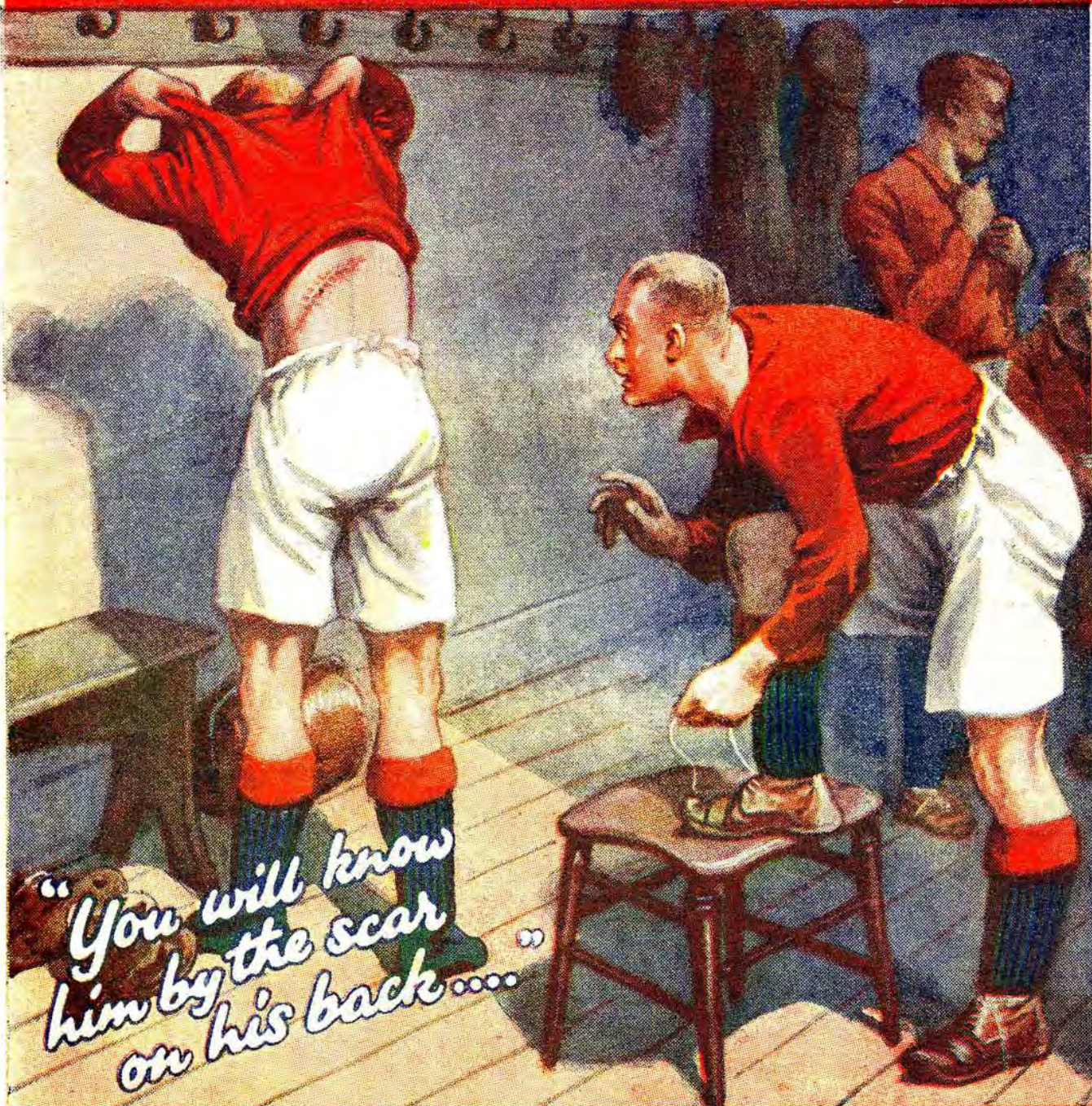


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The PILOT 2^D

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The GREAT NEW PAPER for READERS OF ALL AGES



*"You will know
him by the scar
on his back...."*

A DRAMATIC INCIDENT FROM:

A SPY BY NIGHT!

The Outlawed THREE



500 DOLLARS
REWARD
Will Be Paid for
the Outlawed
Three—DEAD
OR ALIVE!

"HALT!" rapped Hardfist Hall, marshal of Bullwhacker.

Kid Byrne was glad to hear the word. Thrown across a horse, tied there with a lariat, the Kid ached in every limb, as he rocked and swung to the bronco's gallop.

Round him, under the midnight stars, rode Hardfist and his men—dim shapes in the gloom. There were six of them—and there had been more when they had seized Kid Byrne under the cottonwood-tree by the bank of the Rio Rojo. It was a grim satisfaction to the Kid to know that his gun had claimed one, at least, in that last desperate fight under the dark branches.

But they had him—they had him fast-bound to the back of the bronco, and the Kid reckoned that his jig was up. And he was glad that they had caught him alone—that Dan Oak and Tom Redway, waiting for him in the rocks by the river, had escaped that deadly ambush which Hardfist had prepared for the Outlawed Three.

Outlaws the Kid, Dan, and Red certainly were—not of their own free will, but driven to it by the scheming marshal.

Hardfist was their enemy. Knowing that the three cowboys had discovered a gold-mine somewhere on old Sam Oak's land, he had tried to learn its secret.

So far, the location of the mine was still a secret. But now the Kid was a prisoner; and why Hardfist had captured him the Rojo cowboy had no doubts.

The bunch of horsemen clattered to a halt. Kid Byrne lifted his head and peered round him. The halt was welcome, but it surprised him. He had figured that Hardfist was heading for the cow town of Bullwhacker, to lodge him in the calaboose there, or else for the Hall Ranch. But they were nowhere near the cow town; they were still far from the ranch. The dusky prairie surrounded them, stretching silent and lonely.

"Say, boss, ain't you getting the guy to the calaboose at Bullwhacker?" asked Jake Sanders.

"Nope!" rapped Hall. He pulled his horse from the trail, into a bridle-track on the open prairie. His reins were in his left hand; his right arm was in a sling. That arm had been deeply scored by a bullet, and the marshal of Bullwhacker could not use it. "You, Sanders, follow me and lead that guy's cayuse. The rest of you hit the ranch."

The Kid saw the roughnecks exchange surprised looks. But they obeyed the marshal's order without a word. The outfit clattered on again, disappearing in the direction of the distant ranch.

Hardfist Hall rode by the bridle track, cutting off at right angles from the regular trail. Jake Sanders followed him, leading the bronco to which the Kid was bound. Hardfist rode in silence, at an easy trot, and the Kid wondered. Muttered ejaculations from Jake told that the marshal's man was wondering, too.

Half a mile off the trail they came to a stockman's hut—dark and deserted. It was only occupied when a herd was feeding on the Rojo range; and at present that range was vacant. Why Hardfist had made for this deserted shack on the prairie was a mystery to the Kid. But he knew that it meant no good to him.

Hardfist Hall swung himself down and hitched his horse.

"Light down, you Sanders, and get that guy inside!" he rapped.

Jake dismounted and unloosed the rope that fastened the Kid to the bronco's back.

Kid Byrne slid to the ground, where he lay helpless in the grass. His hands and ankles were tightly bound, and he could not stir a limb. Jake Sanders lifted him in his brawny arms and swung him towards the shack. Hardfist flung open the door. The Kid heard a match scratch, and there was a flicker of candle-light. Jake dragged him in after the marshal and pitched him down on the pine-plank floor.

The Kid glanced round him in the flickering candle-light.

It was the usual stockman's hut on a cattle range—a single room, with a wooden bunk, a rough table and bench, a stove, with an iron chimney-pipe passing through the slanting roof, and a kerosene lamp clamped on the wall. The candle that Hall had lighted spluttered on the table.

In one corner of the hut stood a drum of kerosene, for feeding the lamp. An old buffalo-robe lay on the bunk, but there was no other bedding. The cupboard, with its front of perforated zinc, was empty; the embers in the rusty stove dead and cold. It was weeks since there had been cattle on that range, and the stockman's hut had long been unoccupied.

Hardfist's black-bearded face, in the glimmer of the candle, was dark and grim. What was it that the hard-fisted marshal of Bullwhacker intended? Why had the prisoner been brought to that lonely hut, lost in the boundless prairie?

The Kid, as he lay on the muddy planks of the floor, wrenched with fierce strength at his bonds. But there was nothing to it. He had been too securely tied to have a chance.

Jake Sanders stood looking at his master. Ruffian and roughneck as he was, the expression of Hardfist's grim face seemed to make him a little uneasy. Like the Kid, he was wondering what was to come.

Hardfist gave him a glance.

"I guess you can beat it!" he snapped.

"You stopping, marshal?" asked the wondering Jake.

"Quit chewing the rag, and beat it! You can wait for me at the fork of the trail."

Jake asked no more questions. He gave the

Kid a look—and it seemed to Kid Byrne that there was a glimpse of compassion in it. He tramped out of the stockman's hut, and the Kid heard him mount and ride away.

Not till the last sound of Jake's horse had died away did the marshal of Bullwhacker move. Then he closed the door and dropped the pine bars into place in the sockets. Under his knitted brows his eyes glinted down at the bound Kid. The cowboy's eyes met them unflinchingly. The marshal's voice came in low, tense tones.

"I got you cinched, Kid Byrne! I'll say your side-kickers can't help you now. I'll get them, too. I guess I'll find your hide-out up in the mesa, if I have to comb the hills with a small comb! But they'll keep!"

Kid made no answer. Evidently, the marshal did not know that Dan and Red had been anywhere near at hand when he got the Kid under the cottonwood by the river. And the Kid did not intend to put him wise.

"They'll keep!" repeated Hardfist. "But I got you, Kid Byrne, and one of your bunch is enough for what I want. You're an outlaw, and I guess I could string you up, and no questions asked. And there's only one reason why you ain't swinging on a branch now—and I guess you're wise to it! You're going to tell me where to lay my hands on the lost mine of the mesa—and you're going to tell me quick!"

KID BYRNE did not speak. He lay bound and helpless at the marshal's feet—at the mercy of his enemy, in whose heart there was no more mercy than in that of a wolf on the prowl for prey. But his courage did not falter; and his look was cool, contemptuous. Hardfist Hall waited for him to speak; but only the Kid's steady, scornful stare answered him.

"Lissen, you!" There was deep menace in the marshal's voice. "I been after the mine for years. I always allowed that old Sam Oak was right, and that there was gold on his land—the mine that his father lost forty years ago. You found it. I saw a nugget in your fist. I reckon if old Sam had sold out, like I wanted, it would have saved him a heap of trouble."

"You doggoned lobo-wolf!" The Kid broke his silence. "Old Sam's lying close

to death at Doc Baker's, at Parkville, and you was the murdering bound that shot him up in the dark. And Dan and Red—and me are outlaws, because you framed us on the charge of shooting the old man that we'd have died for! Get on with it, you red-handed thief! You won't get a word from me about the mine!"

Hardfist nodded, as if that was the answer he had expected.

"That's how I figured it out," he said. "You'd sure go up on a rope, and take your secret across the Jordan with you."

"Surest thing you know," said the Kid disdainfully.

"It ain't a rope you got to watch out for, Kid Byrne. If I was aiming to string you up, I guess the cottonwood where I cinched you would have come in for that. You're here, and I guess nobody will ask what happened to an outlaw in this lone shack. You got it coming to you hard, Kid, if you don't spill the beans."

"You sure do chew the rag a whole lot, Hardfist," drawled the Kid. "I'm telling you that it won't buy you anything."

Hardfist stood looking down on him in grim silence for a long minute. Blacker and grimmer grew his hard face. And the Kid wondered what was coming to him. The outfit were back at the ranch by that time. Jake Sanders, waiting at the fork on the trail, was a good half-mile away. There were no eyes to see what happened at the lonely stockman's hut; no ears to hear. With all his courage and nerve the Kid's heart beat harder.

Hardfist turned away from him without another word. He stepped to the corner where the drum of kerosene stood.

Kid watched him as he rolled it into the middle of the hut with his left hand, and wrenched out the bung. He tilted the drum, and the kerosene, glimmering in the candle-flicker, gushed out in a stream.

It streamed over the plank flooring; it splashed on the wooden walls. The reek of it filled the hut, and stung the Kid's nostrils. His face whitened under its tan. Was that what the marshal of Bullwhacker meant? Could it be that? The Kid shut his teeth hard.

The drum was emptied. The marshal lifted the sputtering candle from the table, and Kid's heart missed a beat. The candle, dropped into the drenching kerosene, would have set the hut in a roar of flame.

Stooping, Hardfist plugged the candle in a crevice of the plank floor. Its spluttering wick burned a few inches over the glimmering kerosene. When it burned down—

In the dancing shadows the grim, black-bearded face loomed grim, hard, merciless.

"I guess you'll talk now, Kid Byrne!"

The Kid's teeth were shut.

"That candle may burn ten minutes yet," said Hardfist, in low tones. "When it burns down to the kerosene, I guess you know what next. You putting me wise to the mine in the mesa?"

"You pesky polecat!" said the Kid huskily. "Not a word! You shot-up old Sam Oak to get your claws on the mine; but you'll never get them there through me. Dan and Red'll get you yet!"

"I guess your side-kickers won't ever know what happened to you, Kid Byrne. If they're waiting at your hide-out in the mesa, I guess they'll wait long to get news of you. If a stockman's hut gets burned out on a lonely range, who's going to ask questions about it?" Hardfist gave a grim, harsh laugh. "If questions was asked, I guess I got an answer—you got loose, Kid Byrne, and knocked over the lamp in a struggle. And me, with one arm lame—how was I to help you?" He laughed again.

"You got it all out and dried, you coyote!" muttered the Kid. "But it won't buy you a thing."

Hardfist leaned over him. Slowly—for he could use only his left hand—he fastened the Kid's feet with a length of rope to the heavy pinewood bench. If the Kid had thought of rolling over to the candle and extinguishing it with his weight, he had to forget it now.

The bench was too heavy for him to drag; and Hardfist knotted the rope securely.

"Guess again!" came the menacing voice. "I'm leaving you to it; but I'll stop around for a call. Make up your mind to it, and give me a call before it's too late, or take what's coming to you."

"You won't hear me call none, you dog-goned thief and murderer!" said the Kid, between set lips.

Hardfist stepped to the door and unbarred it. He threw it open and stood there against the blackness of the night, his eyes fixed on the Kid.

"Guess again!" he repeated. "Put me wise to the mine in the mesa, and you can mount and ride—join up with your side-kickers, and ride out of Arizona and save your necks. Keep your secret, and I guess I'll get Dan Oak and Tom Redway, soon or late, and twist it out of them. You got your choice."

He waited a long moment for an answer; but no answer came. He stepped out into



Dropping into place the lock-bar that fastened the door, Hardfist Hall turned with a scowl to his bound captive. "Now!" he snarled. "You're going to tell me where to lay my hands on the lost mine of the mesa—and you're going to tell me quick! I know how to make you talk, Kid Byrne!"

the dark, and drew the door shut after him. Kid Byrne was left alone.

Alone, in the flicker of the candle, glimmering on the drenching kerosene. His eyes fixed on it, watching it burn down.

Slowly—but swiftly, to the Kid's watching eyes—it burned. It was a matter of minutes before it reached the kerosene, then—

Then the hut would flare up in a blaze of flames, with the Kid, bound and helpless, in the midst of it.

Was it only a threat to break his nerve, and force from his lips the secret of the lost mine? The Kid knew that it was not. Unless he called to Hardfist Hall, waiting in the darkness by the hut, the candle-flame would reach the kerosene, and the lonely hut would go up in flames.

But the Kid did not call. The sweat started out on his forehead in great drops; but his teeth were clamped shut.

He watched the consuming candle, burning lower and closer to the kerosene—and the sands of the Kid's life were running out as he watched!

"THEY got him!" muttered Red. His voice shook, and his plump face was pale.

Dan Oak, silent, stood under the shadowy branches of the great cottonwood by the Rojo, his rugged brows knitted, his teeth tight.

Hoofbeats had died away across the river; the Kid was gone with his captors, and a dead man that lay in the black shadow of the tree remained to show that he had fought hard to the finish—his lead had not all been wasted.

They had heard the firing—Dan and Red—but they had reached the spot too late to help the Kid. They were on foot, and the captured Kid had gone with mounted men.

Dan clenched his hands till the nails dug into the palms.

"It'll be Hardfist's bunch," he muttered at length. "They couldn't have knowed the Kid was here. Hardfist ain't wise to it that Doc Baker leaves a message for us, about old Sam, hid in the tree. They was hunting us, and jest happened on Kid. They'll be making for Bullwhacker, or the ranch. We got to hoof it, Red."

He tramped down to the ford of the Rojo, Red at his heels. To overtake mounted men was impossible; but to follow was possible. To save the Kid, or to die with him, that was possible.

In silence they splashed through the ford and tramped the trail on the farther side—on Bill Hall's wide-stretching ranch lands. Red's face was pale and strained; his heart ached with fear for the Kid. Big Dan Oak shared his feelings, but his rugged, tanned face told little.

Swiftly they swung along the well-marked trail that led from the ford. The Hall Ranch lay half-way to the cow town, and Dan did not reckon on halting till the ranch was sighted. But coming up to the fork in the trail where the bridle-track branched off, Dan suddenly halted, grasped Red's arm, and drew him to a stop.

Red did not speak; he understood that caution was needed. But he looked up inquiringly at Dan's face, dim in the gloom. Dan lifted his hand and pointed.

Red peered through the dusk. He started at the sight of the dark figure of a horseman.

Dan's hand was on his gun, but he did not draw it. There was—for the moment, at least—no danger. The horseman sat motionless in the saddle, facing the bridle-track that led across the prairie.

The two boys, silent, in the shadow of the clump of post-oaks, watched him.

And as they watched, in spite of the darkness, they made him out at last, and knew that he was the marshal's man, Jake Sanders. Dan had had no doubt that it was Hardfist's outfit that had got the Kid, and the sight of Jake Sanders on the trail was as good as proof of it.

But what did his presence there mean? Why was he halted, sitting like a statue in the saddle, straining his eyes through the dark towards the distant stockman's hut, which Dan knew to be situated half a mile away, beyond range of vision? Where were the rest of the bunch? Where was Hardfist? Where was Kid Byrne?

Dan put his lips close to Red's ear and whispered:

"We got to get him! It's Jake, Hardfist's side-kicker! I don't rightly get this. I reckon the outfit's hit the ranch afore this; but that hombre's waiting for some guy—waiting and watching. I don't rightly get it, but that bullwhacker is going to tell us why they done with Kid!"

Red nodded. "You don't want to burn powder," he breathed. "Mebbe the bunch ain't far off."

"I ain't aiming to burn powder. Stick in cover, Red, and don't make a sound. I'll say this is my game."

He glided away, without another word. Red, standing under the post-oaks, his heart throbbing, watched him till he vanished in the dark.

Big and brawny as Dan Oak was, he was as wary as a cougar on the trail; no sound came

from him as he crept low in the dusky grass. The horseman still sat at the fork of the trail, motionless.

No sound—till a dark shadow rose beside the horseman in the dark, and Jake Sanders gave a sudden convulsive start as the muzzle of a gun jabbed his ribs. Then Dan's voice came, low:

"Grab the air, you galoot! Grab it quick, or you get yours!"

For a split second Jake sat without movement, too astonished to move. Then his hands went up over his stetson.

With a shiver running through his burly body, he looked down at Dan. He had a glimpse of a rugged, set face, of glinting eyes. He read death in their glint if he stirred. He sat tight.

"Red!"

It was only a whisper, but it reached the youngest of the Rojo cowboys, waiting by the post-oaks. A few seconds, and Red was at Dan's side. A breathless mutter came from the marshal's man.

"You 'uns! I reckoned you was hiding up in the mesa."

"Can it!" snarled Dan. "You, Red, cinch that guy's hardware—pronto!"

Red drew the gun from Jake's holster. In Red's hand, it covered the marshal's man.

"Light down!" Dan's voice came low and curt. "Keep your bully-beef trap clamped, Jake! I guess I don't want any of your side-kickers around! Get off'n that cayuse, dog-gone you!"

Jake Sanders slid from the saddle. He stood beside the horse, a tinge of pallor in his tanned cheeks. He was in desperate hands, and he knew it.

Time had been when the Rojo cowboys had stood for the law, as peaceable and law-abiding as any guys in Arizona. But the marshal of Bullwhacker had framed them and driven them into outlawry, and they were as ready to burn powder, in self-defence or in defence of one another, as the most desperate rustler of the sierra. Jake Sanders knew that his life hung on a thread—and a slender thread.

"Hardfist's got Kid?" muttered Dan, his eyes gleaming.

"Sure!" breathed Jake.

"Where's his bunch?"

"Gone on to the ranch!"

"And Kid?" Dan watched the marshal's man like a wolf. "I don't get this, but I'm sure goin' to get it! Why was you left here? What they done with Kid? By the great horn spoon, if Kid's got his, you get yours, Jake Sanders, and the marshal next! Spill it, you piccan—spill it afore I fill you up with lead! What's Hardfist done with Kid?"

His voice came, hoarse with anxiety and ferocity.

Jake panted.

"I'd no hand in it, feller!" he muttered. "Hardfist's got the Kid at the stockman's hut, but I'll tell a man I don't know what his game is!"

Red gave a choked cry. The outfit sent on to the ranch; Jake left to wait at the fork; the marshal alone with the Kid at that lonely hut—what did it mean? What devil's work was going on at that lonely hut on the Rojo range? Red caught at Dan Oak's arm.

"Dan, what'll be coming to the Kid, alone with Hardfist there?"

As if in answer to Red, there came from the south a sudden flash of flaming light. Dan gave a yell.

"Fire—fire at the hut! The Kid—"

Red, heedless of the marshal's man, started running by the bridle-track, heading for the hut. But Dan was not forgetful of him. He had no time to lose on Jake; but he had to leave him safe, although he could not shoot down an unarmed man. He swung up the heavy revolver and brought it down heavily. Jake Sanders dropped senseless into the grass.

Dan gave him not a glance after he fell. He grasped at the bronco and flung himself into the saddle. He drove the animal to a furious gallop towards that dancing flare that lighted the midnight sky, passing Red on the prairie.

"I'll ride ahead to try to save the Kid!" he yelled. "You follow on!"

HARDFIST HALL waited.

The marshal of Bullwhacker stood in the darkness by the fence of the corral attached to the stockman's hut.

He leaned on the rough pine poles of the fence, listening.

From where he stood, the marshal saw the little window of the hut, glimmering faintly with candlelight. Would the call come? Would the Kid surrender?

Hardfist reckoned that he would—that the secret of the lost mine in the mesa was as good as his. Surely he would call when the guttering candle burned low to the floor.

But no call came!

The marshal stirred at last. He stepped to the little window and peered in. In the dim glimmer of the candle he could see the Kid—



Carrying his helpless comrade over his shoulder, Dan stumbled through the searing flames and smoke towards the door. Choked, blinded, tortured, he struggled on, determined to save his pard from the death-trap their enemy had set!

stretched in his bonds, unable to stir—his face, white as wax, but set and resolute.

Kid did not see the black-bearded face that looked in at the window; his gaze was fixed, never wavering, on the flame that was creeping down to the kerosene. There remained less than an inch to burn, and it burned steadily down.

If there was a stirring of compunction in the marshal's hard heart, his face did not show it as he stared in. Silently, grimly, he looked in on the doomed Kid, and then stepped back from the window and resumed his former place, leaning on the corral fence.

The Kid would call surrender; his life was worth more than old Sam's mine. Surely he would talk turkey, with terrible death creeping on him, now so close?

Hall set his teeth under his black beard. If Kid-Byrne did not, let him take what was coming to him!

Shadows wavered and danced in the hut as the candle burned lower and guttered. Still no sound from the Kid. Hardfist wiped a bead of sweat from his dark brow.

His eyes, fixed on the window, were suddenly dazzled by a gleaming of bright light. He spat out a curse. If he repented now, if compunction came, it came too late. For the death-watch was at its terrible end—the candle-flame had burned down to the kerosene, and the inflammable oil had caught.

Up from the window shot a sheet of flame.

It died down, and shot up again! There came a roar of fire—a crackling of wood. But there came no cry from the bound Kid.

Lonely as the prairie was, it seemed to Hardfist that the leaping flame must be seen from his ranch, from the town of Bullwhacker. And it was only the beginning. In a few minutes more, the whole building would be roaring in conflagration.

But he knew it was only the fancy of fear; there were no eyes to see. Jake, from the fork of the trail, would catch the flare; but Jake was a sure man. Jake's jaw would be clamped on the happenings of that night. But the marshal gave a start as he heard the sound of galloping hoofs coming across the prairie from the trail. Dim in the stars a horseman loomed, and the marshal of Bullwhacker snarled a curse. He shouted savagely to the coming rider:

"Beat it, you! Beat it, Jake, you geck! I guess I ordered you to wait at the fork, you doggoned piccan! What you doing here?"

He did not doubt for a moment that it was Jake, riding up to the hut because the flare had caught his eyes. But the next moment he knew it was not Jake.

From the horseman came a flash and a report, and a bullet struck the corral fence a foot from the marshal of Bullwhacker. In the darkness there, and the shadow of the fence, he could not be seen; but his voice had guided the shot. He gave a yell as the bullet splattered on the pinewood.

Crack! Crack! came the roar of the gun again, and twice a bullet grazed him in the dark. Without checking the speed of his horse, the rider fired fast. Hardfist grasped his gun with his left hand, amazed, alarmed, not understanding. It was not Jake; it could not be his own man firing on him as he galloped up. Then who was it?

A flare of flame momentarily lighted a rugged, fierce face, and the marshal knew Dan Oak. He threw lead as he saw him, but his left hand was uncertain, and the rider's motions rapid; the bullet missed by yards. Crack! came the roar of Dan's gun again, and the stetson spun on Bill Hall's head.

The marshal of Bullwhacker gritted his teeth. Dan Oak, whom he had believed miles away in the hide-out up in the mesa! Dan Oak on Jake's horse. He could see that it was Jake's bronc in the flare of light. Dan Oak, mad with rage, shooting to kill!

Crack! roared the gun again, and the marshal felt the blood running down his face as a strip of skin was torn away.

Only the darkness saved him from being riddled with lead, and the flare from the hut was dispelling the darkness. To get to the horse was impossible—he would be seen and shot down. Gritting his teeth with fury, the marshal of Bullwhacker stumbled away on the dark prairie, while Dan Oak, thinking only of his pard now, dashed up to the burning hut and threw himself from the horse.

"Kid!"

Dan dragged open the door. A voice was calling through the smoke—the voice of Kid Byrne.

Dan groped and struggled, blinded by smoke, licked by tongues of flame. Where was his comrade? He stumbled over a figure on the floor.

"Kid!"

He groped—he dragged. There was yet time—time to save his comrade. But he dragged in vain. The Kid was tied—tied fast!

Dan's groping hand felt a rope. His knife in his other hand now, he sawed through the rope—and it parted.

Flame was running along the floor in streaks, following the streams of the spilt kerosene—the wood was catching all round him. But he lifted the bound Kid in his sinewy arms, and stumbled for the door.

How he reached it he never knew. Smoke thickened round him; tongues of flame licked at him. Choked, blinded, tortured, he stumbled on—stumbled into the air—into the wind of the prairie.

With his last ounce of strength, he tottered beyond the reach of the licking flames, stumbled in damp, cool grass, and let the Kid fall. From somewhere, shots were ringing; but he did not hear or heed. Utterly spent, he sank in the

(Continued on page 308.)

THE WORST BOY AT BORSTED

(Continued from page 298.)

"Tuck in, you young fools!" he grated harshly. "And don't eat too quickly. Him—"

He broke off and wiped his eye with the cuff of his sleeve, for the sight of that hungry, ravenous crowd sampling their first meal for days was too much for him.

Just a single glistening tear trickled down his leathery face. It was immediately wiped away, but those Borsted boys who saw it never forgot. From that hour onwards they had a respect for Chief Warden Samson that nothing would ever shake.

When the boys had eaten, Major Whittaker-Rightly arrived.

On the dais at the end of the hall he stood and surveyed the youngsters who had defied him. A pin could have been heard to drop.

"So you have come to your senses at last," he said acidly. "Well, you might as well know what lies before you. Every boy who took part in the mutiny will receive a flogging once a week for the next month."

He paused, and the rebels spirmed in anticipation.

"Every boy will receive the same number of strokes as his age. For instance, you, Castairs, are seventeen years old, are you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you will receive seventeen strokes of the birch. You, Marrowby, are eleven years old. I believe?"

"Yes, sir!" spoke up young Marrowby stoutly. "And I'm not afraid to take my eleven strokes four times during the month, either!" "You wouldn't have got the whip-hand now unless Templeman had met with an accident."

"Quiet, you young fool!" urged Chief Warden Samson under his breath.

"So," said the governor, dangerously calm, "you are still a rebel, eh? Well, we'll make a start with you, Marrowby, now. Just any of you other young scoundrels should be tempted to start another mutiny. Take him up, Samson."

Chief Warden Samson shook his head.

"Not me, sir! The kid can hardly stand on his legs now. I wouldn't be a party to that sort of cruelty, not even at your command, sir!"

"Take him up, Samson—" began the governor, when he became aware that the face of every rebel was blazing with wrath and a new defiance. Fists, too, he noticed, were clenched. For a moment it seemed that the rebellion would break out afresh.

"Very well!" he snapped. "Perhaps the boys are not in a physical state to stand their punishment now. Take their names, Samson—each boy will report for punishment in a month's time."

THE OUTLAWED THREE

(Continued from page 302.)

grass beside the Kid, his dizzy brain swimming. Then a plump, anxious face bent over him in the flare of the firelight.

"Dan, ol' timer!" panted Red.

"The Kid!" muttered Dan. "Look after the Kid!"

Red's knife was already sawing through the Kid's bonds. Kid Byrne sat up in the grass, staring with dizzy eyes at the burning hut.

"I'll say you was jest on time, Dan!" said the Kid softly. "And I'll tell all Arizona, ol'-timer, that if a galoot ever had a better pardner and side-kicker than you, Dan, I'd sure like to see the colour of his hair."

"You said it, Kid!" muttered Red.

Dan granted.

"Aw, pack it up!" he said. He stared round, remembering the marshal of Bullwhacker. "Hardfist's beat it. The pizen skunk! I

And that was how the governor of Borsted crawled out of his difficulty. That was how the great rebellion at Borsted ended.

"Chief Warden Samson," called out the governor, when the boys had been dismissed, "I am not satisfied with your services at this institution. You are impertinent, and I fear, too lenient with the boys. I shall recommend your transfer to another reformatory at the earliest possible date."

"Thank you, sir," answered Chief Warden Samson. "With all due respect, I should like to say that I have already applied to the governing board to transfer me to another reformatory. Your methods, sir, and mine somehow don't agree. You will excuse me, sir—"

He saluted stiffly, wheeled like the well-trained ex-Army man he was, and strode off towards the prison infirmary.

For the remainder of the evening he sat by the bedside of No. 166, staring with fixed gaze at the pale, stricken face of the one boy at Borsted he really cared something about.

"You're out of place here, No. 166," he murmured softly. "You never did fit in with these other young scallaws. And whatever you've done I will say you've got guts. I wish"—Chief Warden Samson began to speak a thought that had haunted him a long time—"I wish I had a kid half as good—or half as bad, come to that—as you!"

It was getting close on prayer-time when Jim Templeman stirred in his sleep. The grim-faced nurse who tended him now came forward.

"He's recovering consciousness," she whispered, and the way she said it showed that somewhere beneath her cold, grim exterior lay a human heart that could feel another's suffering. "The poor kid's coming round—he'll pull through! Look, Mr. Samson—his eyes are opening. I must get the doctor."

Wide and full Jim Templeman's eyes opened, but they had a fixed stare in them that frightened Warden Samson, tough as he was to unpleasant sights. They swivelled in his direction, and his leathery face wrinkled into a smile. But there was no response.

"Don't you know me, Templeman—Jim—I'm Samson!"

Jim's eyes looked straight at him, through him, beyond him, seeing everything apparently, yet seeing nothing. For the second time that evening Chief Warden Samson's eyes watered. Quietly he crept away, murmuring to himself:

"He didn't recognise me! The poor kid! What have they done to him?"

MIDNIGHT had eluded from the clock in the tower when a grey-clad youngster, of plumpish proportions, crept into the infirmary ward. Fatty Williams had let himself out of the punishment-cell with the fixed intention of seeing his pal. Now, having waited for the nurse to disappear, he crept into the ward and bent over Jim Templeman's bed.

reckon we want to beat it afore he hits the back-trail with his outfit. Get them cayuses, Red—it's us for the mesa, and we got to burn the wind!"

Hardfist Hall, with a dozen armed punchers at his back, rode up to the smoking ruins of the stockman's hut, as the stars were paling towards dawn. He had made good time; but the Rojo cowboys were far away.

The trail of three riders was picked up, and followed to the ford of the Rio Rojo—and there lost. The rocky wilderness of the mesa had swallowed them; and Hardfist rode sullenly and savagely back to his ranch.

While in their hide-out—a cave hidden by a roaring waterfall, and actually the location of the secret goldmine—Dan, Kid, and Red were holding a council of war, vowing vengeance against the man who was their enemy.

"Say, you 'uns," said the Kid grimly, "I

No. 166 was awake. His eyes were wide and bright and troubled. Red flecks of colour on his cheek-bones gave a heightening effect to the ghastly pallor of his face. He stared at Fatty Williams' podgy, wrinkled face like a sleepwalker—unseeing.

"Hallo, Jim!" whispered Fatty, forcing a smile. "It's me—Fatty! I've come to see how you're getting on. The rebellion"—he lied bravely—"is going fine. How you feelin', old college pudding?"

But something like a sob rose in his throat when he saw that fixed, unchangeable expression on the face of his stricken chum.

"Lawks, he doesn't know me! He doesn't recognise me! What have they done to you, chum?" Tears were streaming down Fatty's plump cheeks now, unchecked, unheeded. "Speak to me, old china. I'm Fatty Williams—don't you remember? You slobbered me under the chin so that I shouldn't stop you trying to make a break for Dinchester."

No. 166 gave no sign of recognition. He just stared—stared—stared—

The sound of light footsteps outside the room brought home to Fatty Williams realisation of his own danger. He mustn't be caught here; he was supposed to be in the punishment-cell. Swiftly he insinuated his plump body behind the screen by his chum's bedside. Through a gap between the sides of the screen he caught sight of Adolph Larcing tiptoeing up to the bedside.

The secretary glanced about him fearfully, hastily withdrew a small blue bottle from his pocket, and, picking up the glass which contained the sick lad's next dose of medicine, tipped the contents of the poison bottle into the medicine.

Then, with burning eyes, he stared down at the bandaged figure in the bed, muttered something which sounded like a curse, and grinned in evil triumph.

"Good riddance, No. 166!" This time the muttered words came clearly to Fatty, now peering round the screen. "That'll be the last dose of medicine you'll ever need. Lost your memory, have you? Well, you've lost a fortune, too!"

With his eyes popping from his sockets, Fatty Williams watched Adolph Larcing sneak out of the ward, and heard his light footsteps fade away along the stone corridor. Then, before Fatty's numbed brain could function to meet this ghastly emergency, the nurse returned. She smiled down at the invalid, looked at her watch, and then picked up the medicine-glass.

"Come along, son. It's time for your medicine. Drink this—you'll feel much better!"

She curled an arm round Jim Templeman, supporting him, and held the medicine-glass towards his lips.

But for the faithful Fatty, Larcing's fiendish scheme would be bound to succeed, and even now seconds are precious. Read next week's dramatic chapters!

guess it's time Hardfist Hall got his coming to him! It's him or us in Arizona, pard—'nd it's sure not going to be that pesky polecat!"

"You said it!" Big Dan Oak's fist clenched over the butt of his gun. "We'll cinch the pizen skunk, Kid—we'll get him for framing us and high sending old Sam beyond Jordan!"

"Sure!" agreed Red.

There in the cave the Outlawed Three made that solemn vow. The time had come for a final showdown. With roaring guns and flaming lead, they would hound down the man who had forced them against the law!

But before that showdown can be brought to pass, Hardfist Hall has another cunning trick up his sleeve! "Sam Oak is dying!" is the message the Outlawed Three receive—and in answering that summons they plunge into a new trap! You must read next week's thrilling Western yarn of "THE OUTLAWED THREE!"