



*The Rio Kid has been branded an outlaw among men—  
but he proves himself a man among outlaws when he  
rides a race against death for the sake of a boy pard.*

## THE FIRST CHAPTER

### THE SHOT FROM THE TIMBER!

**I**T was the sight of a blue jay, fluttering startled from the cedars, that warned the Rio Kid of danger—of which he had never dreamed.

The flash of the rifle, the whiz of the bullet, came immediately afterwards, but did not catch the Kid napping. He was down on his horse's flank, with only a leg over the saddle, and he felt the wind of the bullet as it passed. The report, a split second later, rolled like thunder through the silent timber.

Danger and the Rio Kid were old acquaintances; but he

had not looked for it after crossing the border and leaving behind him the sheriffs who were hunting him.

Outlaw by no fault of his own, honest as the day in spite of it, the Kid had a hard trail to ride, and peril dogged his steps. But he had figured that he had left all that behind his pinto's tail when he rode into Canada. In British Columbia, no guy had ever seen the Kid—it was a far cry from the plains of Texas. His description, maybe, was known; but the Kid had ridden into a new country in a new guise.

The black-muzzled mustang, as well known as the boy outlaw himself, had

By

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been left in trusted hands. With it were left the walnut-butted guns that had seen so much—perhaps too much—service. The band of silver nuggets no longer adorned the Kid's Stetson.

In Canada, they had told the Kid, a guy did not need to ride heeled; and he packed no gun; the holster, which he kept for old times' sake, was empty. He was riding a painted horse—quite a good cayuse, though the Kid reckoned that his own mustang could have given that pinto fifty yards start in a hundred, and beaten him by the length of a Texas riata.

He rode a trail through timber north of the Thompson river—tall timber that was good to see, though it did not please the Kid's eye like the tangled chaparrals of his own Texas. That trail, the Kid reckoned, was going to land him sooner or later at Yellow Mule, where there was placer-mining, and where the Kid was going to try his luck—and which had the advantage, to the Kid's mind at least, of being out of sight and sound of the railroad.

The Kid had been raised on horses, and horseflesh was good enough for him, and always would be. That day he had ridden across a railroad track, stretching over the plain, and heard the shriek of a locomotive coming up from Thompson—and he did not want to hear it again.

But when that sudden shot came from the cedars, the Kid reckoned that the guys who had told him he did not want to pack a gun in Canada had been stringing him along! Only the prompt wariness, bred of a life of danger, had saved him—and had it saved him?

From the cedars, a man leaped out with a smoking rifle in his hands, ready for another shot. The Kid

had an instant's glimpse of a tanned vindictive face under a Stetson, barred by a black moustache, as he spun his pinto round.

At that moment, the Kid would have given half Texas to feel the old walnut butt in his grip. It was not the Rio Kid's way to turn his back on an enemy; he hated the idea of it. But he did not bank on facing a full Winchester with bare hands. That was not good enough even for the reckless Kid.

Almost in a twinkling, the pinto spun round, and the Kid was riding back the way he had come, bending low over the horse's neck.

Crash! roared behind him, but his swiftness saved him—the lead missed him by a yard or more. He swept round a bend in the trail—tall timber was quickly between him and his enemy. But there was a clatter of rapid-running feet. If the hombre had a horse, no doubt it was tethered in the trees, but he did not stop for it—he still counted on getting the Kid with the rifle.

Before the Kid now lay a long straight stretch, walled by high cedars; and if that guy got round the bend behind him, before he made the grade, the Kid was a gone coon and he knew it.

Many a time had the Kid ridden hard, with Texas sheriffs or Mexican alcaldes riding hard behind him. But seldom had he driven his mustang, Side-Kicker, as he now drove the galloping pinto.

Who that guy with the black moustache was, and why he wanted him, the Kid could not begin to guess; but it was clear that he wanted him, and wanted him bad; and if he got going with that Winchester in the straight, the Kid was going to tumble off the pinto riddled with lead.

With quirt and spur he rode, driving the pinto to a mad speed, the tall cedars blending into one another as they flashed by.

Half a mile of the straight, with no cover that would have sheltered a cicada—would he make it? There was another bend ahead—after that, another stretch of the straight; but there he would be safe from a man on foot. Was he going to make the grade?

Gallop! gallop! The hoofs beat staccato, swift as the rattle of a machine-gun. Bang! The gunman was round the bend behind him, and burning powder. But it was a long range now, and the hot lead clipped

only a patch from the Kid's red shirt. But it gave the gunman the range, and another shot—

Sweating, the Kid thundered round the curve in the timber trail. Bang! bang! roared through the cedars, but he was out of the shooting now. The guy with the Winchester was welcome to blaze off all his cartridges at the cedars, if he liked. He was dropped, and the Rio Kid was done with him.

Checking his horse to a more moderate speed, the Kid rode the back-trail. He was done with that hombre—and sorry to have done with him. With a gun in his grip, he would have asked nothing better than to round up that guy with the tanned

The boy's hand flashed out of his pocket, with a revolver in it. "Hands up! I know you—the Rio Kid! Hands up or I'll shoot!" And the astonished Kid, like a man in a dream, sat his pinto, and put up his hands!



face and the black moustache, and give him a lesson about shooting up strangers on the trail.

But, unarmed, it was not good enough, and the Kid reluctantly drove the thought from his mind. Instead of that, he would have to ride a wide circle to get to Yellow Mule without meeting up again with that guy and his Winchester—maybe as far as that doggoned railroad.

Not in a good temper, the Kid rode. It had always been said, in Texas, that the Rio Kid was a bad man to crowd, but that guy had crowded him, and got by with it. It got the Kid's goat sorely.

It puzzled him, too. That guy, he reckoned, was some gunman from over the border—like himself! He knew the breed. Some rustler who had jumped the States to save his neck from a sheriff's rope, as likely as not. But what did he want the Kid for?

Some old enemy whom the Kid had forgotten? It did not seem likely. Or had the gunman, watching the trail for somebody else, made a mistake when the Kid came riding along, mistaking him for the man he wanted? The Kid nodded as that idea came into his mind. That was more probable.

If that was the case, he was likely to meet the other guy coming up the trail, and a word of warning would not be out of season. The Kid slowed to a trot, thinking it over.

It seemed probable; and the probability became a certainty in his mind when he sighted a rider coming towards him up the trail from the direction of the distant railroad. A fellow of about his own age, in a red shirt like the Kid's, with a cheery boyish face under his Stetson. The Kid grinned as he watched him. Was

that boy the galoot the gunman had been waiting for? It looked like it.

The Kid liked the boy's looks. He had a pleasant face, with smiling blue eyes, and a bunch of flaxen hair sticking out under his Stetson. Too good a lad, the Kid reckoned, to let go on his way, to be shot up by a skulking gunman. And as the two riders approached one another, on the trail walled by tall timber, the Kid threw up his hand as a sign to the other to halt.

The boy pulled in, his blue eyes fixing on the Kid, startled. It seemed to the Kid that recognition leaped into those startled eyes. Holding his reins with his left, the boy jammed his right hand into his pocket. The Kid smiled at him.

"Pull in your cayuse, feller, and lissen a piece!" he said. "I reckon—Great jumping painters!" he yelled.

The boy's hand flashed out of his pocket, with a blunt-nosed "bulldog" revolver in it. The black muzzle of the bulldog stared the Kid full in his astonished face.

"Hands up! I know you—the Rio Kid! Hands up, or I'll shoot!"

The boyish blue eyes were gleaming now, over the black barrel, with all a man's grim determination. And the astonished Kid, like a man in a dream, sat his pinto, and put up his hands over the Stetson, staring.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER

### THE KID GETS THERE

"KEEP them up!" the boy snapped.

"Say, feller——" gasped the Kid.

The Rio Kid was not easily surprised, but he had it coming to him now. He had told himself, when he rode over the border on a dark night, that he had dropped the old dangers in a new country where his name and



fame were known, if at all, only by hearsay—himself unknown. But if that black-moustached gunman back in the timber had made a mistake, this boy was making none. He knew the outlaw of the Rio Grande, and he had him covered.

But the Kid was cool again in a moment. He liked that lad—liked his cheery looks, liked the swift resolution with which he had pulled the gun and covered him.

He did not know the fellow from Adam; but clearly the boy knew him, and, if he knew him, knew that he was a bad man to crowd. But there was no fear, no sign of it, no irresolution about him; the gun in his hand was steady as a rock; his eyes glinted over it. But the Kid did

not figure that he was in any great danger.

This boy had courage—the Kid himself had nothing on him for that. But he was no gunman like that hard-faced guy back in the timber. The Kid did not reckon he was great shakes at shooting. The blunt-nosed popgun

in his hand made the Kid, accustomed to a .45 Colt, smile.

The boy fancied that the Kid was at his mercy; and the Kid grinned at the idea. He was prepared to undeceive him, pronto; but he did not want to hurt him. Smiling,



The Kid was out of the saddle almost by the time the gun touched the ground. Anderson sprang down for it—but by then it was in the Kid's hand!

he sat his horse with his hands up.

“ You figure you know me, feller ? ” drawled the Kid, banteringly.

His grin found no reflection on the boyish face confronting him. That was hard set and grim.

“ I know you—the Rio Kid ! ”

"It's sort of slipped my memory if we've met up before, old-timer! What'll you call yourself when you're sitting around with the old folks at home?"

"My name's Jack Anderson."

"Fossicker?" asked the Kid.

There were plenty of signs about the boy that he was one of the place-miners of the Yellow Mule section.

"Yes. Never mind that. Keep your hands up——"

"Ain't I reaching for the sky, feller, like a good little man, same as you've told me to?" grinned the Kid. "But you got me guessing! You've called me by a name fairly well known along the Rio Grande and the Frio, but I never figured to hear it barked at me in Canada. Where'd you hear it?"

"In Texas," said Anderson, quietly, "I was on the cow-punching there for a few months. I saw you riding through Packsaddle—with a crowd at your heels. I reckon you never saw me—I was one of hundreds—but I saw you, and I'd know you anywhere."

The Kid whistled softly. He remembered that wild adventure—he remembered how a Texas sheriff had nearly roped him in, and how he had ridden through Main Street, Packsaddle, with a roaring gun in either hand, a roaring mob round him, bullets flying like hail.

And this boy had seen him then—seen him fight a desperate way through a swarm of armed men—and yet dared to hold him up, as he was doing, with a toy popgun in his grip for which the Kid would not have given a continental red cent!

The Kid wanted to laugh, but he respected the boy all the more.

"Feller," said the Kid, soberly, "you know too much, if I was the

all-fired firebug that the sheriff of Frio would tell you I was! But I wouldn't hurt one curl of that pretty mop of yourn."

The boy flushed angrily.

"I don't reckon you could hurt me," he snapped. "I've got you covered, and I'll pull the trigger if you give trouble. Mind, I mean that!"

"I ain't doubting that you do," said the Kid, amicably. "Might a cornered guy ask what's the next bit on the bill?"

"You're going to ride ahead of me till we get to Yellow Mule, and I'm going to hand you over!" said Jack Anderson, determinedly.

"Carry me home to die!" said the Kid. He could not see himself riding back to the disappointed gunman! "Say, what do you figure I stopped you on the trail for?"

"That's not a hard one to guess, as you're the Rio Kid" said Anderson. "You've heard of my strike on the Porcupine, and you're after my dust! I've thought more than once that Frisco Dave and his gang had an eye on me—maybe you're in with them——"

"Never heered of the cuss!" said the Kid. "But—say, is that Frisco a hard-faced guy with a black moustache like it was dyed?"

"I see you know him!"

"I'll say I've given him the once-over, and not half-an-hour ago," agreed the Kid, "and I'll let on to this—that identical guy turned me back on the trail to Yellow Mule, trying to make a colander of me with his Winchester, and I reckoned he had got the wrong cayuse on the rope. That was why I stopped you, feller—to warn you that if you was on the wrong side of a guy with a black moustache, to strike for Yellow Mule

by some other trail—and a safer one.”

Anderson laughed contemptuously.

“ You won’t fool me with a tale like that ! ” he said. “ Now, get on—ride ahead of me and keep your hands up.”

The Kid looked at him, quietly. He reckoned that the man with the Winchester was still in the timber ; perhaps coming along the trail hoping for another chance with the rifle. He was not likely to turn back and chance it ; even if he had had any fancy for riding into Yellow Mule under a gun and being handed over there. But the boy miner was in deadly earnest. The Kid had to be wary.

“ Say, feller, lissen to a guy ! ” he urged. “ I’m telling you, that gunman is watching for a guy on the trail—and it’s all Texas to a Mexican centavo that you’re the guy, and he took me for you at the distance. And I’ll mention that he’s the hombre to shoot first and talk afterwards. You aiming to ride on to your own funeral ? ”

“ That’s enough ! Get to it.”

“ Down in Texas,” said the Kid, softly, “ they’ll tell you wild tales about the Rio Kid ; but they’ll tell you, too, that he’s the slave of his word. And I’ll sure give you my word—and prove it.”

“ I don’t see how you’d prove it, and I’m not banking on an outlaw’s word. Get to it, or——”

“ You sure are an obstinate little man, and I’ll say you must have given them a lot of trouble in the nursery you ain’t long out of ! ” sighed the Kid.

Anderson reddened again.

“ Last time of asking——” he rapped.

“ Your say-so ! ” drawled the Kid. With his hands still up, touching

his Stetson, he began to wheel the pinto with his knees. Anderson pushed his horse nearer, his gun still up. And as he did so the Kid’s right hand suddenly swept down, with the Stetson in its grasp, and the big hat crashed on the revolver—so suddenly and so swiftly and unexpectedly that the gun clattered onto the trail before Anderson knew what was happening.

The Kid was out of the saddle almost by the time the gun touched the ground. Anderson sprang down for it—but it was in the Kid’s hand, and the black muzzle looked its owner in the face, the Kid’s eyes laughing over it. The boy leaped back.

The Kid saw his face set, his teeth come together hard. He expected instant death—a bullet from his own revolver crashing through flesh and bone. But his set jaw dropped, in sheer amazement, as the Kid took the revolver by the barrel and extended the butt to him.

“ Your gun, feller,” said the Rio Kid, politely. “ But take a hint from a guy that’s handled guns—them bulldogs jump a foot when you let them rip, and if you want to get your guy, aim low ! ”

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## THE THIRD CHAPTER

### PARTNERS !

JACK ANDERSON took the gun, in blank wonder. He gripped it by the butt—hard ; but he did not raise it again.

His face was the picture of astonishment and wonder as he stared at the laughing Kid. Slowly, he slid the bulldog back into the pocket he had taken it from. He did not understand. But he knew that the boy outlaw of Texas could have shot him dead in his tracks, with his own gun ; instead of which he had handed it back. There

was a long moment of silence, and then the boy spoke frankly.

"Sorry! I reckon you're not so black as you're painted, even if you are the Rio Kid. Then—you were not laying for me on the trail? You hadn't picked it up that I ride into Yellow Mule Mondays, to buy at the store, and——"

"Not so's you notice it!" grinned the Kid. "But there's a guy laying for you on the trail, O.K., and I guess his name is Frisco Dave; and I'll mention that that popgun of yours wouldn't give his Winchester a lot of worry. And if he's got a gang around, like you allowed, I'll whisper that you want to ride clear of him—as clear as you know how."

Jack Anderson nodded.

"I believe you now, of course. But—you're an outlaw——"

"I allow I never did what they made me an outlaw for, feller," said the Kid. "And if I've burned some powder since, I was sure crowded when I let the band play. But I figured on leaving all that on the other side of the Canadian border, and looking for a chance to wash out pay-dirt in this section."

The boy eyed him curiously and earnestly.

"I'll tell a man," continued the Kid whimsically, "I always was a locoed geck! I'll risk it that you're the only guy in this section knows me for the Texas fire-bug, the Rio Kid—and there's a gunman up the trail waiting to blow a hole in your roof, which I guess would keep you quiet for keeps! You wouldn't talk a whole lot after that guy got busy with his Winchester—nope! And I'm letting you run, to shout out to all Canada that the Rio Kid is around! I sure ought to give up riding the trails, and buy me a candy stand!"

The boy laughed.

"I'm not shouting it out a lot, now you've proved up that you're white," he said. "Say, I'm giving Yellow Mule a miss, after what you've told me. I can get what I want from Railroad Camp, south, another day. It's a longer ride, but if Frisco and his gang are laying for me, I reckon it will be a safer."

"Bank on that!" agreed the Kid.

"You've saved my life," said Jack Anderson quietly. "All Yellow Mule knows that I ride in Mondays, and it was easy for Frisco to put up an ambush—though I never thought of it—till now! Look!"

Far in the distance on the timber trail, the way the Kid had come, and the way Anderson had been riding when the Kid stopped him, a figure appeared in sight. Even at that distance, which was great, could be discerned the black moustache that barred the hard face.

At the sight of the two of them, standing by their horses, the gunman broke into a run, half-raising his rifle as he did so. The Kid grinned.

"I guessed he might be follering on, looking for another chance," he said. "If he had a cayuse along, I reckon we'd get our ticket for soup, young feller! Leave that popgun of yours where it is—it don't signify two hoots agin that Winchester. You want to ride."

Anderson nodded, and mounted his horse. The Kid leapt on his pinto. They rode down the trail side by side, at a gallop; and as they rode, the roar of the Winchester woke the echoes of the timber behind them. But the range was too long; and in a few minutes the galloping horses dropped the desperado out of sight.

When they checked to a trot the Kid spoke.



Early one sunny morning Anderson set off for Railway Camp to buy supplies. The Rio Kid saw the boy off, and waved his hand as he went, riding away through the hills.

“ Say, if that guy knows where you hang out, feller, you got sumthin’ coming to you.”

The boy laughed.

“ He doesn’t know—nobody in Yellow Mule knows—I’ve made a strike in the Porcupine, but I’ve let on to nobody. They know I ride in with nuggets, to buy at the store ; that’s all they know. Frisco Dave won’t find out in a hurry.”

“ I guess he looks the man to try, if you don’t show up in Yellow Mule no more ! ” said the Kid.

“ Let him ! ” said Jack Anderson carelessly. He gave the Kid a friendly, frank look. “ You were heading for the diggings ? ”

“ Yep—though I reckon I’d better buy me a gun afore I buy me a pick ! ”

grinned the Kid. “ They sure was putting it on my simple nature when they told me a guy wouldn’t want to pack a gun this side of the Line.”

“ Will you try your luck with me ? ”

“ With you ? ” repeated the Kid.

“ You’ve saved my life to-day. And I held you up with a gun, in return—though I fancy, now, that I couldn’t have done you a lot of damage,” added Anderson, rather ruefully.

“ Not a whole lot, I allow ! ” grinned the Kid. “ But you sure have all the pluck of a bagful of fightin’ painters, to hold up the Rio Kid with that pea-shooter of yourn. But what’s the lay-out ? ”

“ I’ve struck it on a creek in the Porcupine ! There isn’t enough for a

crowd, but there's more than enough for two. What do you say to partners?"

"Search me!" ejaculated the Kid.

He checked his pinto, and stared at the boy.

"You trust me all that?" he demanded.

"All the way, and then some!" said Anderson. "If you wanted my dust, or my life, you had both, back there on the trail. Think I'm a fool? I know a white man when I see one. If you're looking for gold-washing, go in with me on Porcupine Creek—share and share alike! I tell you, there's more than enough for two. I've been taking out a hundred dollars a day."

The Kid did not answer.

His face was working.

The thought had been in his mind. He liked the boy; and he would have been glad to be on hand if Frisco Dave and his gang succeeded in nosing out his claim in the hills. But he would never have thought of making the proposition—he, an outlaw, hunted by the sheriffs in his own country, with an endless tale of wild deeds laid to his credit.

And the proposition had come from the boy, who trusted him! The boy was no fool! Plenty of guys would have called him a fool, trusting the firebug of Texas with the secret of his gold claim. But the Kid knew that he was no fool.

They rode in silence, the timber left behind. They clattered on the plain, in sight of the railroad that stretched snake-like, endless lines of rails and sleepers, hateful to the eyes of the Kid.

Jack Anderson glanced at his companion several times, but without speaking. But all the time, the Kid knew, he was leading him on the way to

his secret claim in the hills. The plain and the railroad vanished as they rode into the foothills of the Porcupine, and the horses' hoofs clattered on the stony soil of a rocky gulch.

Anderson broke the silence at last.

"Don't you like the idea, Kid?"

"Feller," said the Kid, and there was a faltering note in his voice, "I like it a whole lot! Suits me fine! But——"

"Call it a cinch, then!"

"But," said the Kid, "you know me—the Rio Kid! Outlaw and firebug, and a heap of other things—at least, they say so. And you're allowing you're going to trust me with a gold claim, and your life, and all——"

"You said it! Is it a cinch?"

"Sure!" said the Kid, at last.

"It's a cinch! And I'll tell you, feller, you've hit plumb centre, though there's a heap of folks would tell you you was the world's prize boob!"

Jack Anderson laughed.

"This way," he said.

They rode through a rocky draw, and came out on the bank of a creek, that rippled down from the pine-clad slopes of the Porcupine. There was a wooden shack by the stream, with a lean-to at the back for a stable. Anderson alighted, and unlocked the door.

"Home!" he said.

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER

FOR LIFE OR DEATH!

THE Rio Kid was a happy man the next few days.

He worked on the placer with his partner, from sunrise to sunset, washing out dust and nuggets on the bar in the Porcupine Creek.

He had the satisfaction of being a very useful man to his partner. The young Canadian had tried his hand at cow-punching in the States, and at



lumber-jacking in his own country, before he had drifted to the new diggings, and made his lucky strike prospecting in the Porcupine.

Sitting by the rusty iron stove, evenings, he told the Kid of his people back in Montreal, having hard times ; and his keen desire to get to them with dollars in his belt. And

day, built a cradle to wash out the gold ; and the second day the output was doubled. And day after day they worked, and the tin can in the shack grew fuller and fuller

The Kid did not care a whole lot about the precious grains, for with him it had always been easy come and easy go ; but he rejoiced to see his boy



Frisco Dave's roughnecks were coming down the creek at a gallop. Crack, crack crack ! The Kid moved like greased lightning. Bullets clattered on the rocks as he leaped for the shelter of the shack.

he was going to get away with it at last, for he was taking a small fortune out of the creek.

The Kid was a cow-puncher born and bred, but he had fossicked for gold in Arizona, and knew the game ; and he was able to tell the boy many things, and put him wise. Anderson had been hardly scraping the surface of his strike ; but the Kid, the first

partner getting nearer and nearer to the realisation of his hopes.

Anderson had not registered his claim ; in that unsettled section, he told the Kid, that would have amounted to pointing it out to claim-jumpers, and the Kid agreed. It was a "placer," and sooner or later would be completely washed out. With a gang like Frisco Dave's in the vicinity,

it could not be kept too secret.

And it was secret enough. Hidden in that remote recess of the Porcupine foothills, it was not likely that any guy would happen on it, except by the purest chance, as Jack had done when prospecting.

The Kid, remembering the hard, tanned face with the black moustache, reckoned that Frisco Dave was the hombre to hunt his hardest; and for several days he was very watchful and wary, and bitterly regretted having left the walnut-butted guns with Side-Kicker on the southern side of the border.

But there was no sign of an enemy; they worked in peace, day after day. Maybe, the Kid thought, Frisco was waiting for Anderson to make his usual trip to Yellow Mule, on the ensuing Monday, for supplies. But when that Monday came, Anderson did not ride to Yellow Mule—he fully agreed with the Kid that it was wise to ride clear of Yellow Mule.

Supplies were not needed for a time—the Kid had bully beef and biscuit in his pack, and with the old skill he had not forgotten, he netted fish in the creek, and trapped rabbits in the thickets.

“I guess,” said the Kid, “we’ll kinder lay low a few, in case them fire-bugs are cavorting around looking for you, partner. You don’t want to run into Frisco Dave and put up an argument agin his Winchester with that popgun of yours. And when we got to get in the grub-stakes, I guess you want to hit the trail the other way.”

“You said it!” agreed Anderson. “We’ll leave it till next Monday—and I’ll ride down to Railroad Camp for the supplies. It’s a five-mile longer trip——”

“And five miles safer, with Frisco

loafing around Yellow Mule,” said the Kid. They were sitting by the rusty iron stove, crammed with pine chips, in the dusk of evening after a hard day’s work, as they talked. The Kid gave his comrade a whimsical grin. “Say, when you ride down to Railroad Camp, you taking the dust with you in your rags?”

“Enough to pay at the store,” said Anderson.

“And the rest?” asked the Kid.

“That stays here, in the tin can.”

“With me to see it safe?”

“Sure!”

“Feller,” said the Kid, “you’re a good little man, and I’ll tell all Canada I like you a whole lot. But there’s five thousand dollars of the yellow stuff in that tin can; and what’d folks say to you if you let on that you left it to be looked after by the Rio Kid?”

“Aw, pack that up!” said Anderson. “You make me tired, Kid!”

And the Kid grinned, and packed it up.

Another week slipped by; with a steady adding of ounces to the store in the tin can. By that time, even the wary Kid reckoned that there was no more danger from Frisco Dave and his gang.

If they were hunting for Jack Anderson, and his hidden claim in the foothills, it had not brought them anything. And when Monday came again, and Anderson prepared for the ride to Railroad Camp, the Kid figured that it was all clear.

He was going south, instead of north as formerly—a longer but a safer ride; and the gunmen of Yellow Mule were not likely to see anything of him.

He packed a sufficient quantity of dust to pay for the supplies at the railroad store. The rest was left in

the tin can in the shack. And on the list of purchases that Jack was to make, the Kid carefully put down a Colt, and cartridges for the same. Remote as danger from Frisco Dave seemed, the Kid reckoned that it would be wise to pack a gun as soon as he could get hold of one.

He saw the boy off, and waved his hand as he went, riding away through the hills, in the early sunny morning. When the boy was gone, the Rio Kid stood in silence for some minutes, staring at the rocky gulches that had swallowed him from sight. Then, with a strange expression on his sunburnt face, he stepped into the shack, and stood staring at the old tin can, in which glistened gold dust and tiny nuggets, worth six thousand dollars of any guy's money.

"Carry me home to die!" murmured the Kid, and he laughed. He wondered what the sheriff of Frio, in far-off Texas, would have thought had he known that the outlaw of the Rio Grande was left in charge of six thousand dollars—and that it was safer in his hands than in a bank!

The lonely ravine in the Porcupine seemed lonelier with the boy's happy face gone, no sound of his cheery voice. The Rio Kid was accustomed to solitary days; but he disliked the silence now. He went to the lean-to and gave the pinto fodder and water and talked to him and stroked his glossy neck.

He would have been glad to saddle up, and enjoy a gallop in the keen air of the foothills; it was two weeks since he had been in the saddle. But he did not think of it. He could not leave the gold unguarded, and he was there to work on the placer, while his partner was absent. And he went

to work in the creek, and the morning hours passed.

At noon he rested, and ate his rations. Anderson could hardly be back before sundown; and it was many long hours yet to sundown. Not for a long time had a day seemed so long to the Kid.

But he found comfort in work, toiling in the creek, adding fraction after fraction to the golden store. It was pleasant to think of having that little pile in the tin can an inch higher when Jack Anderson came back to see it.

The Kid was thinking of that as he toiled in the hot sun, when something struck a rock a foot from him, and he jumped, and his startled eyes flashed round. It was a bullet that had glanced, and the report of the rifle rolled over the hills with a thousand echoes.

"Great gophers!" breathed the Kid.

His eyes fixed on a bunch of riders coming down the draw to the creek—roughnecks in Stetsons, and the man in the lead was a man with a hard tanned face barred by a black moustache!

A smoking rifle was in Frisco Dave's hand—it was he who had fired, and he fired again as the Kid straightened up and stared, and the boy outlaw barely dodged the bullet.

They were still at a distance—coming down to the creek at a gallop—five of them, armed and desperate men—and the Kid stood there, with nothing but a shovel in his hands. Crack, crack, crack! came the ring of Colts.

The Kid moved like greased lightning. Bullets clattered on the rocks as he leaped for the shelter of the shack.

The pinewood door slammed after

him; he slammed the bar into position. For the moment, he was safe from the shooting.

Hoof-beats rang on the rocks. Rattling bullets dropped like hail on the timber walls.

The Rio Kid clenched his hands desperately. With one of his old guns in his grip he would not have feared that bunch of gunmen—not the whole five of them. He was unarmed, and they were shooting to kill.

Only one glimmer of thankfulness came to him in that terrible moment—Jack was away; his life was saved. The Kid was alone to stand the racket. But the gold—the gold for which the boy had worked so long and so hard; the gold that was to bring prosperity to his father and mother, hit by hard times, back in Montreal—the gold left in the Kid's keeping!

The Texas outlaw gritted his teeth with fury as he thought of the gold slipping into the hands of Frisco Dave and his gang. With his life, ten times over, he would have saved it if he could—not for himself, not a nugget for himself, but for the boy who had trusted him.

Would Jack believe that his faith had been misplaced, that the outlaw of the Rio Grande had failed in his trust, when he came back to find the claim deserted, the gold gone?

It was a black and bitter thought to the Kid. Yet he must believe so—unless, indeed, he found the Kid's body, riddled with bullets, lying where he had vainly striven to save the gold. He would save it—he must save it!

Clattering hoofs rang on the rocks and ceased. The Kid peered from a chink in a shutter.

They had dismounted at a distance from the shack. He wondered, for a moment, why. Then he realised that

they did not know that he was unarmed. They expected shooting when they came, and they were wary

It gave the Kid a respite. If only he had had even Jack's popgun! But he had nothing but the shovel that was still in his grasp—good for cracking one skull before he was shot down.

The Kid cursed his own carelessness. In two weeks he had grown satisfied that Frisco Dave, even if he was hunting for the boy fossicker, had failed and thrown in his hand. Now he knew better.

Because Anderson came no more to Yellow Mule, the hard-faced gunman had not thrown in his hand; he had set out to trail him down with the grim determination of a wolf, like the human wolf he was. And he had found the hidden claim at long last, though it was the Kid, and not the Canadian boy, that he had cornered there.

The Kid was glad of that, at least. Even his own life was not too much to give to save that of his partner. But the gold—he had to save the gold!

He had a respite. They were gathered in a bunch at a distance in front of the shack, muttering together, watchful as wolves. Soon they would guess that no shooting was to be looked for. Then a rush and a stream of bullets, and the end of the Rio Kid's wild-life trail! But he had a brief respite, and minutes were priceless to the Kid now.

His horse was in the lean-to at the back of the shack. He could reach it without emerging from cover, by dragging down an end board—easy enough in the flimsy building. To mount and ride under a shower of bullets—that was the only chance that remained to the Kid, if it was a chance.

Minutes spelled the difference, perhaps, between life and death ; but the Kid did not even think of riding without the gold. Swiftly, but with steady hands, he emptied the tin can into a leather bag, which he buckled to his belt under the red shirt.

Then he wrenched down an end board and stepped into the lean-to, the iron miner's shovel in his grasp. He set down the shovel—his only weapon—and swiftly saddled and bridled the pinto.

He listened.

There were sounds from the enemy—sounds of rough boots on the rocks. They were coming !

Crash ! It was a heavy blow on the door of the shack in front—a

crashing rock wielded in sinewy hands. Another such blow and the door would be in. They had guessed now that he was unarmed, or they were chancing it.

The Kid led his pinto out from the lean-to, bridle in his left, the iron shovel in his right. He had to lead the horse clear before he could mount, and when they saw him—

A startled yell rang out. One of the gang, at the corner of the shack, saw him, and yelled to the others, lifting his revolver as he yelled. But swifter than the rough-neck, the Kid's arm went up—the iron shovel flew before the gun was at a level.

The Kid saw it crash into a savage bearded face—he saw the ruffian go reeling, his skull smashed in by the

"Doggone you, feller," said the Kid. "Did you reckon I'd get through and leave your gold-dust for them scallywags to rope in? Forget it!" And the outlaw unbuckled the leather bag from his belt.



blow, a dead man before he touched the ground. The next instant the Kid was in the saddle, pulling out for his life.

Wild yells and shouts and shots rang out behind him. But the Kid was in the saddle, ducking low and spurring like a madman. The pinto bounded like a mad thing—the hurried firing spattered the air round him; a bullet tore his shirt, another spun the Stetson from his head, but the Rio Kid tore madly on, and the gang of gunmen—only four of them now—rushed for their horses.

Clatter, clatter, clatter!

The Kid spurred and spurred; behind him the clattering of hoofs, the ringing of revolvers. Frisco Dave had dropped his rifle; there was a six-gun in his grip as he dashed ahead of his men in fierce pursuit. Hard rock rang and clattered under the beating hoofs; but the Rio Kid had a start, and in the rapid motion of the horses shooting was wild; he was still unhit as he galloped madly down the gulch for the plains.

With a thunder of hoofs they swept after him. They knew—at least, they could guess—that he had not ridden without the gold—the gold for which they were ready to shed blood, for which they were risking their worthless lives if the law came to deal with them.

But it did not look like coming to that. The four were well-mounted, and if they did not gain they did not lose, as they swept clattering down the gulch in fierce pursuit. And every minute a Colt roared.

The Kid spurred. More than a bullet for himself he feared for a bullet to hit the pinto. That would be the finish. But wild riding made wild shooting.

Mile on mile of rocks rang under the galloping hoofs, and the Kid was

riding on the open plain that stretched endless between the foothills and the railroad. Endless rugged plains and many a long mile away, Railroad Camp his only place of safety.

If he reached it alive the Rio Kid reckoned that he was going to be a lucky guy. Crack on crack rang out behind him as the rugged miles flew beneath the lashing hoofs.

Mounted on his mustang, Side-Kicker, the Kid would have shown his heels to the gang and laughed at the chase. The pinto was a good horse—the Kid would never have been found riding poor horseflesh. But the enemy were as well-mounted as he.

Oh for the grip of a walnut butt—to feel one of his old six-guns in his hand—to turn on that bunch and give them all the shooting they wanted, and then some!

But he packed no gun—and he could only ride and ride, with Death for his comrade in that mad race.

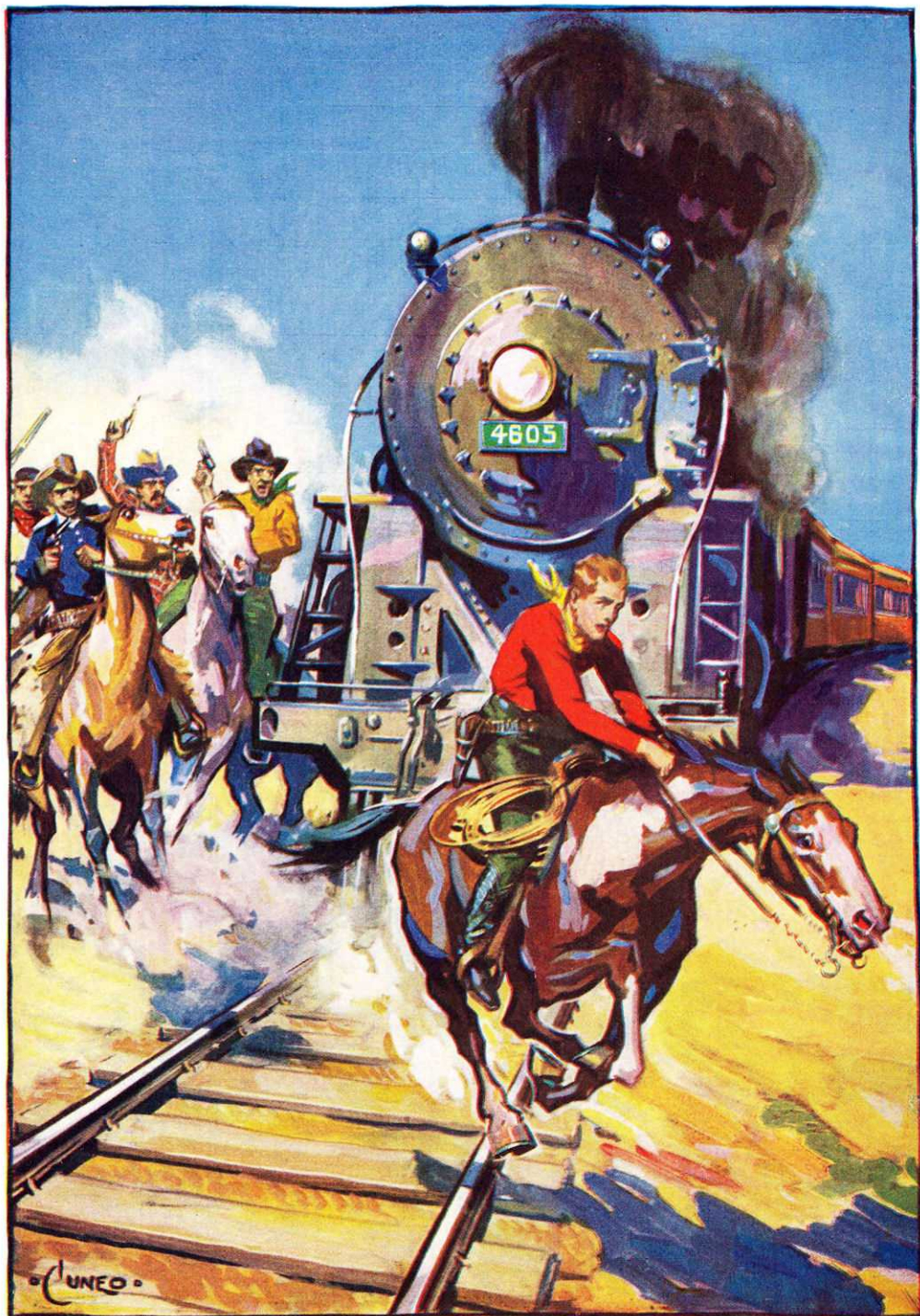
Ahead of the Kid, like a black snake crawling over the prairie, lay the railroad track—obnoxious to a puncher's eyes, but now a glad sight to the hunted Kid, for it told him that he had a chance.

Once across that line Railroad Camp would be in sight, he reckoned, and a chance for life—and to save his partner's gold.

Nearer and clearer came the long line of rails and sleepers—barring the plain ahead of him, endless in either direction. And something, far away, was moving—what was it?

A train on the line—the trail of smoke floating back from the tall engine—the Canadian Pacific express coming up from Thompson. Behind the engine, the long, almost unending line of cars and Pullmans. The Kid hardly heeded it. He rode for the





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Specially painted by Cuneo.

11A

THE RIO KID TAKES A DESPERATE CHANCE!

line, ahead of the coming train—ample time to get across before the express drew nigh.

Crack!

The pinto gave a sudden lurch.

The Kid's hand was like iron on the rein. He knew that his horse had been hit—the wild shooting had got close at last. There was a trickle of red on the horse's heaving flank. Grimly, fiercely, the Kid kept him to the gallop.

Bravely the pinto responded. But he was losing—losing ground—behind him, the clatter of hoofs, the popping of guns, rang closer—closer. A yell rang in his ears—a yell of triumph that was coming.

And the Kid knew it as well as they did: his game was up, and they would round him up against the railroad track, and riddle him with lead, perhaps within sight of the staring eyes of passengers on the express!

Death was his comrade in that wild ride, and the hand of Death was on him—but the Rio Kid still rode, game to the last.

Booming across the plain came the roar of the C.P. express. It was close now, the great engine, the endless line of cars. The Kid had calculated to get across before the train rushed down—but the wound to his pinto had changed all that—and as he came thundering to the track, the great engine seemed to be swooping down on him.

There was a clinking of bridles behind, as the pursuers drew rein—they dared not ride in front of the roaring express. And they had him now—had him cinched, his way barred by the train; once it was in front of him, the long line of cars barred him off from escape.

With the long train in front of him,

the gunmen behind with Colts spitting death, the Rio Kid was crowded to his doom. But the train was not in front of him yet. The towering engine was still to his left when the Rio Kid, casting all his chances on a last desperate hazard, dashed break-neck across the line.

He heard a shout behind him of rage and amazement. He heard another shout—it came from a man on the engine. They rang through the roar of the train—the thunder of the express.

Spurred madly, the pinto leaped on, clattering over rails and sleepers—pitfalls of death, where a single slip meant fearful destruction; and as the Rio Kid hurled onward, the great engine towered over him, rushing down to crush him to dust!

He felt the wind of it, like a prairie gale, as he rode clear—but only barely clear, and thundered on—with the long line of cars behind him now, blotting out his pursuers—barring their pursuit.

The Rio Kid had made the grade.

He knew it as he rode on from the railroad track, the cars booming by behind him. Frisco Dave and his gang had to wait—wait till the long line of cars was past; and by the time it was past the Kid was far ahead and Railroad Camp was in sight.

Whether they pursued him farther the Kid did not know. Breathless, his horse lathered with blood and foam, he rode into the camp and drew rein at the office of the Canadian Mounted Police.

And when the Mounties rode out to look for Frisco Dave, the Kid chuckled, wondering what they would have thought had they known that it was the Rio Kid, the outlaw of Texas, who had called them out.

And having cared for his horse—always the Kid's first thought—he went along to the store and found Jack Anderson. His boy partner stared at him blankly. The Kid told him.

Jack drew a deep breath.

"Thank the good Lord you got through, Kid!" he said. "It'll hit us hard, losing the gold—but there's more in the creek, and I guess the Mounties will look after Frisco Dave after this——"

"I'll say that guy is already hitting the high spots for the border!" grinned the Kid. "But don't you worry any about the gold——"

"I ain't worrying, seeing you've got through——"

"Doggone you, feller," said the Kid, "did you reckon I'd get through and leave your dust for them scallywags to rope in? Forget it!" He unbuckled the leather bag from his belt. "I guess if they'd got your pile, feller, they'd have got this Kid along of it; but they never cinched neither—and now you're in town, I'll say your best guess is to tote it along to the bank, and cache it where it won't come to no harm."

"Kid!"

The Kid chuckled.

"Jest worry out one nugget," he said, "and I'll buy me a gun! I sure do feel sort of lost and lonesome without a gun!"

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## ST. JIM'S CHARACTERS

### *Acquainting you with popular St. Jim's fellows*

HE's the Captain of the Shell,  
And he does his duties well;  
Always sunny, always true—  
MERRY—name and nature too!

Skipper of the New House boys,  
Sport of all kinds he enjoys;  
Not so good in class, perhaps—  
FIGGINS, liked by all the chaps!

He's the type of Vere de Vere,  
And his father is a peer;  
Thinks a lot of socks and spats—  
D'ARCY! Readers, raise your hats!

Jokes and japes and merry jests,  
These are his chief interests;  
Pulls our unsuspecting limbs—  
LOWTHER! Jester of St. Jim's!

Leader of the Fourth is he,  
Staunch and true, as all agree;  
Full of blithe good-humoured tricks—  
BLAKE of Study No. 6!

Thinks he's great at every sport.  
Thinks his play's the finest sort:  
All the other fellows yell!—  
GRUNDY, Duffer of the Shell!

Fat? Well, let us call him plump!  
He's good-humoured, and no chump;  
Demon bowler, great in goal—  
FATTY WYNN, a cheery soul!

Cranky, batty, strangely dense,  
Full of words which have no sense.  
Talks until you shake your fist—  
SKIMPOLE, the Determinist!