

**THERE ARE THRILLS GALORE IN THIS
TOPPING YARN!**

It isn't often that the Rio Kid finds himself at a loss when he's landed in a tight corner, for desperate situations and the Kid are old friends. But this week he really is up against it with a vengeance!



The House of DON BALTHAZAR!

RALPH REDWAY

OUR ROARING WILD WEST STORY, STARRING THE RIO KID,
BOY OUTLAW OF TEXAS!

**THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Foes of the Dark!**

BY uncertain glimpses of the moon, when it peered from the clouds, the Rio Kid sighted the dark-cloaked figures. Two of them, at least, wore at one end of the shadowed street; two or three, he reckoned, at the other.

Once or twice, through the deep silence of the night, he caught a faint, stealthy footfall. Black midnight lay on the Mexican town of Los Pinos; only at rare intervals the moon glimmered through dark clouds, and dropped an uncertain gleam into the street between high adobe walls, lined with shady trees. So far as the Kid could see, there was not a door or a window in the whole street's length—it was shut in by garden walls, high, and guarded at the summit by spikes or broken bottles. In deep recesses in the adobe walls, here and there, thick, iron-barréd gates were set—closed and looked for the night. The Kid, as he moved slowly and warily, his eyes watchful, called himself a luced gink for roaming alone into such a quarter, and without his guns. He had walked out of the fonda to have a look at the town by night, and in that dark, lonely street he had realized that he was being tracked—and surrounded; and he guessed that some of the bravos of Los Pinos had seen him take out his roll when he paid the landlord of the fonda. Whoever they were, they were tracking him, quietly, stealthily, in the gloom, and at any moment there might come a rush, and half a dozen long cuchillos might be glittering round him.

In the sierra, or on the llano, the Kid would not have been so imperilled. With his walnut-butted guns in his

hands, he would not have cared a continental red cent had he run into all the bravos in the pueblo. But in the streets of Los Pinos men did not pack guns; and the Kid had left his hardware at the fonda, while he took his stroll through calle and plaza to see Los Pinos by the light of the moon. Now the moon was hiding her light, and in the darkness his half-seen, half-heard shadowers were tracking him down.

The Kid stopped at last, and listened. Faintly through the night came a soft footfall, soft almost as the slinking tread of a coyote.

The street was narrow—a mere passage between high garden walls. Tall trees that grew behind the walls shadowed it, the branches mostly meeting overhead in a foliaged arch. The Kid reflected that he had wandered into exactly the spot where the bravos wanted him for their purpose. High, inaccessible walls shut him in, and at either end of the ally, stealthy footsteps told of creeping foes. It looked as if the sunrise, when it came, would reveal the gushed body of a Gringo, robbed and murdered—a discovery that would probably not cause much excitement in Los Pinos.

Strangers from the northern side of the border were not popular in Los Pinos, or in any other town in Mexico. But the Rio Kid had a very natural objection to being found in such a stato in the morning, and he called himself a gink for mooeying around a Mexican town without a gun. But it was too late to think of that; he was beset, and so soon as he attempted to get out of that shadowy alley, knives would be gleaming. And to wait there, watching, was only to wait till the bravos closed in on him. In the heart of a town,

where there were telegraphs and telephones, alcaide and police, and the whole bag of tricks, the Kid was in danger more dire than he had been in among the brigands of the Sierra Madre.

But the boy puncher from Frio was perfectly cool. Those leperos guessed that they had him cinched; but the Kid was not a dead Gringo yet, not by long chalks.

Under the thick shadow of a tree, the Kid backed into a deep recess of a high adobe wall, where there was a gate. The gate, obviously, gave on the garden of some mansion, standing in wide grounds; and the Kid nourished a faint hope that he might find it unfastened. It was not likely; he was in a country of locks and bolts and bars; a country where locks and bolts and bars were very necessary, and were seldom neglected. Anyhow, in that narrow recess, the bravos would not find it easy to rush him in a body, and that was something. So the Kid groped into the black porch, and felt over the solid wooden gate, that was barred with iron clamps.

And, to his joy and amazement, he found it yield to his touch.

The Kid whistled softly under his breath.

Likely enough, it was the only gate in Los Pinos that was left unsecured. He surely was in luck.

The Kid grinned as he thought of the rage and disappointment of the ruffians who were tracking him through the shadows, when they found that he had vanished, like a bird in the air. The gate was unfastened now, but it would be fastened, pronto, when the Kid had passed into the garden. The stealthy, cloaked figures would close in, and find

him gone, and even if they guessed how he had gone, they could not follow.

True, it was no light matter to trespass upon private grounds at that hour of the night—he might be seen, taken for one of the innumerable thieves of Los Pinos, fired on, perhaps. But that risk was nothing, compared with the danger of a struggle, unarmed, against a gang of bravos, knife in hand. The Rio Kid pushed the gate open softly, and it moved without a sound on well-oiled hinges.

That circumstance struck the Kid; in Mexico, where everything was left till the morrow, hinges usually creaked for want of oil. But the gate made no sound as the Kid opened it; and when he stepped in and closed it behind him, it closed soundlessly. He groped on the inner side, found a bolt, and pushed it home, and the bolt, too, was noiseless.

The Kid stood in silence and darkness under the thick branches. The moon was hidden again, all was black. He listened, and from the alley without a stealthy footstep passed. The Mexican bravos were seeking him along the shadowed street, not knowing where he had gone. And the Kid smiled in the darkness.

Then suddenly, without a sound, hands were laid on him from behind.

The Kid started convulsively.

The garden had been silent as the grave; to all appearance the house to which it belonged was shut for the night. Within the adobe walls the Kid had not looked for foes; at least, until he began to seek a way out by another quarter. But the dark, silent garden was, it seemed, far from solitary, for three pairs of hands had been laid on the Kid. Each of his arms was pinioned in a muscular grip, and an arm was thrown round his neck from behind. Before he fully knew what was happening, he was dragged over, a helpless prisoner in the grasp of three assailants.

The Kid did not resist.

It was useless to resist three foes, each as powerful as himself, and likely only to draw forth the thrust of a knife. These men, whoever they were, were not of the gang who had been tracking him; it seemed certain that they belonged to the mansion surrounded by the adobe garden wall—night-watchmen, the Kid supposed, or something of the sort.

If they took him for a midnight marauder, as they might well do in the circumstances, it was natural for them to seize him, though there was something strange, almost eerie, in their silence and stealth. It seemed as if they had been lurking in the darkness there, watching and waiting for someone to enter by the gate that was left unbolted, which was strange enough.

They fastened on the Kid with a silent, ruthless determination. He was lifted from his feet, and carried away up a dark garden path. He submitted to his fate with cool philosophy. If they took him for a midnight prowler, he would be handed over to the alcalde and his alguacils, which at all events was better than a thrust from a bravo's cuchillo in the dark. But he could explain, when he saw the master of the mansion, or when he was taken to the alcalde. In the meantime, as a struggle availed nothing, the Kid took it quietly.

From behind a dark bank of clouds the moon peered for a moment or two. The Kid had a glimpse of a large garden, planted with tropical flowers, shaded by great trees, and a white-walled mansion standing high and stately. He had a glimpse of the man who held him—three

dusky peons, plainly the servants of a rich Mexican household. In the glimmer of the moon they also saw the man they bore, and from one of them, the first word that had been uttered, came an ejaculation of surprise:

"Un Gringo!"

Then the moon vanished again, and all was dark.

"You've said it, feller!" drawled the Kid coolly. "I guess I'm from Texas, lumbres; what you galoots call a Tejano in your lingo."

There was no reply from his captors. The Kid felt himself carried through a doorway, and along passages, and at last he was set down, in the darkness, in a room—but he was still held by two pairs of brawny hands. The third man had released him, and gone—to call the boss, the Kid figured. Well, the Kid was anxious himself to see the boss, and to explain how he came to be in the garden at that suspicious hour of the night; and he hoped to see some courteous Mexican Don who would take his word on the subject, and order him to be released—by a safer way out than by the alley under the high garden walls.

The Kid waited with cool equanimity. A light gleamed.

The peon came back into the room, carrying a lamp. He set the lamp on a table, and its light shone brightly in the room. Following the peon, a man entered, and the Kid's eyes turned on him curiously. This, he reckoned, would be the boss of the shebang, the galoot he wanted to see. And the Kid called up his best Spanish to explain.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

Chance!

"UN Gringo! De veras!"

It was an exclamation of surprise, in a harsh, croaking voice.

The Kid fixed his eyes on the speaker. He saw a little old man, dressed in black velvet, with a skull-cap of the same material. From his dress, his look, his manner, it was plain that he was a rich hidalgo, the master of the mansion, or the boss of the shebang, as the Kid expressed it to himself. But there was little encouragement to be drawn from his looks. His old dark, wrinkled face, his little, black, beady eyes, his thin, hard lips, gave the Kid an impression of cold, hard, relentless evil, that caused a chill to run through him. For sheer, dark wickedness, he had never seen a face to equal that of the wrinkled Mexican who was now staring at him. Still, that was nothing to the Kid; he had only to explain how he came there, and at the worst he would be sent to the carcel for the remainder of the night. So, at least, he figured.

For several long moments the black, beady eyes were fixed on him with a strange, glowering look the Kid did not understand. It might have been supposed that the old man was gazing upon an enemy he had long desired to get into his power; yet the Kid had never seen the man before, and outside the forda where he had put up, he had not spoken to a soul in Los Pinos.

"Bind his hands!" said the old man in Spanish, and one of the peons took a cord, the Kid's hands were pulled behind him, and secured.

He was allowed to sit on a bench, facing the old Don. The latter made a gesture, and the three peons quitted the room, leaving the Kid alone with the master of the house.

"So you are an Americano?" said the old Mexican, speaking in English.

"Texan, senor," said the Kid cheerily. "I guess I hail from the Rio country, in Texas."

"Carambol! From your dress, a rancher!" said the Mexican, eyeing the Kid's Stetson and chaparejos and spurs.

"Right in once," assented the Kid.

"Carambol!" repeated the old hidalgo.

"And it is for a Texan, an Americano, an enemy of our country, that Donna Carlotta has forgotten her obedience."

The Kid opened his eyes wide.

"I guess you've got me beat, senor," he said. "Perhaps you'll let me explain how I came into your garden—"

"Believe me, senor, I know perfectly well," said the old Mexican, with a smile that was tigerish. "I am well acquainted with the whole affair, senor. It is not the first time you have entered by the garden gate that Donna Carlotta so cleverly left unbolted for you. You, senor, are a stranger to me, but Donna Carlotta has been watched—as you find I have the pleasure of making your acquaintance, senor, on the night of your death!"

"I guess I ain't dead yet, senor!" remonstrated the Kid. "You're sure making some sort of a mistake—"

"Your name?"

"Kid Carfax."

"Alino, I need not say, as you know it so well, Senor Carfax," grinned the old Mexican.

The Kid shook his head.

"You've got it wrong, senor," he said. "I guess I've never seen you before, and I sure don't know you from Adam. I ain't the slightest notion what house I'm in, or who you are, or what you're chinning about."

"I should not have expected Donna Carlotta's lover to lie, had he been a Mexican, and worthy of her," said the old man. "But the Gringos—they are all liars and thieves. You say that you do not know me, dog that you are—you do not know that I am Don Balbazar Iquique, the richest man in Los Pinos, and the guardian of Donna Carlotta de Soto. You do not seek to rob me of my ward and a fortune? No?"

"I guess not," said the Kid. "You're sure talking in riddles, Don Balbazar, if that's your name. I've never heard of Donna Carlotta, and never heard of you. I guess you're taking me for some other hombre. I got into your garden to-night by chance—"

"Oh, senor, what is the use of lies so palpable?" asked Don Balbazar. "A Gringo should be able to lie more cunningly."

The Kid's eyes gleamed.

"I guess you're too old for me to handle, even if my hands were loose," he remarked. "So you sure can shoot off your mouth as much as you like, you dog-goned Greaser. I tell you I found the gate unfastened, and—"

The old man raised a thin hand.

"Bustante, senor! I do not choose to listen to your lies," he said. "This tale might impose on a child. Do I look a simple child to be deceived by so clumsy a lie?"

"I guess you look the hardest case I've ever struck," said the Kid. "But I'm giving you the straight goods—"

"Enough! Listen to me," said the old man. "You know, for Donna Carlotta must have told you, that it does not please me for my ward to marry—I will be frank with you, senor, as you have but an hour to live, or less. It does not suit me to lose my ward's fortune. She suspects it, or knows it, and I have no doubt that she has told her lover. Until Donna Carlotta is of age, senor, her fortune will remain in

my hands—and even then”—the old man grinned hideously—“even then, senor, there are convents—there are ways and means—I shall not lose so large a fortune easily, senor, when my own has gone on the gambling-tables. Why should I not be frank, when I speak to a man who is already dead—within the hour? Fool! You thought to rob me of a fortune—and you fancied that I was blind, old, foolish—you were mistaken, senor. And if I had any compunction, it would be gone now; now that I find that Donna Carlotta has chosen a Gringo! A Gringo!” The old man spat, with contempt. “By all the saints! Even if it suited me for my ward to marry, senor, I would not permit her to wed with an enemy of my country.”

The Kid watched his old wicked, wrinkled face curiously.

taken care that Carlotta should convey no warning to her lover. Dios! She will not even tell me his name, lest a bravo's knife should let out his life! But I know that you would come again, senor, where you have come before—I was content to wait! Now you have come, to fall into my hands!” He chuckled like some croaking raven. “Fool! Your grave is being dug in the garden in these moments while I speak to you.”

The Kid felt a chill.

“You durned, gol’darned murdering Greaser!” he said savagely. “I keep on telling you that you’ve roped in the wrong cayuse.”

“Save your breath, senor!” grinned Don Balthazar. “Save your breath—I am not a child to believe lies. Every night, senor, since I learned the truth, the gate has stood unfastened, ready for

The unfastened gate had been a death-trap—intended for another, but into which the Kid fell. And there was no chance of convincing Balthazar Iquique that he was not the man for whom the snare had been laid. The Don would not even listen to his story, and would not have believed it had he listened. The trap had been laid for Donna Carlotta’s unknown lover to walk into—the Kid had walked into it, and all was said. If it was any solace to the Kid, he had



MISTAKEN IDENTITY! The girl entered the room and the little wizened figure in black stood back in the doorway, watching her. As the girl saw the Kid she gave a sudden cry. “This is not Don Guzman!” “I guess not, miss,” said the Rio Kid brightly. “Sorry, if you wanted to see a galoot of that name!” (See Chapter 8.)

He comprehended now the mistake that the old man was making.

The unfastened gate, the well-oiled lock and hinges, were explained now; and the serving-men who had been waiting, silent, within, to seize an intruder when he came.

Sheer chance, in seeking an escape from the bravos, had brought the Kid there—where another was expected!

And the other, obviously, was some man who was the lover of this old villain's ward. The Kid had walked into the trap laid for some unknown Mexican of Los Pinos.

The old Don, who looked wickedness incarnate, false to the core himself, was not likely to believe a tale of such a chance. He believed that he had his ward's lover in his hands, and that anything the Kid might say to the contrary was a lie to save his life.

It was a strange, unexpected outcome of the Kid's midnight adventure in Los Pinos.

Don Balthazar was grinning, with the gloating triumph of some evil gnomes. He croaked out a gloating chuckle.

“Tell me no more lies, senor,” he said. “Fool! For three nights, since I discovered the truth, my servants have watched by the garden gate. I have

you—and at last you have come. You came to a love meeting, as you believed, senor—but in truth you came to your death! But I am not cruel!” He grinned like a tiger. “You shall say adios to Donna Carlotta before you die! You shall see her and say farewell. Dios! It will be a warning to her what fate will befall another lover, should she think of taking one to escape from my hands. Wait, senor—I go to call Donna Carlotta!”

The old Mexican backed from the room; the door closed, and a key turned. The Rio Kid was left alone.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Embrace of Donna Carlotta!

“SHUCKS!” murmured the Rio Kid. He was in a tight corner, and he realized it very clearly.

He had escaped the bravos who had been tracking him in the shadowed alley between the garden walls. Probably they had, by this time, given up the search for him, enraged and wondering at his escape. But escape from the cuchillos of the bravos of Los Pinos was little to the good if he was to be butchered in this house of mystery and crime,

probably saved the life of the Mexican lover, who, if he came, would find the garden gate in the adobe porch fastened against him. The Kid was glad of it, so far as that went; but his chief concern was not for an unknown Mexican, but for Kid Carfax of Frio. And it looked as if Kid Carfax had reached the end of his adventurous trail at last.

He waited.

The peons had bound his wrists fast behind his back; he had no chance of getting loose. He wondered whether the coming of Donna Carlotta would give him a chance. At least, she would announce that he was not the man her guardian believed him to be. But would that wrinkled old fiend believe her, any more than he believed the Kid? Would he not be assured that it was a falsehood to save her lover? Even if he believed, would he spare a man who now knew his secrets, a member of the race he, like all Mexicans, hated? It was not likely.

Still, the Kid was cool, and he rose politely to his feet as the door opened to admit a graceful figure in a cloak and mantilla. The girl was speaking in Spanish as the door opened—a low, sweet, trembled voice that was pleasant

to the car. The black lace mantilla half hid her face, but the Kid could see that the face was beautiful, though pale and sad.

"You will spare him, Don Balthazar! You could not be so wicked—so cruel to—"

"Querida, I am not cruel—I allow you to say adios to your Gringo!" croaked the old Don.

"He is not a Gringo, I swear I have never spoken to a Gringo—"

"Peace!"

The girl entered, the little wizened figure in black velvet standing in the doorway, watching her.

Dark, sorrowful eyes turned on the Kid; and the girl gave a sudden cry.

"It is not Don Guzman!"

"I guess not, miss," said the Kid. "Sorry if you wanted to see a galoot of that name."

The girl's face brightened.

"It is not he—it is not he!" she exclaimed. "Don Balthazar, you have deceived me—you have terrified me for nothing—it is not he!"

The old man croaked out a laugh.

"Nombre de Dios! You should have been an actress, Carlotta! Well done—well done! But you cannot deceive me!"

"I tell you, this is not the *hidalgo* you believe!" she exclaimed. "This caballero—I have never seen him before."

"Come, come!" grinned the old Don. "You waste time with this trifling, Carlotta. The man dies within the hour—"

if you would bid him farewell, lose no time. I leave you—but remember that an eye remains on you, and if you seek to release the caballero, the interview ends at once. I trust to your good sense, querida."

He drew the heavy door shut.

The girl remained standing, looking at the Kid, and the brightness was still in her face. The Kid grinned rather sourly. He understood how relieved the Mexican girl was to find that it was not her lover who had fallen into the merciles hands of the guardian who sought to keep her fortune. In her relief, she forgot that a stranger's life was to pay for the old man's mistake.

She approached him at last, and spoke in Spanish.

"Who are you, señor? Speak in your own tongue—I understand."

"A puncher from Texas, miss," answered the Kid. "Kid Carfax, from Frisco."

"But how came you here—my guardian has said that Don Guzman was caught in his snare—though he did not know the name. And you—"

The Kid explained.

"Ah, señor, I pity you!" murmured Donna Carlotta. "Praise be to the saints, who have watched over him, that Don Guzman Saltillo did not come to the garden this night!"

"I guess," said the Kid, "that the saints was so durned busy looking after Don Guzman, that they clean forgot this kid. They sure did. That old hombre won't believe he's roped in the wrong

boss, miss, and I'm sure booked for the other side of Jordan."

The girl clasped her hands.

"If I could help you, señor! But I cannot—I cannot! You heard what Don Balthazar said—I am watched! Oh, señor, I am the most unhappy of women in Mexico! My guardian will believe that he has killed the man who loves me, and who would protect me from him; but afterwards he will learn the truth, and Don Guzman may yet fall into the trap."

Evidently the señorita's concern was still chiefly for Don Guzman, though it was the hapless Texan who was in immediate danger of death.

The Kid made a grimace.

"I guess, miss, that if I got out of this hyer ciuch, I'd sure look for that hombre Don Guzman, and put him wise," he said.

Her eyes glosed.

"Oh, señor, if you only could! If by some chance, señor, or mercy of the holy saints, you escape from this peril, seek Don Guzman Saltillo at the Hacienda Saltillo, and warn him of his peril. Say that the secret is known, that he must not come again, because assassins lurk in the garden to seize him. Tell him he cannot hope to see me more, but that I will be true to him in spite of my guardian's threats. Tell him—"

She broke off.

"But you will never escape, señor—your doom is sealed. And I, alas, am the cause of your death."

The tears ran down the olive cheeks of the Mexican girl.

"I guess I ain't a dead hombre yet, miss," said the Kid stoutly, "and if I beat it out of this, I'll sure see that galoot Don Guzman and give him the office. Say, that guardian of yours seems to be some lobo wolf, he sure does!"

"He is cruel—wicked—remorseless!" sighed Donna Carlotta. "He has lost all his own great fortune at the gaming tables, and I believe that he has lost much of mine, and he dare not account for it, as he must do if I marry. He has kept me almost a prisoner—it was by chance that I saw Don Guzman—he would never have permitted, had he known. Oh, señor, Don Guzman loved me, and he would have saved me from this house of misery and despair. I knew Don Guzman as a child, señor, but since my father died and left me in the care of Don Balthazar, I have not seen him—till by chance at the church, one day—"

She broke off, colouring.

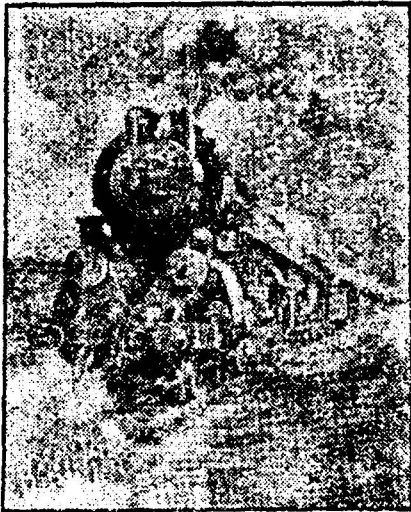
The Kid nodded sympathetically.

He guessed that a ward in the care of a guardian like Don Balthazar Iquique would welcome any chance of escaping from his hands, and more especially if that chance came in the romantic guise of a lover.

He could picture the stolen glances from under the shade of the mantilla, the notes carried by some devoted servant, the secret meetings—the gate left unfastened for the lover to enter the garden—

"Soon, señor, Don Guzman would have saved me from this," the girl was speaking again. "That is what my guardian feared—and so he laid his plans. I would not tell him the name, for all his threats—he would have hired bravos to stab Don Guzman some dark night. But his servants must have watched me—they found that Don Guzman visited the garden at night—and so—I have been kept locked in my room, that I could not give warning, while this ambuscado was laid—but by the mercy of the saints Don Guzman has not fallen into it!"

WONDERFUL COLOURED PICTURE CARD



FREE!

A 200-M.P.H. LOCOMOTIVE!

Here's another reproduction, in black and white, of one of our companion paper's FREE Coloured Picture Cards, dealing with mechanical

"MARVELS OF THE FUTURE!"

Every boy and girl should make it a point to collect these handsome and unique coloured cards, the combined work of skilled artists and inventors. Ask your newsagent to reserve you a copy of the GEM to-day, and share in this stupendous treat!

The GEM

ON SALE WEDNESDAYS : : PRICE 2d.

"Only this kid!" said the boy puncher, with a rather wry smile.

"Ah, believe me, senior, I pity you!" murmured Donna Carlotta. "I cannot help but rejoice that Don Guzman is safe—but from my heart, senior, I pity your hard fate."

"I guess that makes it easier, seniorita," said the Kid gravely. "But it would sure make it easier still if I could wring the wizened neck of that old lobo wolf before I'm rubbed out."

The door opened a few inches, and the grinning, gnomish face of Don Balthazar Irique peered in.

"Are you finished, querida?" he asked mockingly. "Time presses. Senior the Gringo, all is ready for you in the garden."

The girl turned.

"Don Balthazar, I tell you, he is not the man—"

"You may tell me so ten thousand times, nina, and I shall not believe you," grinned Don Balthazar. "I give you a few minutes more. But haste—haste—let the farewells be said—time presses, querida!"

The door softly closed again.

"They watch us, senior," breathed the girl. "I cannot aid you! May the saints have pity on you. If it is a comfort to you, senior, you may reflect that this mischance has saved the life of Don Guzman Saltillo."

That reflection did not bring so much comfort to the Kid as Donna Carlotta may have supposed.

"Seniorita," whispered the Kid, "I guess they're watching through some spyhole, and if you try to untie my hands they'll be on us in two shakes of a beaver's tail. That's a cinch, I guess. But there's a knife in my pocket, miss, and if you could get it, and give a cut at the rope round my wrists—"

"Senior! They will see—"

"I guess, seniorita, that taking me for your lover, they'll not be surprised to see you embrace me a few, seeing that I'm going to be wiped out and buried in the garden," murmured the Kid.

Donna Carlotta flushed crimson.

"Senior!"

"I guess it's asking a lot, but it's to save my life, seniorita," said the Kid; "and if I get loose, I'll sure take a warning to that feller Guzman, and mebbe save his life, too."

"It is true!"

"Just put on some hefty grief, and weep a few, and embrace me, and feel in the breast-pocket for the knife," breathed the Kid. "I guess there ain't much time to lose, seniorita."

"Senior, I will do what I can," whispered Donna Carlotta, "and if you escape, you will convey a warning—"

"You bet!"

Don Balthazar had said that his ward should have been an actress, and the Kid, during the next few moments, was prepared to endorse the statement. For the Mexican girl played her part well. There was a wild burst of sobbing, and Carlotta flung her arms round the Kid, as if embracing her lover for the last time.

The black, beady eyes were watching from the spyhole at the door; but they saw nothing to alarm the old Don. To untie the cords on the Kid's wrists would have taken long minutes. But while she clung to the Kid, apparently in a passion of grief and despair, Carlotta's slim



THE ESCAPE! The Kid heard shouting voices, and wild firing, as he climbed the wall. With scarcely a glance back, he swung himself over and dropped into the street beyond. (See Chapter 4.)

fingers glided into the pocket where the knife was, and her hand closed on it. She let go the Kid, and pressed both hands to her heart, as if overcome with grief; but the admiring Kid noted that that was to get her hands together, so that she could open the knife.

The Kid figured that Don Balthazar's ward surely had her wits about her. With the claspknife concealed in the long black lace of her sleeve, the seniorita flung her arms round the Kid, as if clasping him in a passionate embrace. And the Kid felt the edge of the knife sawing at the cord on his wrists behind him.

His heart was beating fast, his throat was dry. Any galoot, the Kid reflected afterwards, might have felt joyful at being embraced by so lovely a seniorita as Donna Carlotta de Soto; but at the moment the Kid was thinking of anything but that. On moments now his life depended. Donna Carlotta's arms were round him, and her head was on his shoulder, and she was sobbing and weeping—but all the time the edge of the knife was sawing on the cords—gashing the Kid's wrists as well as it slipped, but he cared nothing for that. He felt the cord giving, when the door opened,

and Don Balthazar strode in, with two peons at his heels. Perhaps the old Don suspected that Carlotta was fumbling with the cords as she embraced her supposed lover.

"Bastante!" rapped out the old Don. "Take him!"

The two peons advanced on the Kid, and Donna Carlotta released him, the knife concealed in the lace of her sleeve. The peons gripped the Kid by either arm, and marched him from the room. Down the dark passage they led him, and as he went he heard the voice of Don Balthazar, speaking to the Mexican girl in tones of sardonic consolation. The croaking voice died away, as the Kid was led under an adobe arch into the dark garden.

But his heart was light, and his eyes burned fiercely. The knife had not been given time to saw through the rope, but many strands were cut, and the Kid knew that a powerful wrench would break his hands loose. And when his hands were loose, these jaspers, he reckoned, would find that they had a whole mouthful to chew, in the Rio Kid.

(Continued on page 28.)

The House of Don Balthazar!

(Continued from page 11.)

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

By His Own Hand!

THE moon had sailed out from behind the clouds, and silvery light fell into the scented Mexican garden. By shadowed paths the two peons led the Kid, till they stopped at last under a grove of trees, where the moonlight filtered through the foliage, tracing strange patterns on the grass. Amid the trees was a deep excavation in the earth, dug to a depth of six feet, the displaced earth piled by the side of it.

In the heap of loose earth, three spades and a pick were stuck, and a peon was standing near. The three men had evidently been hard at work, preparing the grave for Donna Carlotta's lover, while the girl was bidding her lover adios. By the side of the deep pit, the Kid was brought to a halt, still held by the peons, and in a few minutes quick, tripping steps announced that Don Balthazar was approaching. The old Mexican came up, and stopped under the trees, gleams of moonlight falling through the branches on his wizened, cruel, wicked old face. He grinned at the Kid like a glowering demon.

The Kid smiled back grimly. His hands would be loose as soon as he wanted them loose, and then there was going to be a surprise for these Greasers. "Now it is adios, senior," said Don Balthazar, with sardonic mockery. "You are ready?"

"I guess I'm ready, you dog-goned lobo wolf," said the Kid.

"Muy bien! You, Jose, strike him dead with your machete!" said Don Balthazar.

The peon laid a hand on the keen-edged machete at his side. Don Balthazar quique looked on, grinning.

The Kid made a wrench, and the half-covered strands of the cord parted. Before the Mexicans knew what was happening, he had grasped the handle of the nearest spade and torn it from the earth. The flat of the spade crashed on

Jose's head as he bared the machete, and the peon fell to the earth stunned.

The other peons leaped back in wild alarm from the spade as it swung round the Kid's head. From Don Balthazar burst a scream of rage and fury. He tore a pompadour from his side, and sprang at the Kid like a tiger. The Kid released a hand from his weapon and struck him with his fist full in the face. The old Mexican staggered on the brink of the pit, lost his footing, and crashed down into the excavation. From the pit, as he cranked to the bottom, came one fearful scream, and then there was silence.

"Now, you dog-goned ginks!" roared the Kid, rushing at his peons with the spade whirling in the air.

They fled like rabbits before his rush.

The Kid burst into a laugh, and threw down the spade. From the pit, where Don Balthazar had fallen, came no sound; and the Kid stepped to it and looked down. The moonlight, filtering through the foliage overhead, shone on a white, fixed, wicked face that stared upward unseeing.

The Kid drew a hard breath.

"Search me!" he muttered.

It was the face of a dead man that glimmered below in the moonlight. The Mexican, pitching headlong into the pit, had fallen on his own pompadour, and the blade was through his body. By his own hand the ruthless old Don had ended his own wicked life.

"Shucks!" murmured the Rio Kid. "I guess that dog-goned galoot has sure got his! And I reckon I want to beat it out of this afore they bring a hull circus round me."

The Kid vaulted among the trees.

He heard shouting voices, and wild firing as he climbed a distant wall. He dropped from the wall into a street, and ran. Half an hour later he was knocking at the door of his hona, and at sunrise the Rio Kid was riding out of Los Pinos in the saddle of the black-muzzled mustang.

The Rio Kid reckoned that the sooner he hit the horizon, after what had happened at the house of Don Balthazar, the better it would be for his health.

What story the peons would tell, he did not know; but it was likely enough that the alcalde and his alguazils would soon be looking for the Tejuano who had been in the garden when the old Mexican met his death. And the Kid had no funds to sample the justice that might be handed out to a Gringo. So he lost no time in hitting the trail. But ere he rode away to the West, he learned where the Hacienda Salallo lay, and in the early morning he rode up to the hacienda and asked for Don Guzman. A handsome young Mexican listened in astonishment to the story the Kid had to tell him.

"Mudro de Dios!" he said, when the Kid had finished. "Last night, senior, I approached the gate of Don Balthazar's garden, but there were cloaked bravos watching the street, and I suspected that they were assassins in the pay of that old picaro. And I did not seek to enter, for that reason. Vaya! If I had entered—"

"I guess they was the galoots that was after my roll," grinned the Kid. "I reckon you was lucky they was there, Senior Don Guzman. You sure would have nicked up with a surprise-party if you'd gone into that garden. But say! You dropped in to put you wig on, be cause, I guess, that the senorita would be powerful glad to see you, and know you'd be safe—and there's sure a clear run for you now that that old hombre has cooked his own goose. I guess you'll be hitting the road for that casa, sir, muy pronto, and I guess I'd like you to take my best respects to that young lady, and my thanks to her for having saved my life."

"Si, senior, si!"
And Don Guzman called for his horse, and was riding for the house of Don Balthazar, while the Rio Kid rode out of Los Pinos and took the trail to the West.

THE END.

(The Rio Kid is in hot water again, next week. Look out for "THE MAN WHO SAVED HIS SKIN" another roaring Western yarn, in next Tuesday's issue.)

THE "TOC-TOC" SPEED BOAT - 3/11. IT'S AN INSTANT ACCELERATION. Runs 15 minutes without attention. HOT AIR DRIVE from "Meta" Split, Caudle-and, or even Night Light. No clockwork. No battery. No boiler. Nothing to explode! 9 inches long. Draught 2 inches. Engine. Continuous "Toc-Toc" sound for great distance.

Write for name of nearest agent, or 4/5 post free (Overseas 5/-) from: **ABBEY SPORTS CO., Ltd.** (Dept. U.S.), 125, Borough High St., London, S.E.1. Manufacturers of the Curzonford Club & Gloucester Boat. Wholesale Agents for Lieke-Wright Yachts, Hudds Reliance, Warneford Aeroplanes.

BOYS (ages 14-19) WANTED for CANADA, AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND. Farm training, outfit, assisted passages provided. The Salvation Army keeps in touch with boys after settlement in the Dominion. Make immediate application.—The Branch Manager, 3 Upper Thames Street, London, E.C.4.

GROW TALLER! ADD INCHES to your height. Details free.—**JEDISON, 39, BOND STREET, BLACKPOOL.**

300 STAMPS FOR 6d. (Abroad 1/-), including Airport, Barbados, Old India, Nywalia, New South Wales, Old Coast, etc.—**W. A. WHITE, Engine Lane, LEE, Stourbridge.**

BE TALL! Your Height increased in 14 days or money back. 2.5 inches gained/ strength increased. Amant's Complete Course, 8/-, or STAMPE brings Free Book with testimonials. Write NOW—**STEEBING SYSTEM, 28, Dean Road, LONDON, N.W.2.**

For 26 Down the Mead "MARVEL" the most popular cycle bargain of the year, 26 years. Rolling over to you for a month. Carriage paid. Other models from £3 10s. 6d. cash. 15 Days' Free Trial. Satisfaction guaranteed or money refunded. Write to-day for Free Illustrated Catalogue. **Mead Limited (Dept. B847), BIRMINGHAM.**

25 BOHEMIA 20 HUNGARY 12 AUSTRALIAN Every claim allowed. Send 2d. postage for approval.—**LIEBURN & TOWNSEND (U.S.), London Road, Liverpool.**

BLUSHING—FREE to all sufferers, particulars of a proved treatment, and permanently cures blushing and flushing of the face and neck. Enclose stamp to pay postage to—**MR. A. TEMPLE (Specialist), Palace House, 129, Shaftesbury Avenue (2nd Floor), London, W.1. (Established over 30 years.)**

WHEN ANSWERING ADVERTISEMENTS PLEASE MENTION THIS PAPER.