

THE OUTLAW OF THE PLAINS!

The RIO KID! by RALPH REDWAY

With such a terrible reputation as the Rio Kid has in Texas, it may seem strange that he should act the Good Samaritan to a wounded foe. But that's because the Kid is not so black as he's painted!

This Week:
"THE GOOD SAMARITAN!"



A RATTLING FINE YARN OF BREATHLESS ADVENTURE IN SOUTHERN TEXAS, FEATURING THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW!

THE FIRST CHAPTER. An Old Foe!

THE grey mustang shied, and the Rio Kid drew rein at once. Something in the thickets had startled his horse. The Kid's gun leaped into his hand. In the heart of the trackless stretch of scrubs he had not looked for a foe, but the Kid was never off his guard.

But there was no sound, no movement in the thick vegetation bordering the narrow path by which the Kid was riding.

Pecans and live oaks, laced with vines and thick masses of Spaniards' beard, rose like a wall beside him. Save for the buzzing insects there was no sign of life, till the Kid discerned a vulture sitting motionless on a branch, watching the thicket below. Like an image carved in ebony the vulture perched and watched, taking no heed of the passing horseman; and the Kid, as soon as he saw the black vulture, knew what had caused his mustang to shy. A man or a beast lay in the thicket, hurt—but not dead, or the carrion bird would have swooped. While a sign of life remained the vulture would not dare to touch his prey. With untiring patience the obscene bird waited, watching with untiring eyes.

The Kid shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

He was following an antelope path through the scrubs, seeking water. His

horse was thirsty and his own water-bottle was empty. Whatever it was that lay hidden among the thickets, it was no business of his. If it was a man, there were few men in Texas who were not his foes. The Kid was tempted to ride on his way, leaving the black vulture to watch for the last spark of life to flicker out of his prey. Nevertheless, he dismounted and plunged into the thickets, the staring, fixed eyes of the hideous bird above him following his movements.

Had it been some wounded beast that lay helpless in the thicket, the Kid would have finished it with a merciful shot. But it was a man that lay stretched there, only a few feet from the trampled track the Kid had been following.

The Rio Kid looked down at him.

The man lay on his back, his eyes closed, his rugged, bearded, bronzed face turned upward towards the branches and the watching vulture. He looked like a dead man; but that he was not dead the Kid knew, because the obscene bird had not touched him. There were two guns in the holsters slung low to the insensible man's belt. One leg of his buckskin breeches was drenched in blood. The Kid did not need telling what had happened. The two-gun man, wounded in the leg, had fallen exhausted, and sunk into insensibility from fatigue and loss of blood—and, without help, it was unlikely that he would ever have opened

his eyes again. The vulture had only to wait.

The Kid smiled grimly as he looked down at the hard, rugged, black-bearded face, with a sickly pallor showing through the bronze. The Kid had seen that face before, more than once. Two-gun Casey was well known on the border.

For some moments the Kid stood looking down at the gunman, undecided. He was again tempted to ride on his way. His glance fixed on a scar that ran across the gunman's rugged cheek from jaw to temple, a scar left by a bullet that had gone very close. Two-gun Casey had had a narrow escape on that occasion, as no one knew better than the Rio Kid, for it was the Kid who had fired the shot. Back into his mind, as he stood staring at the senseless man, came the scene—a cattle-camp on the Pecos, where Casey had claimed a horse on which a tenderfoot had ridden into camp, and pulled a gun to enforce his claim. The Kid, who, as he often told himself, never could mind his own business, had dropped Casey before he could pull trigger. The tenderfoot was nothing to him; he had never seen the fellow before, and never expected to see him again. But he had snipped in to save the fellow's life—and spoiled Casey's good looks for ever.

The man was a bad egg, a hard case, a bullying gunman with a long black record against him. If he died there

J.C.B. King

in the thickets there would be no one to mourn him; many, probably, to rejoice, if ever they learned that Two-gun Casey had gone over the range.

And yet—

The Kid gave another impatient shrug of the shoulders. There were a score of good reasons why he should ride on his way and dismiss the hapless wretch from his mind, but all the time the Kid knew that he would not do it. The fact that the man was wounded and helpless settled the matter for the Kid.

He dropped on his knees beside Casey.

First of all he removed the guns from the man's holsters, and from each of the six-guns he took the cartridges. Then he replaced the guns in the holsters—harmless. He was going to help the man—save his life if he could—but he knew better than to trust him. He searched Casey for cartridges and found a good supply, which he threw away among the thickets. Then he jerked the heavy bowie-knife from the man's belt, and tossed it away in the trees.

"I guess you're safer with your teeth drawn, feller," the Kid remarked pleasantly.

His attention was given next to Casey's wound.

A bullet had passed through the gunman's leg, and the loss of blood had been great—all the more because Casey had evidently exerted himself considerably since receiving the wound.

The Kid bound it up with care.

Casey showed no sign of recovering consciousness. He was a big and heavy man, but the Kid lifted him easily enough.

"Steady, old hoss!"

The grey mustang stood motionless while the Kid lifted the insensible man upon the saddle.

Holding him there with his strong arms the Kid pursued his way, a hoarse croak from the disappointed vulture following him.

For a good distance the Kid tramped beside his horse, pushing through the thickets, till he reached at last the little stream where the wild beasts came to drink, flowing and gurgling through the chaparral.

There he halted to camp.

He gave his horse a drink first of all. His mustang was always the Kid's first care.

But before he thought of his own needs, the Kid attended to the helpless man who had so strangely fallen upon his hands.

He made a bed of leaves, with his own blankets added, and laid Casey upon it, and then removed the bandage he had placed on the wound, washed it carefully with water from the stream, and bandaged it again. All that could be done for the man he did, smiling at himself meanwhile. He knew that he was saving Two-gun Casey's life—the man was hard and tough and would pull through under the Kid's care. He knew that had the case been reversed—had the gunman found him wounded—he would have laughed and ridden on. The Kid was quite well aware of that.

"You're a durned fool, Kid!" he drawled as he left the wounded man at last. "You always was a durned fool, Kid, and you always will be. Here you are in the Frio country again, where there's dollars on you, and Sheriff Watson would give twice as much for a sight of you taking this durned hobo on your hands. You'll sure end your days on a rope, Kid, strung up to a cottonwood—you sure will!"

And the Kid laughed and unpacked the bristles for his lunch, and sat

manching by the side of the insensible gunman, who, as every man on the Pecos knew, had sworn to "get" him. That did not worry the Kid. Many men had sworn to get the Rio Kid, but no one had got him yet.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. In Camp!

TWO-GUN CASEY opened his eyes.

The sun, sinking westward over the hills, glowed red on the trees and bushes. The stream ran under the trees like a streak of crimson. Shadows were darkening in the thickets. The grey mustang was contentedly cropping within the radius of the trail-rope. On a log near at hand the handsome Kid sat, whistling softly the merry tune of a Mexican fandango. Casey's blurred eyes turned on him, dazed, dizzy, amazed.

The Kid gave him a cheery nod.

"The Kid!" breathed Casey.

"Correct!"

The gunman's hand groped feebly down to his belt. The first thought in his dazed mind at the sight of the Kid was to get hold of a gun. The Kid watched him with an amused smile.

Casey groaned. He was too weak even to reach his gun, let alone to pull it.

"Let up, feller!" said the Kid, laughing. "You sure don't want your gun! You're in good hands, feller!"

Casey stared at him blankly.

He knew the Kid at once—the handsome, reckless, sunburnt face, the Stetson hat adorned by a band of shining silver nuggets.

He could not understand.

He lay silent for a time, and the Kid placed a pannikin of water to his lips. Casey drank eagerly.

"I guess I've got nothing better," said the Kid apologetically. "I'm sure on hard pan just now, Casey!"

"What's this game, Kid?" muttered Casey huskily. "How did I get here? And where did you spring from?"

"I reckon I picked you up way back in the thickets and brought you here to camp," answered the Kid.

"Why?"

"You've got me beat! Because I'm plumb loco, I guess!"

Casey glanced down at his bandaged leg, resting on a soft pallet of leaves.

"Am I going up?" he asked faintly.

"Not on your life!" answered the Kid cheerily. "You'll sure limp some, but you'll pull through! In a week from now you'll be O.K.!"

"A week!" muttered Casey.

He stared at the Kid.

"A galoot might as well go up! I shall sure peter out, left here in the scrubs!" he muttered.

"But you ain't left," said the Kid. "A little man about my size is riding herd over you, feller, till you get going."

"Why?" breathed Casey.

"You keep on asking a galoot riddles!" grinned the Kid. "I sure don't know why, except that I'm a pilgrim that never can mind his own business! Any galoot with boss-sense would have left you to the pesky vulture that was watching you way back!"

Casey shuddered.

"You're not for Jordan this time!" assured the Kid. "You keep still and quiet, and I'm going to grub-stake you till you get on your pins again! You don't want to worry."

"I don't get you!" said Casey faintly. "Forget it, then! Take a rest!"

Casey closed his eyes.

But he did not sleep. He was trying

to puzzle out the strange situation. Here he was, wounded and helpless, at the mercy of the Kid whose life he had sworn to take. Why did not the Kid finish him with a bullet, or at least leave him to the vultures and the coyotes? Casey did not comprehend, and he was never likely to comprehend. Indeed, the Rio Kid hardly knew why he was taking trouble and running risk for a man who would gladly have shot him down at sight. He laughed at himself in the role of Good Samaritan.

But he did not falter in what he had undertaken.

The next day, and the next, he tended Two-gun Casey assiduously, and when the gunman was able to eat the Kid brought him food. The Kid was, as he had said, in hard case. He was back in the Frio country where he was known, and where he could not venture into town or camp. For food he had to depend on what he carried in his sack and what he could add to it by gunning in the bush.

But he kept the wounded man well supplied, and in a couple of days Casey was visibly stronger.

On the third day, when the Kid came into camp with an antelope over his shoulder, Casey was sitting up against a log, and he eyed the Kid strangely.

"Feeling better, feller?" asked the Kid cheerily.

Casey nodded.

"Look here, Kid, what's this game?" he asked once more. "You sure ain't keeping me hyer for nothing. But there isn't any price on my head like there is on yours."

"If you was worth five hundred dollars to the Sheriff of Frio like me, I reckon I shouldn't call on the sheriff to pony up, Casey!" said the Kid quietly. "Blood-money ain't in my line!"

He laughed.

"It's in yours, though, I reckon!" he said. "You'd sure hand me over to Sheriff Watson for the reward!"

"Not after what you've done for me, Kid!" protested Casey.

The Kid nodded, and turned away to build a fire to cook antelope meat. If he knew that Casey was sliding his hand to a gun in his belt he gave no sign.

Click!

The Kid turned.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he roared.

Casey, with a startled and sheepish face, sat there with a gun in his hand—and the Kid roared with laughter.

"You sure take me for a simple jasper!" roared the Kid. "Did you figure out that I left you with anything in your guns and turned my back on you? Ha, ha, ha!"

The Kid was genuinely entertained. The black treachery of the attempt did not seem to affect him; he expected nothing better from the wretch he had befriended.

Casey dropped the gun.

For a moment or two his face was convulsed with fury. The Kid did not draw on him, however, as he expected. He resumed building the fire.

"I guess I wasn't gunning at you, Kid," said Casey at last.

"Some lie!" said the Kid, without turning his head.

"I was jest trying the gun, Kid."

"Cut it out, Casey! I reckon if there had been a bullet in that gun, it would have been the long trail for me! What's the good of lying?" said the Kid good-humouredly.

Casey lay silent. But he broke out at last:

"Look here, Kid, you know I was

trying to get you—you know I swore I'd get you after you gave me this scar. What's your game?"

The Kid turned to him then.

"You'll never savvy," he said. "I picked you up when you was food for the buzzards, and I'm saving your life. As soon as you can walk I'm going to start you off, and I shall sure be glad to see the last of you! That's all. But chew on this, Mister Casey!" added the Kid, with a glint in his blue eyes. "Chew on this serious! You try once more to get me while I'm tending you, and you're a gone coon! I've let you off this time, after you've tried to shoot me in the back! That's the limit! You try on any gun-game with me after this, and you're a dead man—if you don't get away with it! You get me? Next time will be last time!"

"I'll sure remember that, Kid!" said Casey.

"You'd better!" said the Kid significantly.

And then he cooked the antelope meat, and gave Two-gun Casey his supper, dismissing the incident from his mind.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Punic Faith!

DAY followed day by the stream in the bush.

Each day Casey grew stronger. At last he was able to limp about the camp with the help of a stick that the Kid cut for him.

Had he been armed the gunman would probably have repeated his attempt on the Kid. Gratitude had no place in the composition of Two-gun Casey. Indeed, he felt no call to gratitude, for his hard and savage nature was incapable of realising what the Rio Kid was doing for him. The Kid was playing some deep game that he could not comprehend as all that Two-gun Casey could believe. His hatred for the young puncher who had dropped him and left a scar across his face burned as fiercely as ever. The knowledge that he was helpless, at the Kid's mercy, added to his hatred. Not a gleam of compunction would he have felt had he been able to pull a gun on

the Kid. But he remembered the warning he had received. He knew that the Kid had meant every word of it. If he tried again and failed, he was a dead man.

And Casey was very careful.

He made himself useful in camp; he tended the camp-fire, and cooked the antelope meat that the Kid brought in from the woods. Once, while the Kid was absent hunting, it crossed Casey's mind to steal the grey mustang and ride. But the Kid's mustang was not to be stolen; teeth and hoofs were ready for any rider but the Kid, as Casey discovered to his cost. Casey would gladly have shot the animal down in revenge had he had a gun with a cartridge in it.

Day followed day.

Casey limped about the lonely camp with his stick; but as his strength returned, and he felt capable of greater exertions, he did not tell the Kid so.

Whenever the Kid saw him, he was limping painfully when he moved.

The week was up; but Two-gun Casey was still, to all appearance, helpless. The Kid was patient.

"What are you doing here in the Frio country, Kid?" Casey asked him over the camp-fire one night. "It sure ain't a safe country for you."

The Kid shrugged his shoulders.

"I reckon I wanted a look at the country again," he answered. "I was raised here, on the Double-Bar ranch; I used to ride into Frio with the bunch. I guess I wanted to see the old show once more."

Casey grinned sarcastically. It was for a sentimental reason, then, that the Kid was back again in the country where a hundred guns were ready to leap from their holsters at the sight of him.

"And you?" said the Kid. "You was in the camps way down the Pecos when I saw you before."

Casey scowled.

"I was after a galoot," he said. "A man I wanted to get."

"And he got you?" grinned the Kid.

"He sure did," confessed Casey. "He laid for me on the trail, and the bullet that went through my leg killed my boss. I'd have got him all the same,

if he'd stayed after one shot. But he lit out and left me. I sure reckon I'd crawled miles before I petered out in the chaparral—where you found me, Kid."

"With a buzzard watching you," said the Kid.

"Look here, Kid, you could sure rustle me a hoss," said Casey. "You've looked after me like a white man, I allow. I can't drag this leg very far, but if you could rustle me a hoss I could hit the trail and save you trouble."

The Kid's face hardened.

"I've never rustled a horse or a cow, Casey," he answered. "You don't want to talk that-a-way. But I reckon I might get you a cayuse somewhere. I made money on a deal in cows in the Blue Pine country, and I guess I'm healed. Only it ain't easy for me to walk into a camp—in this country to buy a hoss—"

The Kid reflected.

"I guess I could ride to the breeds' camps up in the Huecas, and get you a critter," he said. "But that means leaving you here for a whole day."

Casey's eyes glittered.

"That will sure be O.K., Kid!" he exclaimed. "It will be weeks yet before I can get away on this leg. But with a cayuse—"

"I reckon I'll see about it."

The Kid rolled himself in a blanket beside his mustang to sleep. Two-gun Casey had his other blanket.

Several times, in the glimmer of the dying fire, Casey raised his head and glanced across at the Kid, his eyes glittering.

But he knew he dared not risk it.

The Kid would wake; and if he did not, the mustang surely would waken him, at a hostile move from the gunman.

Once more Two-gun Casey swallowed his hatred and vengeance, and closed his eyes in sleep.

The next day the Kid, instead of going out to hunt for game as usual, prepared his horse for a ride.

"I'm leaving you heap grub for a day, feller," he said. "I reckon I can get back soon after sundown with a cayuse from the half-breeds camp in the Huecas. You sure reckon you'll be O.K. on your own till then?"

"Sure!" said Casey eagerly.

"It's a cinch, then."

And the Rio Kid mounted and rode.

Two-gun Casey watched him with glittering eyes as he disappeared into the tangled chaparral.

The Kid was gone—for a whole day! Keen as he was, said to be as wary as any man of twice his years on the border, Two-gun Casey had fooled him. He fancied that he had left a helpless limping man—a man who could not limp half a mile from camp. Casey showed his teeth in a savage grin. The Kid was making a mistake; and in dealing with Two-gun Casey, a man could not afford to make mistakes.

But the Rio Kid was not so easily fooled as the gunman believed.

He rode away cheerily through the chaparral; but a mile from the camp by the stream he halted, and dismounted. Leaving his mustang tethered in a clump of pecans, the Kid retraced his way on foot.



AFTER NIGHTFALL! The sheriff of Frio leaped to his feet, his gun gripped hard in his hand. "Hands up, Kid!" he shouted. And as the figure did not stir, the sheriff opened fire, point blank. (See Chapter 5.)



The Rio Kid is
But he can

There was a smile on his handsome face; but the glint in his eyes might have terrified Two-gun Casey had he seen it.

With the caution of an Apache on the war-path, the Rio Kid approached the camp by the solitary stream.

From the thickets he observed it for a time, before he came out into the open.

He knew that it was deserted; when at last he left cover, and came into the camp. The fire was dead; and there was no sign of Two-gun Casey.

The gun-man was gone. By the dead fire lay the stick the Kid had cut for him to walk with. The gun-man no longer needed it.

The Kid laughed softly. What he had suspected he knew now to be true. While he was absent on a day's ride, not to return till sundown, the gun-man was losing no time. He had left the camp—for what destination? The Kid could guess!

In a few minutes the Kid's keen eyes picked up the track left by the gun-man. One heavy footprint, and one light—Casey was taking care of his damaged leg as he went. The trail wound away through the chaparral, and the direction was that of Frio.

The Kid laughed again. He looked to his guns, to make sure they were in good order. Then, with a light step, he followed the trail of the gun-man.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Not the Kid!

SHERIFF WATSON, of Frio, dismounted at the charcoal-burner's shack on the edge of the chaparral. It was a miserable one-roomed shack, a mere jacal built of leaves and branches, standing amid un-cleared thickets, shaded by a great cotton-wood tree. The sheriff of Frio hitched his horse to a tree, and stood staring towards the shack suspiciously, his hand on a six-gun. He had ridden in hot haste out of Frio town, and he had ridden alone; but he was on his guard, as he knew that he had need to be when he was taking the trail of the Rio Kid.

A black-bearded man with a scarred face limped out of the leafy jacal. He saluted the Frio sheriff with a nod.

"I guess you got my message, sheriff."

"That's why I'm here, Two-gun Casey," answered Watson tersely. "If this is a gun-game you want to watch out."

"It's a square deal, sheriff," said Casey. "I reckon I mean business, or I wouldn't have hopped miles through that god-darned chaparral as far as this. I'll tell the world, I was dead beat when I got this far. I gave that



WHAT THE KID OVERHEARD! "You mosey along to the camp after night-fall, and you'll find the Kid sitting by the fire," said Two-gun Casey. "And you want to be sudden on the shoot, too, sheriff!" "Leave that to me," said Sheriff Watson grimly. (See Chapter 4.)

Mexican greaser ten dollars to leave his charcoal-burning and carry my message to you, sheriff. I guess I couldn't have gone a yard further—but I remembered there was a charcoal-burner's shack hyerabouts, and hit it. It's a square deal, sheriff."

Sheriff Watson stared at the man's scarred, rugged face, worn now with exertion and fatigue and pain. Two-gun Casey was scarcely equal to the long tramp through the tangled chaparral that he had undertaken, though he was much more recovered than he had told the Rio Kid. Hate and vengeance had spurred him on to the effort, but he had reached the carbonero's jacal exhausted. In his hard, worn, tense face, the Frio sheriff read his earnestness.

"Spill it!" said Watson. "I reckon the name of the Rio Kid would make me mount and ride any time. I want that man, and I want him bad. I got your message by the greaser. You sure allowed that if I came out to see you here, you would put me wise to the Kid."

"Sure!"

"The Kid's back, in the Frio country, then?" asked the sheriff. "I last heard of him up in Blue Pine."

"He's back."

"You've seen him?" asked the sheriff eagerly.

"I left him this durned morning."

"Where?"

Watson's eyes gleamed, and he breathed hard. It was a sore point with Watson that he had never been able to rope in the Rio Kid—only once, when the Kid had slipped through his fingers again. Sheriff Watson would have given the fingers of one hand, to lay the other hand on the Kid.

"I sure reckoned you'd hustle when you heard that the Kid was around agin, sheriff!" said the gun-man, with a hard laugh. "But it's a trade, sheriff. There's five hundred dollars on the Kid. Do I touch it if I hand you the Kid?"

"You sure do," said the sheriff. "My word's good enough for you, I reckon."

"All the way," assented Two-gun Casey. "I guess your word is better'n the banker's at Frio. The Kid's yours, dead or alive. I guess I'd have handed him over dead if I'd a bullet to my gun. His camp's in the chaparral, not three miles from this shack."

"Glory be!" said Watson. "Give me the rest of it."

Two-gun Casey told his tale. The sheriff listened in silence, without comment. What he thought of the desperado, who was selling the man who had saved his life, he did not say; his business was to rope in the Rio Kid, wanted by the laws of Texas on many counts.

He listened with deep attention while Casey described the camp by the stream in the chaparral, giving him the minutest details.

"I guess I shall hit that camp easy," said Watson. "And you say the Kid will be back soon arter sundown."

"Sure!" answered Casey. "You can get there with your men soon after nightfall, sheriff. There'll be a campfire to guide you besides. You don't want to get there before the Kid; he's sly enough to spot you and keep clear. You want to surround the camp when the Kid's there, and close in on him—and the Kid's your meat, sheriff."

Watson nodded.

"But if he misses you from the camp he will sure get wise to it that there's something on," he said.

"He won't miss me from the camp," answered Casey. "I reckon I shall be there. He would sure spot the racket in once if I was missing. He reckons that I can't toiter a hundred yards, but he would get wise to it if he found me missing. I shall be there—in my blankets. If I wasn't there the Kid sure wouldn't be there. And I guess I'm not letting him get out of this." Two-gun Casey gritted his teeth and touched the deep scar on his cheek. "I swore I'd get him when he gave me this, and I reckon I want that five



dangerous enemy to have.
make a great pal.

hundred, too. You mosey along an hour after nightfall, and you'll find the Kid sitting cool and easy by the campfire—and you want to be sudden on the shoot, too, sheriff."

"I guess I'll give the Kid a chance to put up his hands," answered Watson. "But if he don't put them up instanter, he gets his. I reckon I know him too well to give him a chance to pull a gun."

"If he pulls a gun Frio will want a new sheriff," said Casey.

"Leave that to me!" snapped the sheriff. "I reckon this is a sure cinch, and the Rio Kid has got to the end of his trail at last."

There was a grim satisfaction in Sheriff Watson's face as he rode away to Frio after his interview with the gunman.

Two-gun Casey stood leaning on the wall of the hut, watching him till he was out of sight.

Then he turned away and limped into the chaparral, to make his way back to the camp by the stream. The Kid was not to know that he had left it—not to suspect for a moment that the gunman had betrayed him and sold him to his enemies.

After the gunman was swallowed by the tangled chaparral, another figure emerged from behind the hut into the sunlight.

The Rio Kid laughed lightly.

He glanced in the direction the sheriff had taken, towards Frio town. He was far out of sight. Then the Kid followed on Two-gun Casey's track into the dim chaparral.

There was a smile on his face as he went, a grim smile.

He trod without sound; but often, ahead of him, he heard the noises of crackling underbush, and a muttered curse from the gunman as he trailed his injured leg.

Two-gun Casey limped at last from the thickets into the camp by the stream and sank down on a log.

The sun was deep down now, and shadows were lengthening in the chaparral. The gunman rested for a time, and then he rebuilt the campfire and lighted it. When the Kid came back from his long ride he was to discern nothing amiss in the camp—nothing to put him wise. The gunman little dreamed how much the Kid already knew.

"Say, feller."

Casey started convulsively and spun round.

The Rio Kid stood almost at his side. His mustang was not to be seen, and there was a gun in his hand. He had come into camp on foot, and it was not yet sundown.

Casey pulled himself together.

"You sure startled me, Kid," he said. "Where's your cayuse?"

"I left him staked out way back," answered the Kid.

"You ain't been up to the hills?"

"Nope."

Casey repressed a tremor. There was a light in the Kid's eyes that scared him, and the gun in the Kid's hand surely meant that the Kid was suspicious. And why had he not been up to the hills?

"Where have you been, then, Kid?" asked the gunman, trying to speak casually.

"I sure took a little paseo on foot," answered the Kid carelessly. "I took a little rest by the charcoal-burner's shack."

Casey's hard face whitened.

He knew now!

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"You dirty dog!" went on the Kid in measured tones. "I picked you up a dying man in the chaparral, with a buzzard watching you, and brought you here and nursed you. I warned you that if you tried to get me again it would be the last time. You dog-goned galoot, you thought you had fooled me—and you was plumb glad to get clear of me for a whole day. Why, you gink, I trailed you to the charcoal-burner's shack, and I was lying there in cover while you was talking to the sheriff of Frio."

Two-gun Casey set his teeth.

"Shoot, then, and be durned to you!" he hissed.

"I guess I'm not wasting powder and shot on a dirty coyote like you, Casey!" said the Kid disdainfully. "And I ain't shooting any man in cold blood, even if he's tried to sell me to Judge Lynch. You've sent for the sheriff of Frio, and, by the holy smoke, you can take your chance with the sheriff. You've warned him to be sudden on the shoot—and maybe he'll be a little too sudden to please you. Take your chance with what you've fixed up for me."

The Kid cut a length of trail-roped and bound the gunman's hands behind his back. Two-gun Casey sought to

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resist, but his resistance did not trouble the Kid.

With his hands bound behind him the gunman was forced into a sitting posture on a log and bound there securely, unable to move hand or foot. His eyes burned at the Kid.

"Kid, what's this game?" he demanded hoarsely. "What are you fixing me up like this for?"

"For the Frio sheriff."

"You dog-goned galoot, the sheriff's got no trouble with me! I ain't wanted in Frio, like you!" hissed Casey.

The Kid's eyes glinted.

"You sure told Watson he would find the Kid sitting on a log by the fire," he answered. "I guess Watson's not going to be disappointed. Take your chance, you dog—and pray that Watson mayn't be so quick on the shoot as you asked him to be!"

The Kid was rolling a gag as he was speaking, and now he forced it into the gunman's mouth and bound it there with a cord about Casey's head. His eyes burning with rage and hatred,

Two-gun Casey sat there, unable to move, unable to speak.

The Kid stirred the fire and threw on fresh logs.

Then he took the gunman's hat, and placed his own Stetson on the head of Two-gun Casey.

The band of silver nuggets, known wherever the Rio Kid was known, glistened and glimmered in the fire-light.

Then the gunman understood.

"I guess that's yours," said the Rio Kid. "Take your chance, hombre, as you meant me to take mine. I guess if the sheriff shoots too quick he will sure drill a worse galoot than he reckons."

A moment more and the thickening darkness of the trees had swallowed the Rio Kid from sight.

Through the darkness Sheriff Watson and the men from Frio trod softly and cautiously.

The gleam of a camp-fire afar was a guide to them, if they had needed one. In deep cover, they paused at last on the border of the glade through which the rippling stream ran.

Sheriff Watson breathed hard.

Scarce twenty yards from him, as he stood hidden, gleamed and glowed the camp-fire by the stream.

Close by the fire a figure sat on a log. It sat motionless, half-hidden by the shadow of a heavy-branched caiba, the firelight playing on it in fits and starts. Every time the flame gleamed up it shone on the silver band of silver nuggets on the Stetson hat of the man seated on the log.

The figure sat absolutely still, as still as a man bound. The face was deep in the shadow of the hat; but the Stetson hat, with its band of silver nuggets, was enough for the Frio men.

The sheriff's eyes gleamed.

"It's the Kid, sure!" he breathed.

His gun was in his hand, his finger on the trigger.

The Kid was taken off his guard for once; but the sheriff knew well how swift was the Kid on the draw. There were six men behind him, but once the Kid was up with a gun in his hand the game might yet go against the sheriff's posse from Frio.

"I'm giving him a chance!" breathed Watson. "But if his paws don't go up instanter, he gets his. You galoots watch out."

His teeth set, his gun gripped hard, the sheriff of Frio leaped out of cover.

His gun flashed to a level as he shouted:

"Hands up, Kid!"

The figure seemed to stir, but the sheriff's order was not obeyed. Watson did not hesitate a second.

Crack! Crack! Crack!

He fired and ran forward, firing again and again as he ran. Bullet after bullet crashed into the figure by the fire, yet no sound came from it and it did not fall—as if something invisible held it in the same posture. The sheriff reached him, but it was not till he had dragged aside the Stetson hat, with its band of silver nuggets, that he knew.

Far away in the pine-woods the Rio Kid was riding, humming a Mexican fandango tune as he rode, while Sheriff Watson of Frio, his smoking gun in his hand, stood staring blankly at the body of Two-gun Casey, riddled with bullets.

THE END.

(You will find another breathlessly thrilling long complete tale of the Rio Kid in next week's issue, entitled: "SAVED BY AN OUTLAW!")