit to guard you. Let up!"

"I guess when I beat it off Squaw Mountain I ain't looking for any guard!" said the Kid. "That ain't worrying me any. But it sure gets my goat for the sheepmen to allow that I shot up Billy Ward, a man I never heard of. You put that on me, feller."

"I never put it on you!" panted Starbuck. "That fool the sheriff roped you for it—I never reckoned anything of the kind would happen."

"You let him think so."

"Was I to put the rope round my own neck?" snarled Starbuck. "You're talking plumb foolishness. What will it hurt you if them pesky sheepmen think you shot up Billy Ward, when you beat it for your own country? You don't want to care what a bunch of sheepmen think in Wyoming, when you're back in Texas."

"That cuts no ice, feller! Billy Ward was shot down unarmed, and I should sure hate any galoot to think that I shot up a man without giving him a chance. That's what gets my goat."

"I tell you, there's no help for it!" growled Starbuck. "Billy Ward asked for what came to him; and I never knew he hadn't a gun when I pulled on him."

"I guess that's a plumb lie!" said the Kid. "Still, it don't matter. Take a little pasear with me!"

The Kid grasped him by the shoulder and swung him round the corner of the great rock.

Jud Starbuck's eyes almost started from his head as he stared at the two bound men lying there.

Ward was struggling madly with his gag. The Rio Kid stooped, and removed the gags from the mouths of the prisoners.

"You wise to it, too, sheriff?" grinned the Kid.

"Sure!" grunted the sheriff. "You let us loose, puncher, and we'll rope in that murderer, and you can beat it as soon as you like."

Starbuck panted.

The Rio Kid cast loose his bonds.

"Beat it!" he said laconically. "These hombres know now who shot up Billy Ward; and I guess all the section will know it soon. I give you ten minutes to hunt cover before I let them loose on you."

For a moment the Squaw Mountain rancher stood there, panting, desperate. Had he been armed he would have taken his chance with the Rio Kid, in the hope of silencing for ever those who knew of his guilt. But he had no weapon; and all that remained to him was flight—first to his ranch to get a mount, and then by the quickest trail away from Squaw Mountain—a ride for his life with vengeance on the trail. He turned and plunged away down the rocks, with a bitter curse, and vanished.

"Let me loose, puncher!" yelled Ward.

"Give the galoot a chance," said the Kid. "He's sure the yellowest coyote I ever struck; but he's going to have his chance."

And not till ten minutes had elapsed did the Kid loose his prisoners, and then Ward plunged away down the rocks on the track of the fleeing rancher, the sheriff following more slowly.

The hunt for the Rio Kid was ending—it was Jud Starbuck who was the fugitive now. The Kid walked back to the spot where he had left the black mustang.

It was by devious ways, by lonely trails and under cover of darkness that night, that the Rio Kid left Squaw Mountains for ever.

Whether Starbuck escaped, or whether the avenger of blood trailed him down, the Kid never knew, and never cared to know. His heart was lighter when he was clear of the Squaw River section at last, and the mighty mass of Squaw Mountain sank below the skyline as he rode southward.

THE END.

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