THRILLS GALORE BELOW!

The Rio Kid rides to an inn in the heart of the Mexican mountains in search of a night's rest. But instead of rest he falls head first into another fearful peril . . . that almost costs him his life!

A NIGHT of PERIL!

by RALPH REDWAY

OUR ROARING WESTERN TALE, STARRING THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
The Inn in the Mountains!

THE posada stood back from the trail, backed by the wooded hillside that shut in the canada on the north. The road that the Rio Kid had been following was called a camino in Mexico; but like many of the rural caminos, it was little more than a track. There was no mistaking the way, however, for it ran direct along the level bottom of the canada, with wooded slopes rising on either side. Ahead of the Kid was the setting sun, burning red through the opening of the hills before him; and somewhere under the sunset lay the pueblo of Los Pinos—which the Kid had given up the hope of reaching that night. At the sight of the posada he drew rein, and looked at the building dubiously. For several nights the Kid had camped out in the sierra, and he liked the idea of sleeping with a roof over his head, and eating a meal that he had not had to cook over a camp-fire. The lonely inn by the trail did not look inviting; but the Kid did not expect much of a posada in the Mexican mountains.

"I guess we locate here for the night, old hoss!" the Kid said to the black-muzzled mustang. "We sure ain't going to hit Los Pinos; and I guess I can eat a tortilla as a change from flapjacks."

And the Kid turned his horse from the trail, and rode up to the posada.

The building presented a blank wall of adobe to his eyes, broken only by the arched entrance. In the Spanish-American style, it was built in a square, with all the windows looking on the courtyard in the centre. Through the wide-open doorway the Kid could see into the patio, where an upturned cart, several bundles of straw, some pigs and fowls, and uncountable heaps of evil-smelling refuse, met his gaze. No human being was in sight, and the Kid, halting under the arch of sun-baked bricks, rapped loudly on the open door with the butt of his quirt.

"I guess they don't see a lot of pilgrims on this here trail, old hoss," he remarked. "They sure don't seem to be looking for a rush of custom. But I reckon I'll make somebody hear."

And he crashed the quirt again on the door.

From among the refuse heaps in the patio, a boy emerged into sight, and came towards the entrance. He was a lad of about sixteen, with a dark, handsome, dirty face, and tousled thick black hair. He stared at the Kid as if in surprise.

"Gringo!" he ejaculated.

The Kid grinned. His Stetson, his chaps, his fair complexion, all told the Mexican nino that he came from the northern side of the border, though he was a good distance from Texas now.

"Sure kid!" he answered amicably. "Gringo—as that's what you call a white man in this here country. Say, you ain't the boss of this shebang, I reckon."

The boy stared.

"No entiendo, senor."

"You don't savvy?" smiled the Kid, and he made an effort and collected his best Spanish. "Hay alguien en este lugar que hable ingles?"

The boy shook his head. Apparently there was no one in the place who spoke English. But the Kid had enough Spanish to ask for what he wanted, and enough savvy to see that he got it.

"If you don't speak my lingo, bo, I reckon I'll sling yours," said the Kid good-humouredly. "Hook out the posadero."

"Padre, posadero," said the boy, and he turned away and began to call: "Padre, padre, un Gringo!"

The Kid pushed his horse on into the patio.

Rooms, with wooden galleries in front, cracking and crazy and sorely in want of paint, opened on either side of the patio. The further end was occupied by stables, dark and gloomy and of evil odour. The whole place looked gloomy and forbidding; but the Kid was glad to see the sunset gleaming down on a spring that bubbled into a cracked stone fountain in the centre of the court. There was clean water at all events—and in Mexican posadas a traveller had to be careful how he drank the water, if he valued the well-being of his inside. The Kid filled a pannikin and drank, and gave his horse to drink, while he waited for the innkeeper to appear. The boy was still calling; but the posadero seemed in no hurry to show himself.

It looked as if they seldom expected guests at the lonely inn in the mountains. Likely enough, it had been built in the old Spanish days, when a camino real ran through the canada to Los Pinos, and there was plenty of traffic on it. Under the glorious Republic the road had dwindled to a track, and the traffic to nothing. No doubt at times vaqueros came in from the ranches and peons from the aldeas of the vicinity. On this especial evening, there was no vaquero or aldeano to be seen; the Kid had the posada all to himself, except for the innkeeper and his son, so far as he could see. What kind of accommodation he was likely to get at such a deserted, dismal place, the Kid wondered; but anyhow there was fresh water and a roof, and at least there would be saladura, and the fowls that cackled round his horse showed that he could expect a tortilla de huevos. So the Kid waited cheerfully for the innkeeper to appear.

A brawny, black-bearded, tousled man in velveteen trousers, a dirty shirt, and a belt, came out of one of the rooms beside the entrance-way. He stared at the Kid under bent shaggy brows; and the Kid figured that he had never seen a more evil-disposed face since he had crossed the Rio Grande into Mexico—dark, evil, sodden with excessive pulque and aguardiente.

"Shucks!" murmured the Kid. "Some hotel-keeper, I'll tell the world!"

But he raised his Stetson politely to the Mexican, remembering that he was in a country where the tradition of Spanish courtesy lingered.

But Spanish courtesy seemed to have been left out of the composition of this particular Mexican.

He stared evilly at the Gringo.

"Que pregunto usted?" he grunted. And he did not trouble to touch the ragged sombrero that covered his shaggy head.

The Kid's eyes glinted.

"In the first place, I'm asking for civility, hombre," he said. "In the second, I want food and shelter for self and cayuse. Savvy?"

If the Mexican did not speak English, he understood it when he heard it. He nodded slowly.

"Si, senor!"

"Say, you don't seem a whole heap pleased to see a visitor arrive in this shebang," said the Kid, more good humouredly. "I guess I can pay my way, hombre; I ain't holding you up for a supper."

The Mexican's black eyes were scanning him. At the first sight, the Kid looked a cow-puncher, as he was; but at the second glance, a keen eye could see that he was probably better heeled than most cow-punchers. The Kid did not display his roll for all the world to see; but since he had made his lucky strike in the gold-mines of Arizona, he had fixed himself up in what the old bunch on the Double-Bar ranch would have called a dandy way. There was nothing showy about the Kid; but his riding-boots were of the finest leather, his neck-scarf of the purest silk, the band of silver nuggets that adorned his hat was worth many dollars; and the Kid allowed himself the luxury of silver spurs. The grim ugliness of the posadero's face relaxed as his scintillating eyes took in all these details, and he realised that this rider who looked like a cow-puncher from a Texas ranch, was probably a rico hombre.

"Senor, you are welcome," said the posadero, in Spanish. "My house is poor, but all that it contains is at your service." It was Spanish courtesy at last, though evidently only evoked by the silver nuggets and the silver spurs. "We see few strangers on this camino, senor! Travellers are fearful of the brigands in the sierra. Alight, senor, I beg you, and I shall be honoured to serve you."

The Kid dismounted.

"I guess I've seen something of the pesky bandoleros," he remarked. "They ain't got me scared any. Feller, I guess I've rode hard all day, and I'm sure hungry. What's going?"

"Saladura, pollo, tortillas, y tortillas de huevos, senor——"

"Muy bien!" said the Kid cheerily.

"Luis!" shouted the posadero.

The tattered boy came up, eyeing the stranger as evilly as his padre. But at the posadero's order, he took the mustang and led it away. The Kid followed. He always had a careful eye on his horse, especially in Mexico. The boy Luis led the mustang into a vacant stall, and stared and grunted when the Kid demanded clean straw, and with his own eyes saw clean water brought. Not till the mustang was cared for did the Kid think of himself, and by that time he was more than ready for the meal that the posadero had prepared in the comedor. And the Kid did not, as was usual, take off his gun-belt when he sat down to that comida. In his present surroundings, the Rio Kid preferred to keep his pair of notched, walnut-butted guns within easy reach of his hands.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
The Kid Watches Out!

"VAYA!" said the voice of the posadero, in a husky whisper, and the sound of clattering hoofs in the falling darkness followed.

The Rio Kid ate slowly, with a good appetite, and he was thinking the while.

The eating-room, or comedor, was dusky and dusty; its window, that looked on the patio, was dirty and cobwebby and cracked and patched. An odorous oil-lamp swung from the blackened low ceiling, shedding a dim light. The door was on the patio, and the Kid had left it wide open for the air. There were too many foul smells in the posada to please the cleanly Kid; but that was not his only reason. The Kid wanted to see as much as he could of his surroundings.

The sun was almost gone now, the darkness falling on the Sierra Madre. The patio was deep in shadow; the cart, the refuse, the heaps and bundles, a collection of strange shadows. The air from the unswept, dirty patio was perhaps one degree more wholesome than the stuffy atmosphere of the comedor. Through the gloom outside the Kid had seen, as he ate his meal, the tattered Luis leading a shaggy Mexican pony across from the stables to the entrance-way, and as he passed out of sight under the arch, the Kid left his comida, stepped to the door, and put his head out. The doorway of the comedor was very near the archway, which was the only entrance and exit of the building; and under the gloomy arch the hoofs of the shaggy pony rattled and echoed. And a murmuring, husky voice told that the posadero was there, speaking to his son; and the Kid, listening intently, caught the word "Vaya" clearly, and the clatter of hoofs that followed.

He returned to his meal more thoughtful than before.

The Kid did not like the place in which he found himself. He was thinking that he might have done more wisely to camp on the mountains than to seek shelter in that lonely and desolate posada. The evil looks of the patron had struck him first of all, and the wild and lawless face of the nino, he had not seen even one peon servant; it seemed as if only the posadero and his son inhabited the place. Clearly the posada did little business in the way of an inn, though probably the cantina was busy enough at times. In the wineshop by the entrance-way were innumerable bottles and flasks, and the cantina, the Kid figured, was the favourite haunt of the landlord, and the place from which his son's call had roused him out when the Kid arrived. No doubt he was his own best customer. He looked it.

The man, as the Kid figured, made a living selling wine to the peons and peasants of the mountain villages, and by cultivating the fields in the canada—a lazy and unskilled cultivation natural to the place. But the Kid was wondering, too, whether the rare travellers who came by that remnant of the old Camino Real contributed to his support; not wholly in the way of the cuenta—the bill. Mexicans had plenty of reason to hate their northern neighbour, who had defeated them in war and seized upon half their country. And that national feeling, the Kid guessed, was quite strongly developed in the landlord of this mountain inn, to judge by his looks.

The Rio Kid had no hunch to finish that night with six inches of a keen cuchillo buried in his heart, or a bullet from some rusty old escopette in the back of his head.

So he was wary.

Why had the posadero sent his son galloping away into the night? There might be an innocent reason for that; and it might mean that the innkeeper was sending word to certain acquaintances in the mountains that a rich Gringo was under his roof—one of the hated race, who could afford to wear spurs of silver and a band of nuggets round his hat, and who rode a horse that in itself was worth a small fortune to a poverty-stricken innkeeper in a country impoverished by incessant revolutions and civil wars. Indeed, it was unlikely that an innkeeper in such a spot could keep his throat uncut unless he was on friendly terms with the neighbouring brigands.

The Kid smiled grimly over his omelette. The posadero had cooked him quite a good tortilla de huevos, and the Kid ate it with relish. But he drank nothing at his meal, with uneasy suspicious working in his mind. He was half-disposed to mount and ride when his supper was over, and take his chance on the dark trails. But he would not allow a mere suspicion to change his plans; and it was dubious whether there would be less danger in the darkness of an unknown trail than in the posada, if, indeed, there was danger within its adobe walls. He resolved to be on his guard, and to keep his guns handy. After the clatter of hoofs had died away in the falling darkness, the posadero came into the comedor to inquire whether his guest desired anything more. The Kid noticed that the black eyes went at once to the untouched wine-flask on the table. The Mexican noted that the Kid had not tasted the wine.

There was a forced civility in the posadero's manner, but his wild and savage nature looked out through it all the while. If the man had not been a brigand in his time, the Kid reckoned that his looks did him an injustice.

"You get much trouble from the bandoleros in these parts?" the Kid asked casually.

The posadero shrugged his shoulders.

"I am a poor man, senor," he answered in his own tongue. "The bandoleros would not be likely to trouble me. What have I? Nothing. All that I had was taken last time the soldiers passed this way, in the revolution."

The Kid nodded. He was aware that Mexico, like most Latin-American countries, suffered from an excess of soldiery, and still more severely from an excess of ambitious generals. They could not defend their country from grasping neighbours, but they were generally ready to fight one another. And wherever a mob of revolutionary soldiers passed, they had something of the effect of a flight of locusts.

"You've heard of Rafael Gonzago?" asked the Kid.

The posadero started, and his black eyes glinted at the Kid with a startled look. But he recovered his composure instantly.

"Who has not heard of that celebrated brigand, senor?" he answered.

"You ever seen him about this-away?"

"I have never seen him, senor. I do not think Gonzago is in this part of the sierra." The posadero broke off. "You do not drink your wine, senor."

"I guess I never do," answered the Kid, with a smile. "Me for the water-waggon, hombre."

The patron of the posada smiled contemptuously. But the look passed from his face when he caught the Kid's

cool, clear eye on him. He shifted uneasily.

"If there is nothing more, senor——"

"Not a thing," drawled the Kid. "I reckon you can show me where I sleep, feller."

"Have the graciousness to follow me, senor."

The posadero slouched out of the comedor, and the Kid had the graciousness to follow him.

From the patio, rickety wooden steps led to the wooden gallery on which the rooms opened. The posadero opened a door and carried an oil-lamp into a room. It was a low, dark room, with a window and a door looking on the gallery; the walls of thick adobe. The furniture was of the barest; the bed a mere trestle, without coverings. But the Kid did not expect bedding, neither did he want it. In a Mexican posada bedding was likely to have too many tiny inhabitants to please the Kid. He had his own blanket, and that was enough for him.

"A poor place, senor, but all I have," said the posadero. "We have few guests here, senor. Few travellers follow the old camino."

"You've said it," agreed the Kid.

"But I trust you will sleep soundly, senor," said the posadero, and the Kid's keen ear detected a sardonic inflection in the voice.

"Feller," said the Kid cheerily, "I've had a long trail, and I guess I could sleep sound on a heap of donioks out on the sierra. I want to be called at sunup!"

In the glimmer of the smoky lamp the Mexican's eyes glinted. There was mockery in the black eyes.

"Si, senor!" he answered. "Buenas noches, senor!"

"Buenas noches, hombre!"

The posadero left, and the Kid shut the door carefully after him. The window, unglazed, was shuttered with wood. The Rio Kid was alone, standing in the glimmer of the smoky lamp with a grim smile on his face. No doubt the posadero had expected the fool of a Gringo to observe nothing; but there was little that escaped the keen eye of the Kid.

"I guess," murmured the Rio Kid, "that that hombre is looking for trouble to-night; and he sure don't expect to have the trouble of calling me in the morning. I reckon he figures on my sleeping sound—with six inches of cuchillo to help me. If he ain't sent that young scallywag of his'n to fetch a bunch of cut-throats I miss my guess. I reckon I'd have slept sounder out on the sierra."

The Kid blew out the lamp.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Foes of the Night!

THE Kid was tired from a long trail, and he would have been glad to stretch himself on the bedstead in his blanket, and sleep. But he did not think of doing so. Sleep, he reckoned, was likely to be a long one, and terribly sound, if he was caught napping that night under the roof of the mountain inn. He stood in the darkness, thinking.

Outside, in the patio, there was a glimmer of starlight. The soft, starry night of Mexico hung like a velvet pall over the mountains, spangled with stars. More and more stars came out in the deep, dark blue. Inside the Kid's room, with door shut and window shuttered, all was black. But from a crack in the crazy shutter a bar of soft starlight dropped in. The Kid examined that crack in the shutter intently. It was in a direct line with the bed. A man standing in the gallery outside, and knowing where the bed stood, could have fired through the crack directly at a sleeper. The Kid felt over the crack with a searching finger. The unpainted wood had split in the hot sun of tropical days; but the edges, as the Kid felt them, told that the crack had been widened by the gashing of a knife. The Kid figured that that was one of the preparations the posadero had made to insure that his guest would sleep soundly, and would not need calling in the morning. The rift in the shutter had not been wide enough for easy shooting from without till it was cut wider.

"So that's the lay out!" murmured the Kid, with a smile. "That feller sure thinks he's got hold of some soft jasper—he sure does."

Next the Kid examined the door. There was no lock; but it was fitted with strong wooden bars, which he had only to drop into the rusty iron sockets on either side. The bars were stout enough; but the iron sockets were old and loose, and a hefty push from without would have sent the door flying in, bars and sockets and all.

The Kid smiled again, and bared his bowie-knife. With the keen blade, he whittled down one end of a wooden bar, making a wedge of it. The sharp end of the wedge he thrust under the door.

It would need the strength of several men to drive the door open against that obstacle.

Just inside the door the Kid rolled himself in his blanket and lay down on the floor.

There he was, out of the line of fire at the window, unless the shutter was broken away, and that could not have been done without awakening a heavier sleeper than the Rio Kid.

With head pillowed on his rolled slicker, the boy puncher from Texas stretched himself at ease.

It was possible that his suspicions were unfounded, in which case the night would pass without trouble. But if he had judged the posadero well there was going to be trouble.

In the meantime he was tired from the trail, and he had slept soundly in more dangerous quarters than this.

He listened for some minutes after he had lain down. All was silent in the posada. The fowls in the patio had gone to roost. From somewhere in the night came the braying of a burro. It died away, and all was still again.

The Kid closed his eyes.

Sure of awakening if danger came, the Kid slept peacefully; and he was fast asleep a few seconds after his eyelids drooped.

The starry hours passed.

The Kid slept soundly.

But little was needed to awaken the Kid, accustomed to the perils of the llano and the sierra.

ENEMIES AT HAND! The Kid, lying on his blanket on the floor, silent and still, watched with cool amusement the rifle-barrel appear through the crack. Bang! The roar of the rifle broke the silence with a sound that seemed like thunder, and the heavy bullet crashed through the bed, just where the Kid had been lying. (*See Chapter* 3.)

It was midnight when his eyes opened at a creak of the crazy wooden gallery outside his room.

He did not stir.

Lying silent and motionless, and smiling in the dark, the Rio Kid listened.

Soft and stealthy footsteps were moving on the rickety planking of the gallery outside. Certainly, those footsteps were not of other guests going to their rooms; the Kid was the only guest at the posada. The stealthy sounds ceased outside his room.

The bar of starlight that dropped through the slit in the shutter was darkened by a figure without.

The Kid smiled and waited. He had had three hours of refreshing sleep, and awakened as fresh as a daisy, cool as ice, with nerves of iron. There was a low whisper in Spanish.

"The Gringo dog is sleeping."

"Silencio!" came another whisper.

There was faint, low whispering—three or four Mexicans, the Kid figured, were gathered on the gallery. A soft, grating sound was audible at the cracked shutter. Something hard had touched it gently; it was a metal tube that was pushed through. The muzzle of a gun was thrusting into the room, bearing full upon the bed opposite the window.

"Tenga cudado, Pacheco!" said a whispering voice, in Spanish. "If you miss, the Gringo wakes."

The savage whisper of the posadero answered.

"Do I not know where he lies, hombre? Have I not placed all with my own hands?"

"Muy bien!"

Slowly, carefully, the posadero was aiming the rifle. The muzzle came a few inches into the room through the hink in the shutter, and the scoundrel without was calculating carefully to get it in an exact line with a sleeper on the bedstead. He could not afford to waste a shot. If the first bullet did not strike, the bunch of cut-throats had an armed and desperate man to deal with. Long minutes passed, while the posadero still fumbled at the window. The Kid, lying on his blanket on the floor, silent and still, watched, with as much cool amusement as if he had been watching a play. There was a surprise coming for these hombres later. For the present the Kid was giving them rope.

Bang!

The roar of the rifle broke the silence with a sound that seemed like thunder, in the stillness of the night.

The heavy bullet crashed through the bed. Had the Kid been lying there he would have waked only to utter his last cry.

But the cut-throats without were not to be denied hearing the cry, for which they listened as the report of the rifle echoed and boomed through the posada.

The Rio Kid uttered a loud, ringing yell. He was prompt to take his cue.

Loud and sharp that yell rang from the Kid's room. And he followed it with a deep groan.

Then—silence.

There was a sound of chuckling outside. The hitherto stealthy figures gathered there moved without restraint now, and the subdued voices spoke in loud tones.

"Todos los Santos! He is gone, Pacheco."

"Muy bien!"

"Listen! No sound——"

"Carambo! He is dead!" said Pacheco. "I did not need you, amigos. But you can never be sure with these Gringo pigs. He is armed, and would have been dangerous had the shot failed."

"The danger is past, Pacheco," chuckled another voice.

The Kid grinned. There was more danger for the bandoleros in that room than they figured. The Kid was on his *feet now*, silent as ever, with a six-gun in his hand.

"Force open the door," said the posadero. "He is dead—he utters no sound; but carambo, if he lingers yet, a cuchillo will end him. Force the door."

"Nuestra senora! I am curious to see the Gringo," came one of the voices. "From the description Luis gave, it is the same Tejano who fought with us in the sierra, and whose death Rafael Gonzago has sworn. If this be the same hombre, it will be welcome news for the chief."

The Kid was conscious of a little disappointment. He understood the words in Spanish; and he knew that these hombres belonged to the gang of Rafael Gonzago, the gang the Kid had helped to cut to pieces in the mountains a few days ago. The Kid had hoped that Gonzago *himself* was on the scene; he wanted badly to get a bead on the chief of the bandoleros. But no doubt this stealthy treachery was beneath the chief, and he had left it to a bunch of his followers.

Hands fumbled over the door, and it creaked under a push. But it stood fast.

"Carambo! It does not open, Pacheco."

"Bah! The *fastenings will not hold*—exert yourself, idler!" snapped the posadero.

The door creaked again. Four or five men were driving at it with hands and shoulders, and the bars would not have held. But the wedge the Kid had driven under the door held it fast enough. He heard the posadero panting and then cursing.

"The accursed Gringo has secured it somehow! He suspected, perhaps, Ramon."

"He did not suspect the chink in the window, Pacheco," chuckled Ramon.

"Carambo! No! The door will not *move, but the shutter is easy.* Espera!" growled Pacheco.

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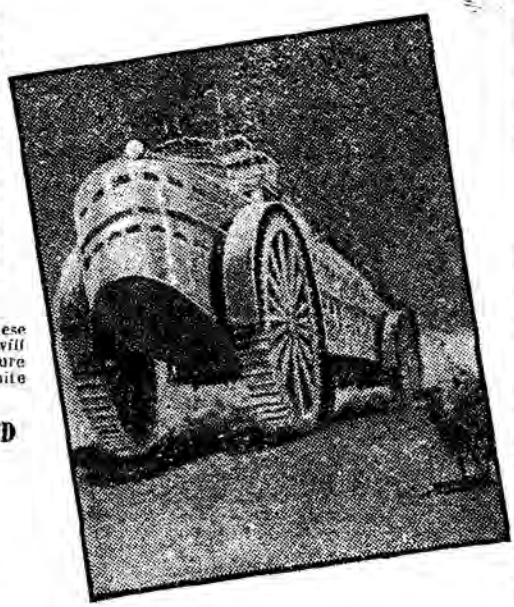

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There was a beating and wrenching, and the wooden shutter was torn away from the ventana.

Soft starlight glimmered into the room.

"Enter, Ramon."

A dark head and brawny shoulders came in at the small window-space. For a moment, scintillating black eyes stared into the darkness of the room. Then the brigand clambered through the window and dropped inside, breathing heavily. The next moment the heavy butt of a Colt crashed on the dark head, and Ramon dropped on the floor, stunned and senseless.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
At Close Quarters!

"MADRE de Dios!"

"Que significa eso?"

"Carambo!"

"Por todos los santos!"

There was a startled muttering of voices without. Close round the window gathered dark forms and swarthy faces, blotting the dim starlight in the gallery.

"Ramon!" hissed the posadero. "Ramon!"

But no word came from Ramon, lying stunned on the floor in the darkness. Only dimly the ruffians at the window could see the stretched figure. The Kid they could not see at all.

"The fool has fallen," said Pacheco at last. "Madre de Dios! What ails him? Ramon, speak."

But Ramon was not likely to speak for many hours to come.

"The Gringo——" whispered a startled voice.

"You are a fool, Ricardo—the Gringo is dead. Enter and open the door, son of a fool."

Another dark head came in at the window. Searching, glittering eyes watched the interior of the room. But only at the window the patch of starlight fell; the unoccupied bed and the Kid at the door were wrapped in darkness. Slowly Ricardo climbed in at the window, and dropped on his feet beside the still form of Ramon. He bent over the senseless brigand; and as he bent the Kid made one stride, and the heavy revolver-butt crashed on the back of the Mexican's head. One faint gasp the ruffian gave, and he fell across Ramon.

"Ricardo!" yelled the posadero.

But Ricardo could not reply.

"The Gringo!" shouted another voice. "You are a fool and a mule, Pacheco; the Gringo is not slain! Your bullet missed——"

"Ramon! Ricardo! They are silent—mule of a posadero, the Gringo lives and has struck them down!"

"Fire into the room—fire!"

The Kid stood back against the door. Three or four shots rang out, and the bullets crashed across the room, dashing fragments from the adobe of the opposite wall. Then a hand came in at the window, with a revolver in it, to spray bullets round the shadowed room; but the finger never pressed the trigger. A shot rang in the darkness, there was a fearful cry, the pistol dropped with a crash, and the hand was withdrawn, streaming with blood, with shattered fingers.

There was a roar of rage. The voice of the posadero rose above the rest, yelling to Luis to bring an axe. Crashing blows fell on the door; the axe, wielded by the posadero, and three or four machetes in the grasp of the brigands, crashed and smashed, and the door swiftly yielded.

The Kid stepped back to the end of the room. He threw the bedstead in the middle in front of him, and threw across it the senseless bodies of Ramon and Ricardo, as carelessly as though they were sacks of alfalfa. That was enough to stop the first rush, and the Rio Kid had a six-gun in either hand now and was ready for the climax. He reckoned that there were still five or six of the bunch for him to handle, and the door was falling in splinters.

It crashed down at last, and, with a yell, the Mexicans rushed in, cuchillo or machete in hand, like a pack of wolves. But one dropped in the doorway as the rush started, another as they entered, and four yelling ruffians crashed into the bed and stumbled over it, roaring with rage. And still came the spitting of fire from the Kid's unerring six-guns as he sprayed them with bullets.

Only one of the Mexicans reached the Kid, and only to fall under a crashing barrel. Two wounded men were running along the gallery; two more groaned on the floor. But the rest were silent.

"I reckon it's time to beat it out of this shebang," murmured the Kid. "I guess there'll be more of these hombres fooling around before dawn, when the word goes to Gonzago that his bunch have been shot up this-a-way."

The Kid coolly picked up his blanket and his slicker pack, and with a reloaded six-gun in his right hand stepped out into the gallery over the sprawling bandoleros, dead or wounded. With wary eyes about him in the starlight he trod to the stable, saddled and packed his mustang, and led him out into the patio, across to the entrance-way. There, under the adobe arch, dim in the star-glimmer, lay the posadero, wounded, where he had sunk down. He glared up at the Kid like a wild beast, and spat out a curse.

"Forget it, feller," said the Kid. "I guess what you want is a bullet through your cabeza, you sure do; but you ain't worth it. Next time you send the nino to Rafael Gonzago, tell him that I'm sure hoping to see him, and that if he wants my scalp he'll find me at Los Pinos."

And the boy puncher led his mustang past the groaning man. Outside the posada, the starlight glimmered on the wooded sides of the canada, and on the hoof-beaten trail that had once been the camino real. The Rio Kid mounted and rode down the trail under the stars.

THE END.

("THE BANDOLERO!" is the title of next Tuesday's Wild West thriller. Don't miss it, boys!)

THIS WEEK'S LIST OF BIRTHDAY DATES!

Readers who were registered in the POPULAR Birthday Gift Club before April 27th, 1929, may claim one of the following gifts:

Fountain Pen.
Penknife.
Table Tennis Set.
Combined Compass and Magnifying Glass
Conjuring Outfit.
Drawing Set.
Electric Torch and Battery.
Leather Pocket Wallet.
Hobby Annual.
Holiday Annual.

—if the date of their birth is the same as a date in the following list—

May 7th, 1914.
June 3rd, 1915.
January 19th, 1914.
April 8th, 1919.
March 1st, 1913.
November 9th, 1912.
October 9th, 1910.
June 25th, 1917.
February 23rd, 1915.
August 9th, 1915.
December 26th, 1913.
September 17th, 1916.
March 21st, 1916.
July 17th, 1913.

If you were BORN on any of these dates, fill in the CLAIMS COUPON provided on this page and send it to:

The Editor,
POPULAR Birthday Gift Club,
5, Carmelite Street,
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so as to reach this address not later than May 9th, 1929. Please write the word "CLAIM" in the top left hand corner of your envelope.

No reader may claim a Gift unless he or she has already been registered as a member of our Birthday Gift Club.

A published date must be exactly the same in day, month, and year as that given on your registration coupon.

You CANNOT claim and register AT THE SAME TIME. Should your birth date happen to be published in this list, and you are *not* already registered, YOU WILL *NOT* BE ELIGIBLE FOR A GIFT.

ANOTHER LIST OF BIRTHDAY DATES WILL APPEAR IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE.

BIRTHDAY GIFT CLAIM COUPON

(For the use of REGISTERED READERS ONLY.)

Name .....

Full Address (*please write plainly*) .....

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I declare myself to have registered in your Birthday Gift Club, before Saturday, April 27th, 1929, and as the date given above (*here state date*).....

is the date of my birth. I wish to claim a (*state name of the Gift you would like*)

.....in accordance with the rules of the club.

THIS COUPON IS ONLY AVAILABLE UNTIL MAY 9th, 1929.

POPULAR. MAY 4th.