DANDY PHOTO OF THE ENGLISH TEST PLAYERS—INSIDE!

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## BOY OUTLAW PROCLAIMED SHERIFF!

SMASHING COMPLETE TALE OF WESTERN ADVENTURE

# The RIO KID—SHERIFF!

## RALPH REDWAY'S ROARING ROMANCE OF TEXAS.

### The Foes of Plug Hat!

THE Rio Kid hitched his holster a little forward, to bring the walnut butt of a gun nearer to his hand.

The Kid was sitting at his ease in a rocker on the wooden piazza of the Plug Hat Hotel, in the cow-town of Plug Hat. At a little distance was the plaza, where the naphtha lamps of half a dozen saloons flared, dimming the light of the stars. From the direction of the plaza a burly, red-bearded cowman came striding, and he stopped at the rickety wooden steps that led up to the piazza where the Kid sat. It was the sight of him that made the Kid shift his gun into easier reach.

Red Harris paused for a moment or two, and then came tramping up the steps, which creaked under his weight.

"Say, you're here!" he said, stopping in front of the Kid.

The Kid nodded cheerily.

"Right hyer," he assented. "If you're looking for me, feller, you've found me to home."

Pop Short, the landlord of the lumber hotel, looked out of the door, a frown on his fat face.

"Here you, Harris," he exclaimed, "and you, Mister Texas Brown! You step down into the street afore you begin burning powder. I ain't the guy to interfere with any gent's amusement; but I'm telling you, bullets ain't no respecters of persons and I'll say you can't do your shootin' on my piazza. You light down into the street."

"Can it you geck!" growled Red Harris. "I ain't come hyer a-shootin'. I got a message for this guy what calls himself Texas Brown."

"Spill it, feller," said the Kid amiably.

Red Harris eyed him surlily. The look on his hard tanned face showed how willing he was to pull a gun on this stranger in Plug Hat. But he did not touch a gun. The Kid, during the few hours he had been in Plug Hat, had beaten a better man than Red Harris; and the burly rough-neck did not seek trouble with the puncher who had gone one better than Cactus Carter.

The Kid gave him a cheery smile.

"Spill it!" he repeated.

"I got a message from Cactus Carter," said Harris.

"I reckoned so," assented the Kid. "I kinder opined that that pesky horse-thief, Carter, wouldn't be satisfied with me bootin' him across the plaza. I'm sure ready to boot him again if he ain't satisfied."

Red Harris made a gesture towards the lighted plaza.

"Carter's waiting for you," he said. "You'll find him in the Red Flare; and you want to pack your gun when you go. And I guess Cactus is going to make you sorry you horned into Plug Hat."

The Kid nodded thoughtfully.

"Cactus is waiting for me in the Red Flare, is he?" he asked.

"He sure is."

"And he's going to give me an even break, if I come a-huntin' him?" asked the Kid.

"Sure."

The Kid laughed.

"I was raised in the Frio country," he said, "and guys in that country are born with their eyes peeled. Say, Mister Harris, you hump back to Cactus Carter and tell him not to wait. He won't see me in the Red Flare this evening."

"You ain't coming?" asked the red-bearded cowman.

"I surely ain't," answered the Kid. "But if Cactus Carter is hunting me, feller, he ain't far to come. What's the matter with Cactus walkin' up the street?"

"If you're afeared to come——" jeered Red Harris.

"Feller," said the Kid placidly, "I ain't afeared of any two-legged guy in Texas. But I guess I ain't such a bone-head as to put my cabeza into a hornet's nest. No, sir! You tell Cactus I'm waiting for him here, and I'll step down into the street and meet up with him as soon as he wants. And tell him that if he don't come he's a yellow coyote, and I'll sure boot him again, same as I did before, next time I see him."

Red Harris scowled and turned away, and tramped down the steps. The Kid watched him as he strode back to the Red Flare saloon, and disappeared into the doorway.

Pop Short came out on the piazza, with a grin on his fat face.

"I guess that message will bring Cactus," he said.

"You reckon?" smiled the Kid.

"Sure! If he don't show up, I guess his jig is up in Plug Hat," said the landlord. "The whole burg's chewing the rag about the way you beat him to the draw and booted him for stealin' your cayuse. If Cactus don't shoot you up, feller, he may as well pull up stakes and slide out of Plug Hat. You was sure a jay not to plug him when you had him covered."

"I didn't want to spill his juice if he'd ride clear of me," said the Kid. "I didn't come to Plug Hat hunting for trouble. But I wasn't letting a guy steal my horse right under my nose. Say Mr. Short, I never struck a town in Texas before that was packed so full of horse-thieves as Plug Hat. They



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WHO'S WHO IN OUR GRAND SOUVENIR GROUP PHOTO OPPOSITE.

Left to right, standing: Duckworth, K. S. Dulespainhil, R. W. V. Robins, Woolley, Geary, Tate, R. Tyldesley, J. C. White, Hendren. Left to right, sitting: Larwood, Hammond, A. P. F. Chapman (Capt.), Hobbs, Sutcliffe.

string up horse-thieves in Frio, where I was raised."

Pop Short grunted.

"I guess half the town would be strung up if they was to string up the horse-thieves in Plug Hat," he answered. "Cactus Carter and his bunch run the town, and the country, too, since the last sheriff was shot up."

"Why don't you elect a new sheriff, and get that bunch rounded up?" asked the Kid.

Mr. Short grunted again.

"There ain't a man in Sassafras county would take it on," he said. "It would be sudden death."

The Kid laughed.

"Here comes Colorado Bill," added Mr. Short. "I guess he's got suthin' to say to you, Mister Brown."

The big cowman came up the wooden steps and gave the Kid a nod and a grin. The Kid smiled. A few hours since he had shot a gun out of the burly cowman's hand, but that feat seemed to have earned him the cowman's esteem.

"Say, Texas," said Colorado Bill. "You want to keep your gun handy."

"I guess my gun's always handy," said the Kid. "Is that ornery horse-thief Carter coming a-shooting?"

"Sure! That's what I've come to tell you," answered Colorado, "and he won't keep you waiting long. You want to step down into the street, Texas, and he'll be along in two shakes of a coyote's tail."

The Kid yawned, and rose from the rocker.

"I guess I'll be on hand," he said.

And he descended the creaking wooden steps into the rugged street of Plug Hat.

## Gun to Gun!

CACTUS CARTER stepped out of the Red Flare saloon.

In the plaza of Plug Hat, the glaring naphtha lamps made it as light as by day.

Outside the saloon was a crowd of the citizens of Plug Hat, in a buzz of excitement, and another crowd followed the gunman out of the saloon.

The slim, hard-faced gunman was perfectly cool. Not a flicker of emotion could be read in his cold face.

Yet more than one man in the crowd had a suspicion that Cactus Carter, the "Killer," the man who was said to have shot more men than he had fingers and toes, disliked the task that lay before him.

Hitherto, Cactus had been monarch of all he surveyed in the cow-town; he was a dead shot, and quick as lightning on the draw, and absolutely ruthless in the use of the weapons of which he was a master. Many a hard-bitten desperado in the lawless cow-town feared the glint in the cold eyes of the gunman. He was undisputed king-pin of Plug Hat; it was an open secret that the late sheriff, who had sought to establish law and order in Sassafras county, had fallen by his hand. Among the desperate refugees from the law who found a hiding-place in Plug Hat, more than one had tried conclusions with Cactus, and he never failed to fix his adversary for the camp cemetery. And it was a matter of wonder in the wild cow-town, that a puncher who looked a mere lad had come into town, beaten Cactus to the draw, disarmed him, and booted him across the plaza.



The lawless authority of the king-pin of Plug Hat hung in the balance now. He had to shoot up the man who had booted him or fall from his high estate, to become an object of derision to those who had followed him and feared him. And for once—for the first time in his savage career—the gunman was feeling doubts.

But he dared not give way to his doubts. Once he backed down in a contest, his reign was over, and his place would be taken by some more reckless and desperate ruffian. It was the price of his position that he had to be ready to set his life upon a cast.

Cactus had stood there at the bar, with his "bunch"—Red Harris, Yellow Dick, and Sandy Tutt, his three closest associates, ready for the Kid to horn in. And though the Plug Hat crowd dared not draw his enmity upon themselves, individually, by spoken comments, Cactus was well aware of what the mob of rough-necks were thinking, and he had nerved himself to the task of seeking the Kid alone. His reputation, his standing among the wild crew of which he was "king-pin," required that he should meet and defeat his rival, playing a lone hand.

Never before had there been doubt in Cactus's heart when he set out to encounter an enemy. And now that he doubted, he hid his doubts well. He swung out of the saloon and walked down the plaza towards the lumber hotel.

On either side of him the crowd surged.

Thirty yards away, the lights of the lumber hotel glared on the rugged street.

In the centre of the street, full in view in the bright light, stood the Rio Kid—"Texas Brown" as he was called in Plug Hat. And had Cactus known the real name of Texas Brown, he would have known that he had reason for the doubt that so strangely chilled his heart.

The Kid stood easily, his hands by his sides, within quick reach of the guns in the low-slung holsters. This was not a new game to the Kid; he knew every turn of it.

He waited, with a cheery smile on his face. If there was a doubt in the mind of the gunman, there was none in the Rio Kid's.

Slowly, Cactus came up the rugged street.

The Kid was watching him warily from the moment he stepped out of the Red Flare. And he was watching not only Cactus, but with the tail of his eye he was keeping tabs on the throng on either side of the street. The Kid had sized up Cactus very keenly, and he did not expect an even break from the gunman, if Cactus had a chance to double cross him.

Cactus was not touching a gun yet.

Slowly, foot by foot, he drew nearer to the Kid, his eyes upon him, his hands empty. As he drew nearer and nearer, the buzzing in the excited crowd died away to a breathless hush.

Each of the adversaries eyed the other like a cat, each ready for action as soon as the other made a movement to draw. Thirty yards had been reduced to thirty feet, and still neither touched a gun.

At twenty feet, the gunman, in sheer desperation, put his fate to the touch.

In a single movement, that was so rapid that the eye could scarcely follow it, he flicked his gun out and fired from the hip without raising the weapon.

Rapid as he was, the Kid was as fast, or faster.

Like magic, a gun was in the Kid's hand, and he, too, fired from the hip without wasting a split second in lifting his gun.

The Kid felt the wind of a bullet that clipped the edge of his Stetson hat; the gunman had fired too hurriedly. But the Kid's return bullet, so close that the two bullets sounded as one, went unerringly to the mark.

Cactus Carter staggered.

A roar burst from the Plug Hat crowd, silent till that moment in tense excitement.

All eyes were on the gunman.

The Rio Kid's bullet had gone home, and the gunman staggered, but he did not fall.

He stood unsteadily, his gun-hand sagging at his side, his face white as chalk. Every man in the street expected to hear the Kid's gun roar again and again, and to see his opponent fall riddled with bullets. But the Kid stood gripping his smoking gun, without pulling the trigger.

"By the great horned toad, he's got him!" yelled Colorado Bill.

The gunman stood swaying. The gun dropped from his hand to the ground with a clatter.

A blaze of demoniac rage came into Cactus's eyes. His right arm hung at his side, disabled by the bullet. With his left he dragged his second gun from his belt.

Bang!

The Kid's Colt roared again, and the gun spun from Cactus' hand before he could use it.

A hoarse cry came from the gunman. He staggered, and fell to the earth.

"Cactus has got his!" roared Colorado Bill.

"Aw, forget it!" drawled the Kid. "He ain't got his, not worth a red cent. I've jest tickled his fin, and Cactus is worth a whole crowd of dead men yet."

The Kid's smoking gun was still in his hand, his wary eye watching. He was ready for some member of the "bunch" to take up the quarrel for the fallen gunman.

But the "bunch" were not toning for trouble with the puncher who had shot up their leader. They gathered round the gunman.

Cactus Carter was lifted, and carried back into the Red Flare. The Kid, still wary and watchful, strolled back into the lumber hotel.

## Not Caught Napping!

"SIDE-KICKER, old hoss!" murmured the Kid.

The grey mustang turned his head and whinnied softly as the Kid stroked his glossy neck.

The mustang was stalled in the barn behind the lumber hotel. And it was the Kid's intention to camp that night in the barn.

In a town like Plug Hat, the Kid did not care to trust his cayuse out of his own sight. Indeed, Pop Short made no secret of the fact that the mustang would probably be missing by morning. His own pinto had been lifted from that barn the same day; and the Kid had already learned that no man's horse was safe in Plug Hat.

Pop Short showed him into the barn with a glimmering lantern.

"You figure you'll bed down hyer, Mr. Brown?" he asked.

"I reckon!" answered the Kid. "I sure don't want to wake up in the morning and find this hyer cayuse gone, feller."

"You're said it," agreed the landlord. "I guess your hoss will be safer with you along, sir. But you won't be so all-fired safe yourself."

"How come?" asked the Kid.

Pop Short shook his head.

"You've laid out Cactus Carter," he said. "But Cactus is only one of a bunch—and a dog-goned tough bunch."

"They didn't seem to be honing for trouble," remarked the Kid.

"I guess they ain't honing for gun-play with the guy that's shot up the all-firedest gunman in Sassafras county," answered Pop Short. "You're too mighty sudden on the shoot to please that bunch, Mister Brown. But if you don't hear from them to-night, if you sleep in this barn, I shall sure be surprised."

"I guess it cuts no ice," said the Kid. "I'm bedding down here along with my cayuse."

"It's your say-so; but you'd sleep sounder behind a barred door, I reckon."

"I guess I'll sleep as sound as I want, feller."

And Pop Short, leaving the lantern hanging on a nail, retired, and left the Kid to his own devices.

The Kid, having looked after the comfort of his horse always his first task put out the lantern.

A glimmer of starlight in at the barred, unglazed window was light enough for the Kid.

There was a faint smile on the Kid's handsome face as he moved in the gloom of the barn.

The big door was closed, but the lock on it was out of action; it had been forced when the landlord's pinto was lifted that day. The Kid could have wedged the door fast as it opened inward, but he did not take the trouble.

He stepped to the barred window and looked out in the dim starlight.

The hour was late, and the lumber hotel was shutting. He could hear Pop Short bolting and barring doors and windows.

From the plaza there was still a glare of light from some of the saloons. But the noise of the cow-town was dying away.

The Kid was in no hurry to turn in.

He remained at the window for some time, looking at the stars and the shadows, thinking, and listening to the sinking noise of the town as saloon after saloon closed down.

All was darkness and silence at last.

The Kid left the window and sorted out a bundle of straw for a bed. On the bundle he arranged his blanket, stuffed with straw, where the glimmer of starlight fell in upon it from the window. He stacked straw round it, and smiled as he finished his task.

If any guy spied into the barn that night he would see, or figure that he saw, a sleeper rolled in his blanket in the straw. And if that dummy sleeper stopped a bullet or two it would not greatly concern the Kid.

Beside the window, close to the wall and hidden in thick shadow, was a wooden bench. On that bench the Kid stretched himself to rest. The night was warm, and he did not miss his blanket.

With his head pillowed on his arm the Kid closed his eyes and almost immediately sank into slumber.

Where he lay he was invisible to anyone entering the barn; and he knew, too, that if the door opened, the creak of the rusty hinges would awaken him instantly.

He slept as peacefully as if he was rolled in the deepest cover of the chapparral.

A couple of hours had passed when the Kid awoke.

He awakened, as he always did, with his mind perfectly clear from the mists of sleep, and without a movement or a sound.

He lay still and listened.

He knew that something had awakened him, and he listened intently to learn what it was.

A grim smile crossed his face as he saw a black shadow fall across the starlit space inside the little barred window.

It was the shadow, grotesquely exaggerated, of a head outside the window, blocking the starlight.

A face was pressed to the opening between the wooden bars, peering into the dusky interior of the barn.

Silently the Kid's hand moved, closing on the butt of a gun. Then he lay without motion, waiting.

From the stillness a faint whisper reached his ears.

"You figure he's there, Yellow Dick?"

"I guess so," came the soft answering whisper of the man peering between the bars. "I sure reckon he's there, Sandy."

"I know the guy was bedding down in the barn," came another voice. "Mexican Pete was watching, and he allowed that the guy went into the barn and never came out again."

"He's sure there!" muttered Yellow Dick. "And sleeping as sound as if he was in a pesky hotel at San Antone."

The shadow left the window.

But the three rough-necks of Plug Hat remained close, for the Kid, straining his ears, could still hear their whispering, husky voices.

"What's the game, Red? I guess if we push open the door and run in on him——" muttered Yellow Dick.

"Guess again," grunted Red Harris. "You 'member how them hinges creaked when we got Pop's pinto this morning. I guess they creak loud enough to wake a guy if he was sleeping like a greaser full of pulque."

"We got to get him!" said Sandy Tutt. "I'll say Cactus will be apt to get mad if we don't get him, Red."

"We're getting him all O.K.," answered Red. "There's light enough from the winder to drill him where he lies. I guess I'm putting lead through him from the winder."

"Say, it's pesky low-down to plug a galoot asleep!" muttered Sandy. "I guess I wouldn't stand for it, Red."

"You dog-goned jay, you want to wake him up and stand in front of his gun, after the way he shot up Cactus!"

Pop Short started back in surprise at sight of the three captive gunmen. "Waal, carry me home to die!" he yelled. "What you got thar?"

"I sure do not!" answered Tutt promptly.

"Then quit chewing the rag and leave it to me."

A shadow darkened the window again. There was a glimmer of metal as the long barrel of a Colt was thrust between the wooden bars. A hand and an arm came in behind the six-gun.

The Kid watched them curiously. There was no sound of whispering now; all was still. Red Harris was taking careful, meticulous aim at the rolled blanket in the heap of straw, in the glimmering starlight. If the shot failed, the roar of the six-gun would infallibly wake the sleeper; and the Plug Hat bunch did not want to face the gun that had proved too good for Cactus Carter. Long and carefully Red Harris dwelt on his aim before he pulled trigger.

The report, when it came, came in the stillness with an effect of thunder.

Bang!

Right through the stuffed blanket in the straw tore the bullet, and following the shot came a deep groan in the barn. The Rio Kid, from his corner in the darkness, added that realistic touch.

Bang! Bang!

Twice again the red-bearded rough-neck fired, sending each bullet through the stuffed figure in the straw. But there were no more groans; the Kid waited in silence now.

He heard a chuckle from the window.

"I guess that's fixed him, you'uns!"

"You bet!"

And the three ruffians, nothing doubting, scurried along the barn to the door, shoved it open, and came crowding in.

## The New Sheriff!

THE Rio Kid did not stir.

He had shifted his position a little, and was now sitting up on the bench in the dark corner, a gun in either hand.

In that position he remained still and silent; watching. Side-Kicker had given a startled squeal, but was now silent again. The three rough-necks gathered round the straw bed, on which the stuffed blanket lay, with three bullet-holes through it. They stood clearly in the starlight that streamed in at the window; and the Kid, invisible in his dark corner, watched them curiously.

Red Harris, with a brutal laugh, stirred the rolled blanket with his foot.

"He's sure got his!" he remarked.

"He sure has!" chuckled Yellow Dick, "and that cayuse is ours, you'uns! I guess the guy was bedding down hyer to make sure that that cayuse was safe."

And he chuckled.

"Git hold of the cayuse," muttered Sandy Tutt. "I guess that shooting has woke up Pop Short, you'uns. We want to beat it!"

"Aw, forget it!" grunted Red Harris. "I guess if Pop Short is woke up, he will be mighty careful not to horn in. I guess I'd shoot up Pop Short jest as soon as look at him."

"Hands up!"

It was a sudden voice from the darkness, outside the space of starlight in which the three rough-necks stood.

The ruffians started convulsively.

Not for a moment had they doubted that the stranger in Plug Hat lay dead at their feet, riddled with bullets from Red Harris' six-gun. But it was the voice of the puncher that came from the gloom.

"Say——" stuttered Red Harris. "Say, who—what——"

"Thunder!"

"Don't touch a gun!" came the quiet voice. "I've got two Colts looking at you, and if you touch a gun, fellers, it will be the last thing you'll do this side of Jordan."

"The puncher!" roared Red Harris.

"You've said it!" drawled the Kid. "And I guess I shall want you to pay for that blanket you've drilled holes in, Red. The straw inside it belongs to Mr. Short, but I reckon that ain't damaged a whole lot. But I surely do dislike a guy using my blanket for pistol-practice."

The Kid stepped out of the darkness. His guns were at a level now, his eyes looking over them mockingly. The three rough-necks faced him, panting with rage. There was a revolver in Red Harris' hand; but he did not venture to raise it.

"I guess I said hands up!" drawled the Kid. "I ain't waiting you'uns, want to reach for the roof, and reach pronto. Or—"

Red Harris' gun dropped in the straw, and his hands went up over his head. More promptly still the hands of Sandy Tutt and Yellow Dick were elevated. They stared at the Kid, in deep rage, but still in more astonishment than rage. The ghost of the Rio Kid could hardly have startled them more.

The Kid holstered his left-hand gun, keeping the other looking at the bunch of desperadoes. They eyed him wolfishly as he stepped towards them. But they did not dare to lower their hands. Only too well they knew that the puncher could have riddled them with lead, before they had time to pull trigger if they reached for a weapon. They were three to one, and three of the toughest rough-necks in Plug Hat; but they stood before the Kid's gun like lambs.

With his left hand, the Kid drew away their weapons, tossing guns and bowie-knives into a distant corner, one by one. With their hands up, and savage scowls on their faces, the trio of rough-necks submitted to the inevitable. In a few moments, they were disarmed.

"That's better for you!" drawled the Kid. "If you was to try to give me any trouble, fellers, I should have to spill your juice; and I sure don't want to muss up Pop Short's barn."

"What's your game, durn you?" hissed Red Harris. "You got us dead to rights, you gol-darned puncher! What you figure you're going to do?"

"You want to get that trail-rope," said the Kid, with a nod towards his trail-rope that hung on the wall.

"I guess——"

"And you want to do it pronto," said the Kid. "I ain't honing to spill your vinegar, though you've shot three holes through my blanket. But if you don't jump to orders, fellers, you're gone coons, and I'm telling you so. Get that trail-rope, durn your hide!"

He rapped out the order sharply, and the gleam in his eyes over the revolver was enough for Red Harris. With a curse, the ruffian pulled down the coiled rope.

"Now you want to tie up the paws of your pardners," said the Kid, "and you want to tie them safe, or you won't know what hit you, Mr. Harris. Jump to it—I ain't waiting. I guess I'm some bonehead for not plugging you anyhow; and I'll sure plug you if you keep me waiting."

Breathing fury, the ruffian obeyed. The rope was knotted round the wrists of Sandy Tutt and Yellow Dick; and under the Kid's close inspection, the knots were safely tied. The Kid nodded approval.

"O.K." he said. "Now make a loop round your own paws, Mr. Harris, and I'll oblige you by pullin' it tight."

Red Harris, gritting his teeth, obeyed. The Kid pulled the slip-noose tight round the ruffian's wrists. Then, with a grin, the puncher holstered his gun. He took the rope, and knotted it afresh on the arms of the three ruffians, winding it round them, and securing them together in a row. Then the rope was wound round their legs, with an ample allowance of knots; and finally the Kid tied the end of it to a hook high up in the wall of the barn.

"Now I guess you'uns are safe for the night!" he remarked. "I'm asking you to keep quiet, while a guy gets a little sleep."

Red Harris gritted his teeth and was silent.

The Kid turned away from the three prisoners. He dragged the bench along to the door, took his blanket and rolled himself in it, and laid down on the bench to sleep—sure to be awakened if any attempt was made to push open the door from outside.

Heedless of the three ruffians bound in the long trail-rope, the Kid closed his eyes, and was immediately asleep.

But there was no sleep that night for Red Harris, Sandy Tutt, and Yellow Dick. They stood in a bunch against the wall of the barn, under the hook to which the end of the rope was tied. Long and savagely they wrestled with their bonds; but the Kid, who knew how to tie up a dangerous steer, had tied them securely enough. They had no chance of wriggling loose. And after a time they gave up the attempt, and stood in a disconsolate bunch, breathless from their efforts, and muttering lurid curses in low tones—carefully low lest they should awaken the Kicker.

The Rio Kid slept soundly.

His eyes did not open till the sun was in the sky, and the new day was shining down on the town of Plug Hat. Then it was a push on the outside of the door that awakened him.

"'Mornin'!" said Pop Short.

"'Mornin', sir!" said the Kid.

"Say, your cayuse is still here," said Mr. Short, with a glance at Side-kicker.

"Sure!" said the Kid.

"Carry me home to die!" yelled Pop Short, suddenly catching sight of the three rough-necks tied to the hook in the wall. "What's that?"

"That?" said the Kid, with a smile. "I guess that's a bunch that called in to see me in the dark, and didn't find me so fast asleep as they figured. I guess I roped them up to keep them out of mischief."

Pop Short burst into a roar of laughter.

"Say, this beats the whole deck!" he yelled. "Say, this surely does beat the Dutch!"

"Say, you dog-goned puncher, you letting us loose?" hissed Red Harris.

And the question was accompanied by a string of oaths from Yellow Dick and Sandy Tutt.

The Kid nodded.

He released the rope from the hook, and from the legs of the three ruffians. A jerk on the trail rope pulled them

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came careering from the opposite direction. The driver touched his brakes to steady his machine round the bend; but he forgot that the surface of the road was slippery from the rain that still showered down.

They saw him get into a skid. The tail of his car swung round, leaving two great swathes on the road behind as it slashed dead in their path.

Jack pulled over to cut inside the other car, and in that instant the driver tried to get out of his skid, wrenching his machine in the same direction, so that it seemed that the two must crash.

Sid heard the tearing scream of the brakes on the chassis. Jack hauled the steering-wheel over, as though to dive at the side of the road. Instead, the rear of the machine slithered round, spinning them to the middle of the road and sliding almost backwards. Again Jack twisted on the wheel, pulling the car broadside on, then he let the tail fling round, missing the other machine by a yard.

He pulled straight. They rolled on and came to a stop, just as a crash sounded behind them.

Sid, both hands clutching the rim of the scuttle, turned a scared face to Jack.

"Thought we was goin' to smash!" he gasped, and added: "Might's well go back and be sacked."

Jack turned the chassis, and they rolled slowly around the turn again. The car they had met was off the road. It looked as though it had been trying to wrap itself around the telegraph post that stood there. The radiator was all battered, and a gentleman was climbing slowly from the machine. On the opposite side of the road the car bearing Ben Moran and Mr. Lucas was just stopping.

"That's one of our new sports saloons. That's why I never recognised it from behind! They must ha' been tryin' it out," Sid exclaimed, as he saw the car, and a moment later they pulled up beside the wreck.

The old gentleman came across to them as Jack climbed down from the bucket seat.

"I thought we were going to hit one another," the gentleman said. "Did you skid like that intentionally—so that you'd miss me?"

"Yes, sir," said Jack, and behind him Sid's eyes almost popped out of his head. But he believed Jack, because he knew that Jack wasn't the sort to tell lies.

"It was the smartest piece of driving that I've seen in my life, and I——"

A roar broke in on his words as Moran and Lucas came charging from their car.

"What the perishin' heck d'you think you're doin' whoopin' about the road on that chassis?" Moran snarled as he wagged a finger under Jack's nose. "You're sacked for that!"

"Control yourself, Moran. Let me deal with this," came the chill voice of the general manager. "Give an account of yourself, King."

Jack faced him; the rain driving against his cheeks. But before he could get out a word, the man from the wrecked car said:

"I'm Baddeley Baron—Sir Baddeley Baron, an this boy has just shown a masterly piece of driving. Look at the marks!" He pointed to the broad sweeps left by the tyres on the wet road. "I got into a nasty skid, and he certainly saved my life. If we'd hit, I should have been killed, without a doubt, and the whole thing is entirely the fault of that wretched car round the telegraph-pole."

He glared at the smoking, steaming front of his machine as he spoke.

"Nothing but trouble since I've had it, and——" He broke off, then nodded to the chassis behind Jack and Sid. "Is that for sale? Could you put me a body on it? If you can, I'll buy it, on one condition!"

"The machine is certainly for sale, Sir Baddeley," said Mr. Lucas, and his stony face melted into something resembling a smile.

"Very well, I'll give you a cheque on deposit now; but these two boys must not suffer for their—er—their impetuosity."

Mr. Lucas was too much of a business man to miss the sale of a thousand guinea machine, just for the sake of sacking a couple of works boys, and he said:

"They can consider themselves admonished, Sir Baddeley, that is all."

The baronet smiled, then he shook hands warmly with Jack. If he would have said anything else, he didn't get the chance, because Jack and Sid climbed back to the chassis in silence at a jerk from the general manager's head.

The chassis rolled slowly and quietly away at a sedate twenty miles an hour, Ben Moran glaring after them. They travelled a mile or more before Sid said anything. Then he heaved a whistling sigh of relief.

"Ben Moran is a good driver," he said. "But I lay he couldn't ha' handled a machine like you did. Jack, when we get back, I'll make you a wreath o' sparkin' plugs an' crown you the 'Skid Kid'!"

THE END.

*(There's motor-racing thrills galore in "THE HILL-CLIMB HEROES!" next week's stirring story of the "Skid Kid." Order your POPULAR well in advance.)*


## DOWN BY THE SEA!

**Look out for our representatives at the seaside resort you are visiting; he is giving away splendid prizes and thousands of dandy free gifts. Also, numerous competitions will be held for which attractive prizes will be given. Very large quantities of small gifts will be distributed to readers who are seen making a prominent display of The POPULAR.**


## THE RIO KID—SHERIFF!

*(Continued from page 6.)*

to the door of the barn, where Pop Short stood yelling with laughter.

"Beat it!" said the Kid tersely.

"Let our arms loose, you gol-darned geck!" hissed Sandy Tutt.

The Kid shook his head.

"I guess it will make Plug Hat smile some to see you fixed up like that," he answered. "Just beat it! I'll sure help you with my boot."

The three rough-necks, still tied together in a bunch, only able to use their legs, staggered out of the barn. The Rio Kid's boot, vigorously applied, started them, and they staggered away as fast as they could.

Loud yells of laughter greeted them as they appeared in the street of Plug Hat and zigzagged their way along the rugged street towards the plaza, to reach the Red Flare, where they had friends to let them loose. With faces black with fury, gritting their teeth with rage, the bunch of rough-necks lurched and staggered along, amid roars of laughter that woke every echo of Plug Hat.

It was an hour later that the Rio Kid, having finished his breakfast, came out on the piazza of the lumber hotel, and looked into the street. Pop Short was on the wooden piazza, and with him nearly a dozen other citizens of Plug Hat. The whole party made a movement towards the Kid, and the punchor, for a second, eyed them warily, and his hands slid towards his guns. But it was not a hostile movement. Every face was friendly, and every member of the numerous party raised his Stetson in salute to the Kid. And the Kid, who was politeness itself, raised his Stetson in acknowledgment of the greeting, wondering the while what this demonstration might portend.

"Mister Texas Brown!" said Pop Short, who had evidently been selected as spokesman. "This here is a delegation of the most substantial citizens of Plug Hat, and they're sure proud to make your acquaintance."

"You do me proud, Mr. Short, sir," answered the Kid politely.

"And this here delegation," continued Pop Short, "is here to put a request up to you, Mister Texas Brown."

"Hear, hear!" said the delegation, with one voice.

"Shoot!" said the Kid.

"This here delegation," went on Pop Short, "requests you to stand for election for sheriff of Sassafras county."

"Hear, hear!" repeated the substantial citizens of Plug Hat.

The Kid jumped.

"Me for sheriff!" he gasped.

"Jest you!" said Pop Short. "The last sheriff was shot up by Cactus Carter's bunch, and like I've told you, no galoot in this section is honing for the job since. Mister Texas Brown, this delegation of citizens reckons that you are the man for the job. This delegation asks you to stand, and will use their influence to get you in."

The Kid gasped.

The boy outlaw of the Rio Grande had come to Plug Hat to keep out of the way of sheriffs. He stared blankly at the delegation of substantial citizens of Plug Hat.

"Carry me home to die!" he ejaculated.

The Kid's eyes danced.

"Gents," he said, "you do me proud. I guess if you want me I'm your mutton, with the wool on. Gents, it's a cinch."

And a cinch it was. The Rio Kid, once an outlaw, hunted by half the sheriffs in Texas, was the new sheriff of Plug Hat.

THE END.

*(Don't miss reading "BY ORDER OF THE SHERIFF!" next Tuesday's gripping tale of the Rio Kid—it's great, chums!)*