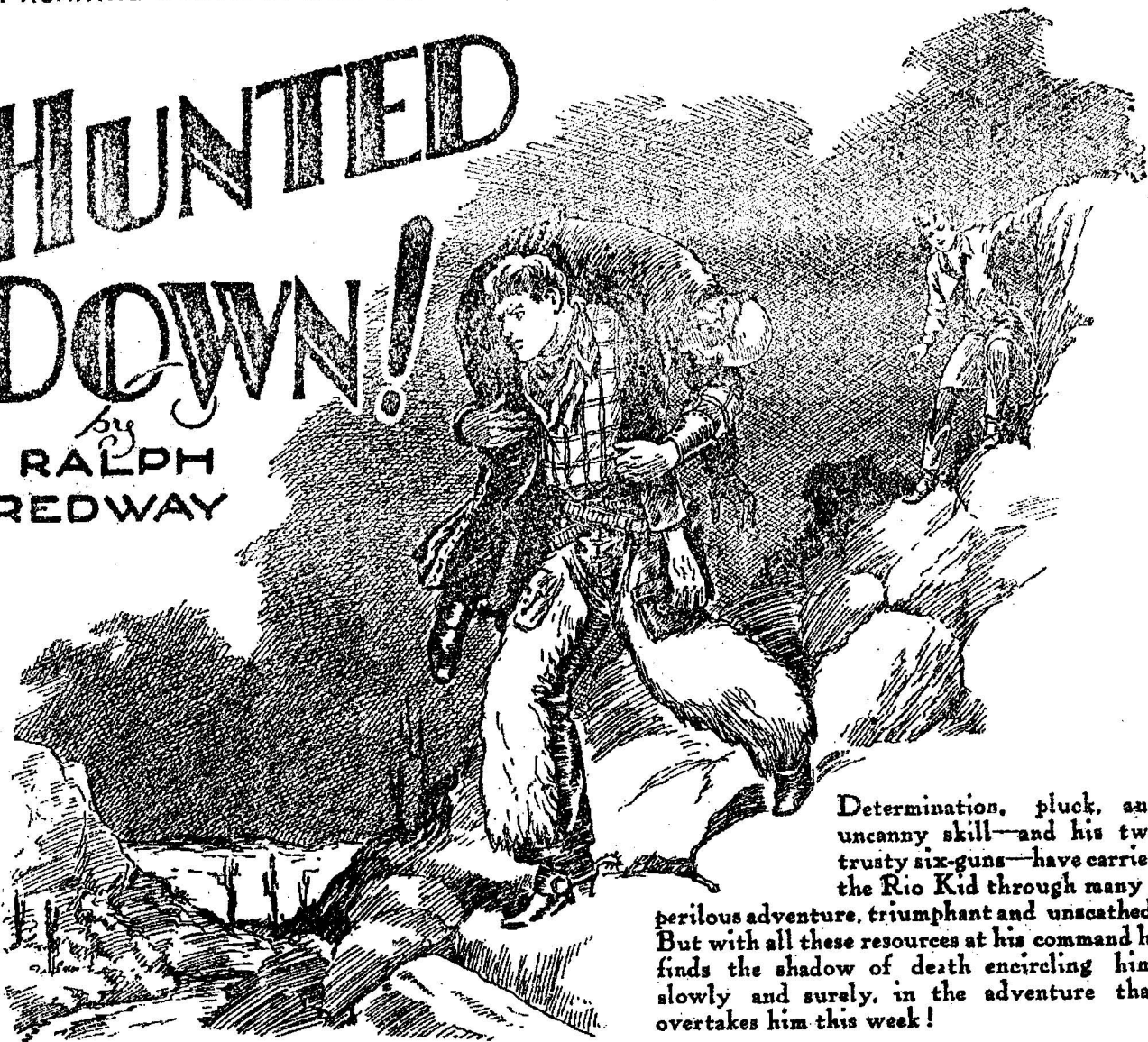


OUR ROARING WESTERN YARN STARRING THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW!

# HUNTED DOWN!

by  
RALPH  
REDWAY



Determination, pluck, and uncanny skill—and his two trusty six-guns—have carried the Rio Kid through many a perilous adventure, triumphant and unscathed. But with all these resources at his command he finds the shadow of death encircling him, slowly and surely, in the adventure that overtakes him this week!

## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Hunted!

"LISTEN, señor!" breathed Donna Estrella.

The Rio Kid was listening. For hours, since he had taken refuge in the vast branches of the ceiba, the Kid's ears had been on the strain. He did not need the Mexican girl's whispered warning.

In the heart of the tropical forest, stretching from the banks of the Rio Rojo, the great ceiba reared its massive trunk and mighty branches, interlaced with the branches of other towering trees. Thick foliage, hanging lianas, masses of Spaniard's beard, made it an almost solid mass, impenetrable to the eye. Scarcely a safer hiding-place could have been found by the fugitives, if only the bunch who were hunting them had missed the trail. And as the hot hours crawled by the Rio Kid's hopes had risen. Don Guzman Carrero and his men had passed on, under the great branches and disappeared into the forest, hours since. The Kid's mustang, trampling a trail through the dense forest, had led them far, on a false scent—far from sight and hearing of the hidden ones in the great ceiba.

Had the Kid been alone he could have dropped from his hiding-place in the great tree, struck off into the forest, and laughed at pursuit. But his two companions had sunk under the fatigue of the long, weary flight. It was because they could go no farther that

the hiding-place had been sought. In a fork of two great branches Don Antonio Pasquale lay, secured by a rope from falling, half-sleeping, worn out, incapable of further exertion. His wizened face was deeply lined, his hawk-like eyes closed, opening at intervals to glance round him in fear and apprehension. And Donna Estrella, though her courage had never faltered, lay heavily against a slanting branch, without motion. The Kid could not make a break without leaving his companions to their fate, and of that the boy puncher from Texas was not thinking.

Hours had passed, and the dusk of the Mexican forest was deepening to dark. It seemed to the Kid that fortune was turning his friend. No sound or sign of the enemy, after long hours of watching and listening. Side-Kicker had gone far into the forest, and his trail had led the Mexican bunch far astray. Parting with his faithful mustang made the Kid's heart ache, but it seemed that his device had been successful. Later, when the moon came up over the forest and his exhausted companions had recovered their strength a little, it would be possible to make a break, with a chance of escape.

And then, to dash the Kid's rising hopes, came sounds from the tangled woods below—rustling, swaying of creepers, followed by the murmur of voices speaking in Spanish. Estrella Pasquale laid her hand on the puncher's

arm, her dark eyes dilated, and she whispered:

"Oigo! Oiga, usted! Listen!"

The Kid set his lips.

From a slit in the mass of vegetation he looked below, and a sombrero nodded in his sight. A Mexican was passing under the tree. The Kid's hand sought the walnut butt of a gun, but the sombrero did not tilt, the man did not look up. It passed and vanished.

Pasquale's eyes opened, gleaming with fear. He was about to speak, but the Kid laid a hand on his lips. The old miser of Olillo was silent, trembling in every limb.

The Kid listened almost painfully.

He knew what had happened. The Mexicans had followed the trail left by the mustang—a trampled trail they could not miss—but they had discovered at last that the horse had gone alone. After wasting hours they had turned back along the trail to seek the fugitives who had remained behind. Now they had reached the spot where the fugitives had hidden, and were searching the tangled forest on either side of the trail. The Kid could hear voices calling, rustling and swaying in all directions. Again a Mexican passed under the branches of the ceiba and crashed on through a mass of lianas and disappeared. The spot where the Kid had started Side-Kicker on his lone trail was a hundred yards away—

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at that distance from the ceiba there were footprints to be picked up by a keen eye—none nearer, for the Kid had been careful to leave no sign near the hiding-place. Don Guzman must know that they were not far away; he must know that they were hidden, but finding them in the impenetrable greenery was another matter. The Kid figured that it was more than likely that they could be doggo in the branches of the ceiba till dark, and when darkness fell the hunt would have to be abandoned. There was a chance yet.

Footsteps beneath the ceiba again; a muttering in Spanish. The Kid caught the words "el traidor." They were speaking of Antonio Pasquale, the man who had fled, a traitor to the revolutionary junta of Olillo; and the savage bitterness of their voices told how fiercely keen they were to bring him to account. Pasquale, as he heard the words, trembled like a leaf. Only the foliage hid him from the men whose knives would have leaped to take his life, had they seen him.

"They are not far away!"

The voice, speaking in Spanish, came clearly to the fugitives in the ceiba, and the Kid recognised the tones of Don Guzman Carrero. He peered down through the foliage, and had a glimpse of the square jaw and dark, swarthy face of the Mexican hacendado, with the forehead bandaged under the sombrero. One glimpse was enough for the Kid and he drew back silently into thicker cover. The black, glinting eyes under

the blood-stained bandage were watchful.

"They cannot be far!" Don Guzman was speaking again, evidently without a suspicion that his words were heard by those he sought. "The horse went on alone—that is certain. That Tojano played a trick on us, and we were deceived. But it is certain that they did not go with the horse. Felipe has picked up the trail where the horse was sent on alone—there is no question of it. They sent on the horse to delude us, and found a hiding-place."

"Si, señor Don Guzman," came another voice.

"In the thickets, in the lianas, perhaps in the branches of the trees," said Don Guzman. "We have but to seek. That old picaro cannot escape us now. Harm not the senorita, she is innocent. And spare the life of that Tejano, if it be possible. Ho spared mine when it was his to take. But kill Pasquale when your eyes fall on him—a knife or a bullet at the sight of the old wolf."

There were footsteps again. The Mexicans were spreading among the tangled tropical vegetation, searching. Don Guzman remained for some moments where he stood, and though the Kid could not see him now, he knew that the hacendado was staring upward, scanning the mighty branches over his head. But there was nothing to betray the fugitives to his eyes, and the Kid heard him pass on at last.

Donna Estrella breathed a panting breath.

"Senor, they are gone!" she whispered.

"Nombre de Dios!" muttered Pasquale. "Madre de Dios! I am a dead man! Por todos los Santos! I am lost!"

The Rio Kid figured that the man of Olillo was right. But to the Mexican girl he still kept a face of hope.

"There's a chance yet," muttered the Kid. "If we keep doggo till dark, there's a chance, though a mighty slim one. Send that them guys don't root us out before sundown."

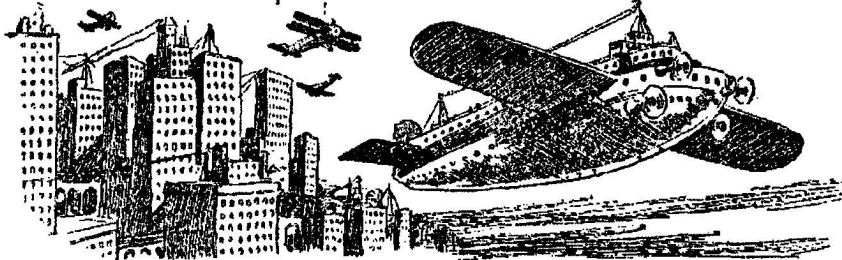
Sounds of rustling, of calling voices, came at intervals, but farther from the hiding-place in the ceiba. And at last the light of day was gone, and darkness, deepening swiftly to blackness, descended on the Mexican forest.

### THE SECOND CHAPTER. The Flight!

**S**ILENCE in the forest! Through the thick foliage there was a gleam of silver from the unseen moon that sailed over the Rio Rojo.

Long the Kid had listened; but all sounds of the enemy had died away. It seemed that they had passed far from the hiding-place in their vain search. With nightfall, the Kid reckoned, they would camp—it might be at a distance. That was the chance for which the Kid had hoped. To make a break might be to run fairly into the hands of the enemy, but the chance had to be taken. (Continued on opposite page.)

## WHEN THE EARTH BECOMES TOO SMALL!



*At the swift rate Mechanical Science progresses to-day, what will this world of ours be like in the years to come? This vast question is skilfully answered by our contributor in the special article below.*

**E**VERY few weeks some clever brain is responsible for the hastening of the time when this world of ours will become such a very tight fit that inventors will have to start scheming for a way of escape from the earth. There won't be room for us all, and people who want to travel tremendous distances at the speed of the wind won't be satisfied to do it here.

You can speak to a friend at the other side of the world at five minutes' notice, if you can pay the wireless fee. Very soon now someone will have perfected a plan whereby you will be able to see your friend, in his home surroundings, in natural colours, whilst you chat across thousands of miles of space.

Airmen have flown to India in two days. Enormous trains are slaughtering space and time incredibly. Inventors are planning to turn the North Pole into wheat-growing country, and people are living in parts of the world that a little while ago were unknown.

Labour-saving devices are giving folk more time to spend on pleasure trips, and the sum total of every invention now being completed is the very startling fact that the world is rapidly becoming too small for us. We are outgrowing it like a youngster outgrows his breeches!

When air-liners have conquered the air completely, explorers will turn their backs on the countries of this world and try to visit those other worlds dotted immense distances out in space—the planets. Of course, it will be necessary to learn far more about these mysterious other worlds before such trips cease to be jumps in the dark, but they are doing amazing things towards gathering that knowledge in the various observatories of the world.

At the great Mount Wilson Observatory, in America, they are now buffing a telescope that will be able to see at least 600,000

times better than the sharpest human eye! It will cost £1,000,000 at least, and it will have a mirror not quite seventeen feet in diameter!

It will take anything from five to ten years to complete, this mighty instrument that is going to wrench from the planets the secrets they have hidden so long from mortal eyes. When the job is done, and the telescope is pointed at the first great star that astronomers want to tackle, the greatest feat of modern engineering ever performed will reveal to us—what?

That question must remain a fascinating problem until the time is ripe. Meanwhile engineers are tunnelling the earth in all directions, deeper and deeper every day, and others are rearing up skyscrapers, the mere thought of which turns one giddy.

The cities are nearing the limit of their possible expansions, so buildings of the future must either be reared higher into the skies or deeper into the bowels of the earth. Pedestrians must give way to swift and colossal traffic, and for these immense tunnels are even now being built.

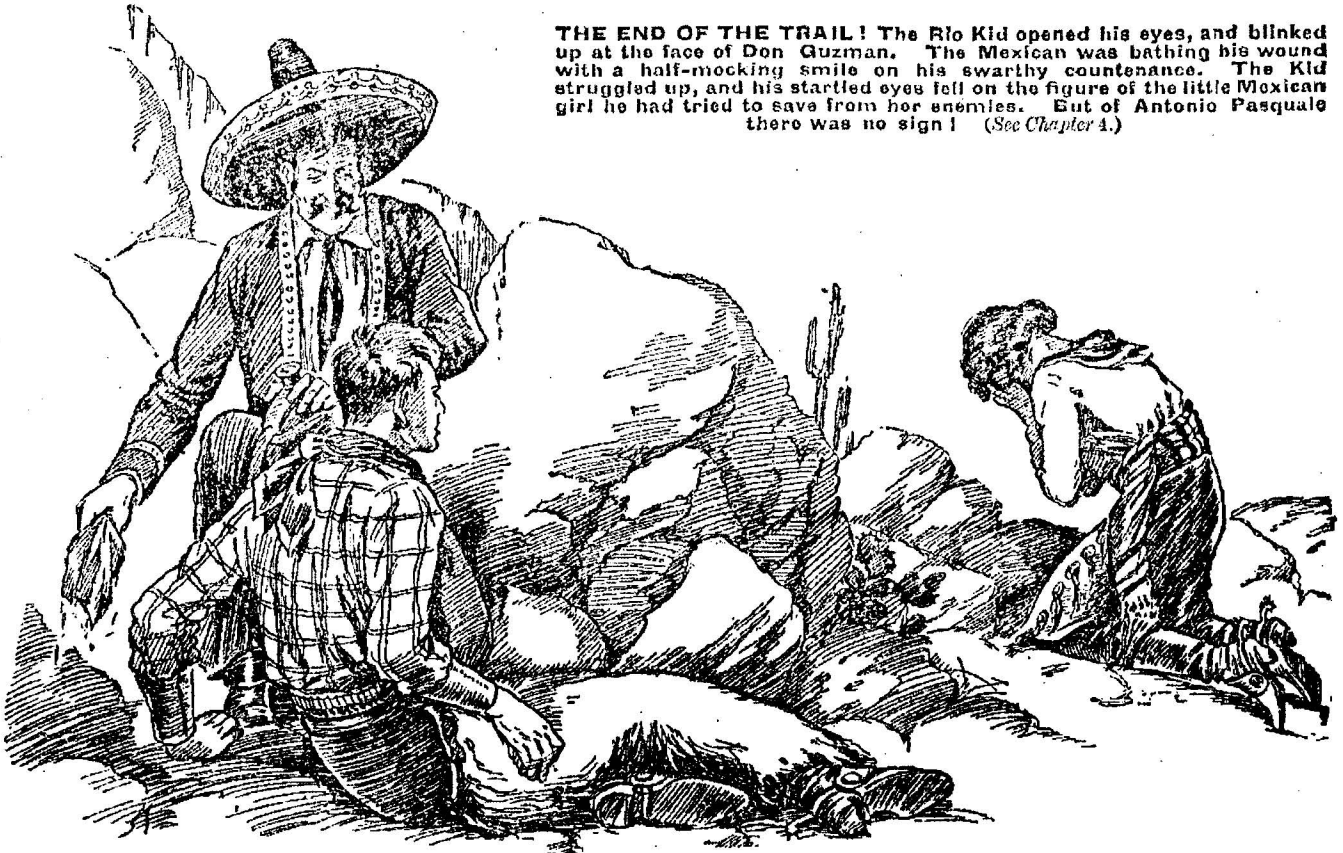
Those skyscrapers are being pushed up in a fever of wild competition. They have just started work on one, in Chicago, which is going to be *seventy-five stories high!* In it there will be innumerable shops and offices, a hotel with well over 400 rooms, a garage to hold more than 1,000 motor-cars, a hospital, two clubs, gymnasiums, and swimming pools; a golf course, and a railway running through the bottom of it! The whole gigantic scheme will cost about £11,000,000!

Britain has already shown the rest of the world what can be done in the way of underground railways, as any fellow who lives in, or can visit, London can see any day or night for himself. Piccadilly is far and away the most amazing underground railway station ever known, one of the tubes through which one of the several railways run being over a hundred feet below the roads.

An army of workmen took four years to construct it, and it cost £5,000,000. Eleven moving stairways take you down or up, and for the time being, once aboard the train, you become a swift-moving human mole.

Another sort of tunnel, three-quarters of a mile long, has just replaced a big bridge spanning a busy river in America. It was built in enormous sections, each 200 feet long and weighing 4,500 tons apiece. When all the mighty sections were ready they were floated down the river and sunk, all twelve of them, in the places prepared on the bed of the river. Then they were joined end to end, and now 12,000 motor-cars can use it daily, with two lines of street trams whizzing down it, and pavements on either side of the twenty-three feet wide under-river roadway!

**THE END OF THE TRAIL!** The Rio Kid opened his eyes, and blinked up at the face of Don Guzman. The Mexican was bathing his wound with a half-mocking smile on his swarthy countenance. The Kid struggled up, and his startled eyes fell on the figure of the little Mexican girl he had tried to save from her enemies. Out of Antonio Pasquale there was no sign! (See Chapter 4.)



for to remain was death. With the new day the beating of the forest would begin again, and it was too much to hope that the hiding-place would remain undiscovered till another night came. It was now or never.

After the long rest in the ceiba, the old Mexican and his daughter were capable of renewed exertion. As for the Kid, he had forgotten that he had been fatigued. The faint glimmer of the moon gave light enough for the Kid to pick his way, and any way was good that led far from the pursuers. With luck, they might be at a good distance by dawn, to hide the next day in a more secure place of concealment. The Kid knew how slim the chances were, but such as they were he was the hombre to make the most of them.

He whispered to his companions. They were eager to go—old Pasquale almost panting with eagerness to make the attempt to put a safe distance between himself and the foes who hunted him for his life. The Kid swung him down to the earth with his lasso, and then helped the Mexican girl to descend. He dropped lightly after them, packed on his rifle and slicker-pack, and stood for some moments watching and listening. But all was silent and still, and the boy puncher led the way through the tangled forest.

From the underbush the fierce eyes of a jaguar glared; but the savage brute leaped away from the flash of the Kid's knife, much to his relief. A single shot, he knew, would be enough to bring the whole bunch of Mexicans down on them.

Winding through the forest, they pressed on their way, the Kid leading and forcing a path where the brush was thick. No skill could blanket such a trail—it had to be left for the enemy to pick up when daylight came. But by daylight the Kid hoped to be far away.

The Kid stopped suddenly. He signed to his companions to halt. In the dimness of the forest he had almost trodden on a sleeping figure—a Mexican rolled in his serape, his head pillowed on his arm.

The Kid was only a foot from him when he stopped.

But caution was useless—the sleeper awakened. Two black, fierce eyes gleamed, startled, lips were opened for a shout. But the shout was never uttered. The hoavy butt of the Kid's Colt crashed down, and the Mexican rolled senseless in the herbage.

"I guess that jasper won't yap a whole heap!" growled the Kid. "Follow me, you-uns."

He trod round the stunned Mexican. The man was left behind, lying where he had fallen.

With redoubled caution the Kid pressed on. But he saw no more of the enemy, though once or twice he thought he heard sounds from the dimness of the night. The rest of the bunch, the Kid figured, would not be far from the man he had struck down, and that meant that the whole bunch was left behind. When more than a mile had passed under his feet the Kid breathed more easily. He was fairly certain now that he was out of the radius of Don Guzman's farthest scout, and there was no sound of pursuit. And the night was before him—so long as the strength of his companions held out.

The Kid alone would have travelled fast, but he had to accommodate his pace to that of a stumbling old man and a girl. From the old Mexican, who realised now that he was out of hearing of his pursuers, came a constant muttering of complaint, of curses on Don Guzman, and invocations to the saints. Donna Estrella was silent; only her dark eyes turning gratefully on the Kid when he helped her in difficult places with his strong arm.

She was the real goods, this Mexican girl, the Kid reckoned, and the thought of escape, though it was what he aimed for, was not wholly agreeable to his mind, because it meant that he would see Donna Estrella no more. That old lobo-wolf, her father, got the Kid's goat sorely; but his heart was growing very tender towards the old traitor's daughter.

The Kid had left his native Texas for a spell in Mexico, to keep out of the way of searching sheriffs and Rangers, who had made things hot for the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande. He had not thought of locating in the country of the Greasers for keeps. But now that thought was in his mind—vague pictures of a rancho in the Mexican cow-country, with a dark-haired, dark-eyed Mexican girl riding by his side. It hardly occurred to the Kid's simple mind that in those days and nights of danger and stress his heart had gone into Estrella's keeping. But he knew that the thought of parting brought a strange pain, and once, when the Mexican girl leaned heavily on his arm as he helped her over a fallen trunk, the Kid felt his heart beating fast.

But if such thoughts were in his mind they did not draw the Kid's attention from the matter in hand. For some time now he had noted that the forest was thinning—the trees no longer grew in interlaced masses, the swarming creepers no longer choked the way. The Kid figured that he was, at last, getting out of that seemingly interminable forest, and the prospect cheered him. The Kid was a man of the plains, and he longed to be under the open sky again.

They came at last to a deep, wide arroyo, where the forest ended. Beyond the moonlight lay like a sea of silver. Where he was the Kid was left guessing; he was a stranger in the country of the Rio Rojo. Beyond the arroyo stretched a stony plain, rising towards a long, low line of sierra. Clumps of bush and tall cactus and yucca showed dim in the moon. He clambered over the edge of the arroyo and looked down. At the bottom of the channel a thin stream flowed and murmured, and the Kid guessed that it was one of the innumerable tributaries of the Rio Rojo. He returned to his companions with a brighter face.

"I guess our luck's holding, you-uns," he said. "We got to hump it down into the arroyo, and follow the water—it's a chance of blinding the trail. If them

jaspers don't get after us pretty slick now, I guess they can call it a day, and hit for home."

Pasquale had sunk down on the earth, groaning with weariness.

"Senor, I can do no more," he mumbled. "Not to save my life can I take another step! Nombro do Dios!"

The girl's dark eyes turned outreachingly on the Rio Kid.

"You reckon you can make the grade, miss?" he asked.

"Si, senor."

"I guess I'll get your padre along, then."

The sinewy Kid swung the skinny old man on his shoulder, and carried him down the steep side of the arroyo. Donna Estrella followed. They reached the stream a score of yards below the high, stony banks, and entered the shallow water—it was but a few inches deep. Up the stream the Kid led the way, the old Mexican on his shoulder, mumbling and muttering. His weight was a heavy burden to the Kid, but he tramped on steadily, the water washing round his riding-boots. No trail was left now—it meant delay, if not defeat, to the pursuers. For more than a mile the Kid, carrying the miser of Olillo, tramped up the winding watercourse, and it was the sound of a stumbling fall behind him that made him stop at last and turn.

Donna Estrella struggled to her feet. "No es nada, senor! It is nothing! I can go on!" she whispered.

But she stumbled again as she moved, and the Kid shook his head.

"I guess it's close on sun-up now, miss," he said. "We got to stop at sun-up and hunt cover. You rest here a piece while I take a leetle pasear around."

The Kid placed his burden down, and Estrella sank on a rock and waited. The Kid moved on, his own sinewy limbs aching now. It was impossible to push on farther, and many miles lay between them and the enemy. All that remained was to find a new hiding-place for the new day—and hope!

The Kid soon found a place—a deep fissure in the side of the rocky arroyo, screened by irregular rocks. He carried the old Mexican into the hollow, and then helped Donna Estrella over the rough rocks and jagged stones. The girl looked round her when they stopped. Walls of rock shut in the hiding-place, save on the side towards the stream, where great boulders were piled.

"We are safe here, senor," she whispered.

"I sure hope so, miss," said the Kid.

Old Pasquale was sleeping where the Kid had laid him down on the stony earth. At the farthest extremity of the fissure the Kid stretched his slicker and blanket for the girl to rest upon. Then he went back to the stream, and in the glimmering moonlight, mingled now with the first gleam of dawn, carefully obliterated every sign of their passage. Satisfied at last, the Kid clambered over the boulders again into the hollow of the high bank, threw himself on the stony earth, and slept.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### The Kid's Last Fight!

HIGHER rose the burning sun over arid plain and rocky arroyo. Light blazed down and simmering heat in the hollow of the high bank of the water-course. Faintly the shallow stream murmured over stone and sand, shining in the bright sunlight.

Among the silent rocks a coyote crept

and slunk, with watchful, glaring eyes. He peered and sniffed about the boulders that hid the camp of the fugitives, and slunk on down the ravine, whining. And then suddenly the lean, hungry beast started, pricked up his ears, turned and scuttled up the arroyo again, and vanished into the dusty distance.

Some sound of alarm had reached him from lower down the stream, though it did not reach the ears of the sleepers—sounds of men pursuing a weary way in the blazing sun, tramping over rugged rocks, splashing in the stream, muttering Spanish oaths. The slinking coyote had fled, but there was no flight for the fugitives who slept in the hollow of the bank; even if they waked, there was no more flight for them. And as yet they did not wake.

Up the arroyo the Mexican bunch came, picking their way, watchful, suspicious, savage-eyed. Don Guzman Carrero, his forehead bandaged under the wide sombrero, bloodstained, worn, and weary, but indomitable as ever, led the bunch—a human bloodhound on the trail of vengeance.

By what good fortune the Rio Kid had escaped him so far, and kept the old lobo-wolf of Olillo from his clutches, the haciendado hardly knew, but he knew that, at long last, there was no escape. The Kid was fighting against Fate in his struggle to save Estrella's father from the vengeance of the junta.

In the forest the trail had been found at dawn, followed swiftly to the arroyo, and now the arroyo that rived the stony plain was under search. A dozen men had been sent down the stream towards its junction with the Rio Rojo, for Don Guzman left nothing to chance; but it was not in that direction that he believed the fugitives had gone. Up the stream he went with a score of men at his back, scanning and searching every foot of the way.

High up on either side of the sunken ravine, riding the dusty plain, wore a dozen horsemen, watching the desert for sign if the fugitives had left the arroyo. But Don Guzman knew they had not left it; he could follow the reasonings of the Kid's mind; he knew that it was cover the Texan was seeking, and on the open plain there was no cover, and the fugitives would have been visible for miles in the sunlight. It was in the arroyo that he would find them, if he found them at all, and he swore with many Spanish oaths that find them he would. Towards the girl he had no anger, and the Kid he admired with the respect of one brave man for another; but to the traitor—"el traidor"—he was implacable.

But in the rugged, rocky sides of the deep arroyo, amid crevices and fissures and hollows, there were hiding-places innumerable, and the progress was slow, for not a chance would the chief of the Olillo junta leave.

Men on foot explored every rocky recess and hunted for sign, while Don Guzman walked his horse up the stream. Behind the party came other led horses and pack-mules; in the remuda was the Kid's powerful mustang, which had led the Mexicans so far astray the previous day in the forest, and which had been roped in at last with a lasso.

In the hunt in the forest the bunch had left their horses, but the animals had been promptly brought up when the trail was found leading on to the plain. The fugitives were dismounted, and if they broke cover, they would be ridden down; the haciendado was sure that they would not break cover while the day lasted. And ere sundown their hiding-place would be found. It was

yet long till noon when one of the riders on the upper plain halted, and waved his sombrero as a signal to the trackers below in the arroyo.

A grim smile crossed Don Guzman's swarthy face. He knew that the quarry had been sighted.

The Rio Kid, on his stony bed, slept soundly through the hot hours of the morning. In those hours the enemy were stealing upon him, but had he waked he could have done nothing but wait for them to come. He hoped that the trackers had lost the trail; but if that hope failed the game was up, and the fugitives were at the end of their rope. He slept, knowing that he would wake if a foe came near. And he awakened suddenly.

Across his face a moving shadow had passed—the shadow of a horseman who had halted on the high bank, with the sun behind him, and was looking down into the fissure. The Kid, without stirring, looked up and saw the dark face of a Mexican, the black eyes glinting as they searched the hollow of the rocky bank of the arroyo. He read the grin of triumph on the swarthy face, and knew that he had been seen—knew that it was the finish. And he flashed a gun from his belt and lifted it, and the horseman backed away out of sight only in time to escape the swift bullet.

The crack of the six-gun awoke a thousand echoes on the arroyo. It startled Donna Estrella and the old Mexican from slumber.

"Nombro de Dios!" babbled Pasquale.

"Senor!" It was a cry of fear from the Mexican girl. "Senor! Los picaros! They are here!"

The Kid was on his feet now, his face grim.

"I guess it's the dog-goned finish, miss!" he said. "That guy Guzman is sure a bloodhound on the trail! We had a dog's chance, but it ain't bought us anything! They got us!"

"Save my father!" breathed the girl, her eyes wide with terror. "Senor, caballero, save my father!"

"They ain't touching him while this Kid can pull a trigger, miss!" said the boy puncher quietly. "You get back, miss, and keep doggo! There'll be lead flying hyer soon!"

The girl did not heed. All her fear was for her father, and all the wretched old man's fear was for himself. From behind the boulders that screened them from the stream came trampling of feet, clattering of hoofs, triumphant shouts of the Mexicans. From the high upper bank, more trampling and shouting. The fugitives were surrounded, and the end had come at last—the grim, desperate fight against odds that the Kid had long expected at the end of the desperate trail—and it only remained to the boy outlaw to sell his life as dearly as he could. And that would be very dearly, he told himself savagely, as he gripped a walnut-butted gun in either hand and watched for the first enemy to show himself.

A shadow fell again across the fissure from above, and the Kid lifted a gun. But the man who showed himself on the high bank, looking down, came unarmed and held up a hand. The Kid stared up grimly at Don Guzman Carrero.

"We meet again, caballero!" said the haciendado politely. "Do not reproach yourself, senor. You have done miracles, but there was no chance for you. And now it is the end."

"You've said it, fellow," answered the Kid coolly. "You've got me cinched, and I guess it's me for the long jump!"

"Sin duda, señor," smiled Don Guzman. "But, you see, caballero, that it is the end; you cannot save that old wolf now! Why throw away your life in a futile struggle against thirty men?"

"I guess I've given my word to the señorita, feller!" said the Kid stubbornly. "You ain't touching that old hombre while this guy can put up a fight! Come on as soon as you want!"

"You are a brave caballero!" said the Mexican. "I shall be sorry to see you cut to pieces, señor. Once more I offer you a chance. I have your horse. You shall take it, and another for the señorita, and ride where you choose, leaving to me that old wolf, who is now in my power, and whom you cannot save. You have done all that a man can do, señor; there is no shame in yielding to what is inevitable. Do not spill blood for nothing."

The Kid shook his head. "You sure are a white man, fellow!" he said. "I ain't much use for Greasers, as a rule; but I do allow you sure are a white man from the toes up! But there ain't nothing doing! I'm standing by the old guy so long as I can put up a rookus! Quit chewing the rag, and let the bell ring!"

The Mexican, looking down at him, paused. There was regret in his face. He would gladly have spared the Kid; and he knew, too, how desperate and deadly the fight would be when the bunch closed in on the boy puncher for the last savage struggle. Perhaps for some moments and for the first time, the avenger paused in his purpose. But as his eyes turned on the figure of the miser of Olillo, a blaze came into them, and his face set hard, his square jaw shut grimly. If he had thought of abandoning his purpose, it was only for a moment.

"As you desire, señor!" he said. And he stepped back. "Now for the circus!" said the Rio Kid grimly. "I guess this is going to be some rookus."

There was a rush and scramble of feet over the boulders; sombreros and dark, fierce faces showed in a swam. The Rio Kid's guns began to roar. There was a shriek from Estrella—a wail of terror from the miser of Olillo. From the side of the stream the attack came swarming; and at the same moment men scrambled down into the fissure in the bank from the upper plain. On all sides the Rio Kid was surrounded, foe-swarming on every side, knives and machetes gleaming, firearms crashing in a chorus of pandemonium.

Men were yelling, falling, stumbling, cursing, while the Kid's guns streamed fire and smoke, as if an inferno had broken out amid the rocks under the burning sun. Death was before the Kid, death behind him; but the Rio Kid was a bad man to crowd, and certain death did not daunt him. Foes crowded on all sides, amid frightful yells and cries, till a crashing bullet brought sudden darkness and oblivion to the puncher as he fought in the midst of a swarm of foes. And as the Rio Kid went down, the Mexicans swarmed in the rock fissure with shouts of triumph, and the traitor of Olillo cowered in the grasp of the avengers who had tracked him to his doom.

**THE FOURTH CHAPTER.**  
**Hitting the Trail!**

THE Rio Kid opened his eyes. He opened them in wonder, blinking at the sun. It had not been in his thoughts that he would ever open them again when he had closed in that last wild affray with the Mexican bunch.

Yet he lived, and wondered to find himself still living. A bitter ache was in his head—he was covered with dust and blood; yet he did not feel that he was badly hurt. His hand went to his head, and felt the cut on the scalp. A bullet had gone close—close enough to stun him; an inch lower and the Kid would have found the end of his wild life-trail. His hair was wet with water—someone was bathing the hurt. The Kid's dazed eyes discerned Guzman Carrero. The Mexican smiled as he met his glance—a smile, half-mocking, but not unfriendly. The Kid's glance passed him, and fell upon a kneeling form—Donna Estrella, her face buried in her hands, her graceful form shaken by sobs, weeping. The Kid felt a pang at his heart. His hand went instinctively to his belt, but his weapons were gone. He could see nothing of Antonio Pasquale; and he could guess what had happened while he lay senseless in the hands of his enemies. The traitor had paid for his treachery.

"Shucks!" murmured the Kid. He sat up and leaned on a rock. "You dog-goned Greaser, what' this game? Where's Pasquale?"

Don Guzman shrugged his shoulders slightly. "We have not trailed that old wolf, señor, for days and nights, to spure him at the end," he answered.

(Continued on next page.)



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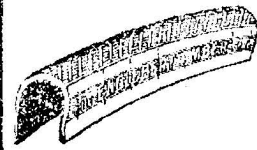
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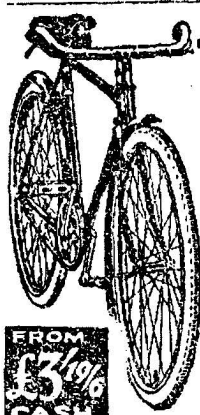
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"The senorita—" faltered the Kid. "The senorita saw nothing. Antonio Pasquale has paid for his treachery—speak no more of him," said Guzman Carrero. "Fear nothing for the senorita—we are caballeros, and the nina is as safe with us as in the house of her relatives. And you, senor—" He paused, with a strange smile on his swarthy, bandaged face.

The Kid's lip curled. "I guess I ain't got no kick coming," he answered coolly. "You got me, and it's your game, feller; and I'll say you're a white man. You got the senorita safe to her folks, and I guess I'll go up the flume without raisin' a howl. I reckoned I'd come out at the little end of the horn when I horned into this rookus; and I ain't got any kick coming. Get it over and be damned to you!"

"It is over, senor," answered the Mexican. He touched his bandaged head. "You spared my life when it was yours to take—"

"I guess I creased you like an ornery steer in the forest yesterday," said the Kid. "I reckon I'd have done better to put the lead through your cabeza, feller."

"Perhaps not," said Guzman Carrero. "You spared me, like a brave caballero, and I spare you. I also can handle a gun, senor." He smiled. "I can crease a steer as well as a Texas puncher. It was my bullet that struck you down, senor, but even in the heat of conflict I spared you. My men demand your life, but—caramba—I am master. You live, senor, and you will live to ride with the senorita to Olillo."

"Gee!" muttered the Kid. He stared blankly at the Mexican. "You ain't putting me out?" he ejaculated.

"No, senor. I should be sorry to take the life of so brave a caballero. There is now no quarrel between us; the man you sought to save has met his punishment, and all is at an end. Your horse is here—your guns at your saddle. We part, senor, for ever; let us part like caballeros."

The Kid staggered to his feet. His mustang, his beloved Side-Kicker, was tethered close at hand, with another horse and a pack-mule.

"Don Guzman, I've said that you're a white man," he said. "You are sure white, and clean grit all through. I guess I never figured I'd take my hat off to a Greaser, but I do now. You sure are the real goods!"

The Mexican grasped his hand. "Adios, senor!" he said. "Adios!" said the Kid.

The Mexican mounted his horse and rode away down the arroyo, the way his men had gone. The clattering hoof-beats died away.

In the lonely, rocky arroyo the Rio Kid remained—with Estrella. He spoke what words of comfort he could to the Mexican girl, weeping for the father who had been unworthy of her devotion, but who had been dearly loved. The traitor had fallen to the vengeance of the junta of Olillo, and one heart, at least, mourned for him.

It was days later that the Rio Kid rode into the tree-shaded streets of Olillo, the Mexican girl riding by his side. Safely the Kid had brought her home from the desert, and in respect for her grief he had said no word of the feelings in his heart. But the Kid had been thinking—thinking of that picture of a rancho in the Mexican cow-country, with a dark-eyed donna who would ride the range at his side.

Through the sunny adobe street of Olillo they rode to the Casa Pasquale, where wondering peons came to greet the daughter of their master who had fled in the night, and who would never return. And then the Kid rode to a fonda, leaving Donna Estrella in her home, but thinking—still thinking of the rancho of his dreams. But it was fated that the Rio Kid should ride a lone trail.

The next day the boy puncher was at the Casa Pasquale, where Donna Estrella, clad in deep black, her pale face more beautiful than ever under the black lace mantilla, greeted him with grateful courtesy. The Kid wondered shyly whether he would dare to speak what was in his mind; and he coloured and hesitated long, hardly hearing even the sweet voice of the senorita as she thanked him for his courage and devotion. But he started and gave sudden attention as a name fell from her lips.

"Don Jose Amado," the girl was saying; and the Kid, wondering who that guy might happen to be, soon learned, as the girl, colouring, proceeded: "Mi novio—"

The Kid drew a deep, deep breath. It had never crossed his mind, though he figured now that he might have guessed as much; he knew what a "novio" was. Donna Estrella was betrothed to this Don Jose Amado, of whom the Kid had never heard till that moment; and in her gratitude to the chivalrous Kid the senorita was asking him to meet Don Jose; assuring him that she had already told Don Jose of his chivalry, his courage, his courtesy, and that Don Jose was as eager to thank him as she herself was. She was anxious that he should meet this Don Jose, at the mention of whose name her pale, sad face lighted. The Kid was glad to see it light; but he had no hunch to meet Don Jose Amado, and he was glad that the words that had been in his mind had not passed his lips.

"You dog-goned gink!" was what the Kid said to himself. And that picture of a rancho in the Mexican cow-country and a dark-eyed donna riding by his side, faded from the Kid's mind. He pulled himself together; the Kid was not the galoot to wince under a blow.

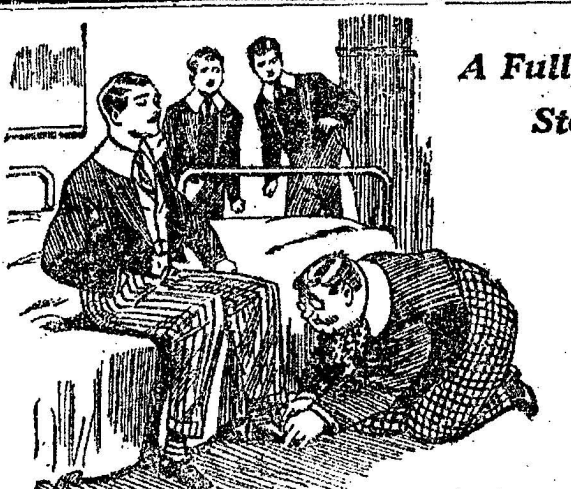
"I guess, miss," he said slowly; "I guess I'd be powerful glad to meet up with this Don Jose, who I'm sure is the pick of all the guys in this section, or you wouldn't like him, miss, like you do. But it jest happens that I got to hit the trail pronto; I jest got to ride out of Olillo powerful quick and—"

"But you will return, senor," said Dona Estrella eagerly; "and when you return—"

"Sure!" said the Kid. "When I return, senorita—" It was little likely that the Kid would ever ride again into the adobe streets of Olillo.

He took his leave, and returned to the fonda. An hour later the Rio Kid was riding out of Olillo to the west.

THE END.



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