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The POPULAR

Week Ending
February 22nd,
1930.

No. 578
(New Series)

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Read: "THE RIVAL CANDIDATES!" One of the sparkling School Yarns in this issue!

OUR WESTERN YARNS ARE THRILLING THE WORLD!

YUBA DICK'S LAST GAME!

By Ralph Redway.

When Yuba Dick, puncher of the Bar-One Ranch, is in urgent need of a pal, he finds one in the Rio Kid, boy outlaw!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Kid is Not Pleased!

"YOU dog-goned bonehead!" said the Rio Kid.

Yuba Dick grinned.

"You pie-faced locoed gink!" said the Kid warmly.

"Aw, can it!" said Yuba. "You sure do shoot off your mouth a whole lot, feller."

"If you wasn't a friend of mine," said the exasperated Kid, "I'd sure take you by the back of the neck and the slack of your pants, and heave you out of this shebang on your cabeza, I sure would."

"And if you wasn't a friend of mine," retorted Yuba, "I'd sure pull a gun on you, and fill you so full of holes that any guy that saw you lying about would take you for a dog-goned sieve."

"Look here, you pesky geck—"

"Ain't I telling you to can it?" demanded the horse-wrangler of the Bar-One ranch. "You sure make a galoot tired."

The Kid, standing in the doorway of the Ace of Spades at Kicking Mule, glared at the horse-wrangler who sat at one of the little tables where they played poker.

Yuba Dick had a pile of chips before him, and a pack of cards in his hands, shuffling the same.

How long he had been sitting there, the Kid did not know; but it was a long time. Yuba Dick had dollars in his pockets, and when that was the case, his besetting weakness generally found him out. Up and down Kicking Mule the Kid had been hunting him, and he had found him at last—up to the neck in draw poker at the Ace of Spades.

"You're a durned double-crossin' scallywag," said the Kid indignantly. "You left me at the Golden Mule feedin', telling me you wanted to see a man. And that was three hours ago."

"Waal, I did want to see a man," said Yuba, "and I've sure found a man, and I'm playing poker with him."

Yuba was for the moment alone at the table. His adversary had gone over to the bar for cigars.

"You figure that we're on leave?" demanded the Kid. "You figure that you can cavort round this cow town just as long as you like?"

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roll. Yuba Dick was not only an inveterate gambler, but an unlucky one, and the Kid hated to see him with the cards in his hands.

Since he had been at the Bar-One, the Kid had made friends with all the bunch, but he liked Yuba the best of all. They had become great friends, and perhaps it was that streak of weakness in Yuba's character that helped to draw the Kid to him. Yuba was the kindest, best-natured galoot going; he would have shared his last dollar with friend or foe; nobody could help liking him. He was a good man with a horse, a gun, or a rope; a man in everything but that one weakness; but when he came under the influence of the painted pasteboards, he was nothing but a soft rube. And the Kid, whose character was like a rock, hated to see it.

But concern for his friend was not all that troubled the Kid now. Yuba, finding himself in town, and unable to resist temptation, was taking leave that had not been given, and that got the Kid's goat. They ought to have been riding back to the ranch long since, and even now that the Kid had found him, Yuba was not proposing to ride. Evidently he was glued to the Ace of Spades till his last dollar was gone.

"It ain't no use chewing the rag," said Yuba, "I guess I'm on a lucky streak, and I'm sure following it up."

"Aw, you boneheaded gopher," growled the Kid. "I've heard that afore—you was on a lucky streak when that guy from Austin cleaned you out."

"You got your cayause there?" asked Yuba,

Yuba did not reply to that. He shuffled the cards.

"Ain't the boss sent us into town on business?" went on the Kid. "Ain't we done our business, and got to get back to the ranch? Colonel Sanderson sure ought never to trust you off'n the ranch, you big stiff!"

"Aw, can it," protested Yuba.

"Mesquite Bill's looking for us back before sundown—"

"Dog-gone Mesquite Bill!"

"Ain't he your foreman, you gink?"

"I guess you can git on your cayuse and hit the trail for home, if you want," said Yuba. "I ain't keeping you."

"I ain't going without you," growled the Kid.

"Waal, sit down at the table and take a hand in the game," suggested Yuba. "Poker Smith will sure be pleased."

The Kid grunted.

Now that the Kid was a member of the Bar-One bunch, and drawing the pay of a puncher, he had no hunch to lose his pay at the game of poker. Still less did he like to see Yuba losing his

"Yep."

"Git on him and ride, then."

The Kid grunted again.

"You pesky jay! I ain't leaving you here none. What chance you got agin the poker sharps in this shebang, you gink?"

"I reckon I can keep my end up at draw poker," said Yuba.

"Shucks!" grunted the Kid.

"Waal, I ain't trailin'! Quit if you want, and hit the trail for home."

"Aw, you big boob," said the Kid.

A hard-faced man, with the cold eyes of the professional gambler, came back to the poker table, and dropped into the seat opposite Yuba.

The horse-wrangler of the Bar-One gave the Kid no more attention then. He handed the deck to Poker Smith, who cut.

Poker Smith's icy eyes glanced towards the Kid. It was an inimical glance, and it fell at once before the Kid's steady gaze. Poker Smith packed a gun, and was well known to be prompt in the use of it, but the most reckless gunmen in Kicking Mule walked warily when the Rio Kid was around.

Nobody in Kicking Mule knew that he was the Rio Kid, his name was Two-gun Carson at the Bar-One. But if they did not know who he was, they knew what he could do with a gun. The boy puncher who had roped in Black George, the road-agent, was not a galoot to seek trouble with.

Poker Smith gave his attention to the game.

The Kid looked on frowning.

But it was obviously useless to think of getting Yuba away from his game, and the Kid lounged out of the Ace of Spades at last, and left him to it.

His mustang, Side-Kicker, was hitched to the rail outside by the side of Yuba Dick's pinto. The Kid paused to stroke his glossy neck.

"I guess we got to hang on, old boss," he remarked. "We got to hang on, waiting for the biggest boob in Texas."

And the Kid strolled away up Main Street of Kicking Mule, not in a pleasant frame of mind.

For an hour, under the hot afternoon sun, the Kid strolled about the cow town. He chatted with punchers in from the various ranches; he dropped into Silas Shook's store and bought cartridges, and killed the minutes as best he could.

After an hour, he came back to the Ace of Spades.

By that time, he reckoned, Yuba ought to have lost his last dollar, and ought to be ready to ride.

But when he looked in, Yuba was still sitting at the table, with cards in his hand, though the good-humoured expression had left his face, and he looked set and harassed. That he had been losing was plain, but the fact that he was keeping on indicated that he still had something to lose.

"Say, ain't you quitting yet?" called out the Kid.

There was no answer from Yuba. His attention was concentrated on the game.

The Kid came towards the table.

Poker Smith was playing with the impassive, bored air of the accustomed poker sharp; it was business with him, not pleasure. He was there to clean the cowpuncher out of all he had, and was prepared to sit at the table until it was done.

The Kid tapped Yuba gently on the shoulder.

The horse wrangler of the Bar-One looked up for a second.

"Git!" he snapped.

The Kid stepped back. He did not

want to quarrel with his friend, and Yuba, by that time, was in a mood for trouble.

The Kid stood watching the game. His young life had been passed among men who gambled as readily as they breathed, and though the desire to gamble never touched him, and he despised it as a foolish weakness, he knew the game of poker thoroughly enough. Less knowledge than the Kid's was needed to see that Yuba was not getting an even break.

Twice the Kid saw Poker Smith deal from the bottom of the pack, though it was done so swiftly and skilfully that a keen eye was needed to detect it.

Yuba Dick saw nothing. He fancied that he was a "chief" at the game of poker, but he was a baby in the hands of the professional sharp.

Poker Smith "stocked" the cards to suit his game when they came into his hands, and when they were out, he brought the two halves of the pack together exactly as they were before, though so skilfully as to deceive the eye. And he had always a few winning cards at the bottom of the pack to deal himself.

It was clear enough to the cool, watching eyes of the Kid, as he stood behind Yuba's chair, and it went against the grain with him to keep silent while his friend was robbed.

But Yuba was not in a mood to be reasoned with. He was in a mood to quarrel at a word of warning.

And had he discovered that the poker sharp was cheating him, he would have reached for his gun at once; there was only one way of settling such a dispute in Kicking Mule. And good man as Yuba was with his gun, he was not in the same street with the professional gunman, neither was he in a state to do his best.

The Kid had no desire to bring on gun-play, and see his friend robbed of his life as well as his dollars. "Shooting up" the poker sharp afterwards, on his own account, would have been very small satisfaction.

The Kid strode out of the shebang with a worried brow.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Test of Friendship!

"AW, you've quit!"
The Kid was sauntering wearily under the glow of the setting sun when Yuba came out of the Ace of Spades at last.

The horse-wrangler looked pale and tired and dismal.

He gave the Kid a faint grin.

"Yep, I've quit!"

"I guess it was time," said the Kid gruffly. "We'll sure get the rough side of Mesquite Bill's tongue when we hit the ranch!"

"Durn Mesquite Bill!"

"Well, now you've quit, let's mount and ride."

"Mount and ride!" repeated Yuba Dick.

"You ain't looking for another game before we hit the trail, I reckon?" asked the Kid sarcastically.

"Nope!"

"Well, let's get going then. Say what's the matter with the guy?" exclaimed the Kid, as Yuba made no move towards the horses tethered outside the Ace of Spades.

The colour rushed into Yuba's wan face.

"Feller, you called me a dog-goned bonehead!" he said.

"I sure did, and some other things, too, and meant every one of them," answered the Kid. "I'd call you some more if I had the time."

"Well, you was right," said Yuba. "I ain't denying it. I've sure left all my dollars with that sharp. But—that ain't all."

"What more is there to it?" asked the Kid.

"I've lost my cayuse, too."

The Kid rapped out an exclamation.

"You've played away that pinto?" he said.

"Sure!"

"Well, of all the locoed geeks——"

"What's the good of chewing the rag?" said Yuba dismally. "I've lost that cayuse, and he was a good critter, too."

"You sure are the world's prize boob," said the Kid. "But if you've lost your critter, you got to ride double with me on my cayuse to get back to the Bar-One, and there ain't no two ways about it. Get moving!"

Yuba Dick hesitated.

"That ain't all," he muttered.

"Aw, carry me home to die!" ejaculated the Kid. "What more is there to it, you jay? Lost your boots and chaps as well?"

"Nope!"

"Well, what?"

"We can't ride your mustang back to the ranch, Two-gun!"

"And why can't we? He can carry double, he's carried double afore."

"Tain't that! But——"

"But what?" hooted the exasperated Kid.

"I've lost him, too!"

The Kid jumped.

"You've lost my hoss at poker?" he yelled.

"Just that!"

"Great snakes!"

The Kid stared at him blankly.

That Yuba would lose all he had, he had had no doubt; and it was not the first time that he had lost his horse, too, on a poker game, and had to hoof it back to the ranch. But it had never crossed the Kid's mind that Yuba would, or could, go further than that. But he had gone further this time.

"You've staked my hoss on a poker game, and lost him!" said the Kid dazedly.

Yuba Dick nodded.

He had the grace to be ashamed of himself, but there it was, he had done it, and it couldn't be helped.

The Kid drew a long breath.

Anything else that he had, the Kid would have handed over to his friend without stopping to think, even to his walnut-butted guns. But Side-Kicker was no ordinary cayuse. Side-Kicker had carried the Rio Kid through many a peril; more than once the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande had owed his life to the grey mustang's speed. And it might come to that again, for pleasant as the Kid found life on the Bar-One ranch, he doubted whether it would last. Sooner or later, he figured, it would come out that he was the Rio Kid, the hunted outlaw, and he would have to ride.

Side-Kicker was not merely a cayuse to him, he was a tried and trusty comrade. He would have parted with a limb as soon as with Side-Kicker.

"Well, carry me home to die!" said the Kid, at last.

Yuba grinned sheepishly.

"I allow it's pesky hard on you, pardner," he said "I guess I'll get you another cayuse. That's sure! But——"

"That cayuse is like my own flesh and blood to me, Yuba," said the Kid, very quietly.

Yuba's lips quivered.

"I know! But you got to stand for

"Two-gun! I lost him fair and square to Poker Smith, and you ain't letting down a pardner!"

"I ain't letting down a pardner," said the Kid, with a nod. There were no two ways about that. In the cow country it was the law for a man to stand by his friend to the last turn of the cards.

"I guess you can kick me if you want," said Yuba. "I allow I been some bonehead! I surely do allow that."

"Kicking you wouldn't unloose Poker Smith's grip on my cayuse," said the Kid grimly.

"It sure won't! Say, we can borrow hosses at the Golden Mule and ride home," said Yuba. "I'm powerful sorry, pardner, and I allow that when I get the cards in my hands, I'm some boob! But—"

"You lost him fair and square?" said the Kid sarcastically.

Yuba started.

"Say, Two-gun, you don't reckon that tin-horn sharp was ringing in a cold deck on me?" he exclaimed. Apparently some vague suspicion had already entered Yuba's innocent mind that he had not been given an even break.

The Kid did not answer. Yuba's hand was already on his gun, and there was a glitter in his eyes.

"Say, Two-gun, what do you think? If that darned poker sharp has been stocking the cards on me, I'll sure go back and get him! I'll get him if he was the gold-darndest gunman in Kicking Mule!"

The Kid checked the words on his lips. The poker sharp had cheated the simple cowman almost palpably, and the Kid was wise to it. But it was futile to put Yuba wise to it. Poker Smith was not the man for an excited and enraged cowman to go gunning after. He was a dead shot, lightning on the draw, and if Yuba hunted trouble with him, Yuba was a dead puncher at the first shot.

"Aw, forget it, Yuba!" said the Kid. "You've done been a dog-goned boob, and if you lost my hoss, you've done lost him."

"You ain't mad with me, Two-gun?" asked Yuba shamefacedly.

The Kid laughed.

"Say, what's the good being mad with a big baby like you, Yuba?" he asked. "I guess next time we hit town I'll sure lead you around at the end of my riata and keep you out of trouble. But I'm standing for what you done, being your pard; and you don't want to worry none."

"You're a white man, Two-gun!" said Yuba gratefully. "I'll tell all Texas you're a white man, and me a loosed gink!"

"Well, it's done," said the Kid. "It ain't no use sitting on our tails and howling like coyotes in the chaparral. You hit the Golden Mule and feed, Yuba, while I rustle some cayuses to ride home."

And Yuba Dick went into the lumber hotel to feed, the Kid taking his way slowly back to the Ace of Spades.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Gun-Play!

THERE was a wrinkle in the Rio Kid's brow, a gleam in his blue eyes. He was thinking hard, as he paced slowly along Main Street towards the poker dive where Yuba had lost all he had, and all that his friend most valued. And the Kid's hand caressed the walnut butt of a gun.

Outlaw the Kid had been—and still was if the sheriffs got wise to his new haunt—but he was outlaw by accident: THE POPULAR.—No. 578.

cowpuncher by nature and training. The unwritten law of the cow country held him fast; what his friend had done he stood for. Well he knew that Yuba Dick, with all his reckless thoughtlessness and weakness of character, would have stood by him to the last shot in his Colt, and died by his side if need had been. Not even for Side-Kicker, not to save his life, would the Kid have let his partner down.

Had it been a fair game in which Yuba Dick had lost all to the poker sharp of Kicking Mule, the Kid would have had nothing to say. But it had not been a fair game; Yuba Dick had been cheated in the game, skinned as ruthlessly by a thief as if he had been held up on the trail with a gun at his head.

That was what got the Kid's goat. He could not tell Yuba how the matter stood without sending the cowman gunning after Poker Smith, which was not good enough in the Kid's opinion. But there was one guy in the cow town who could put paid to any gunman there, and that guy was the Kid himself. That was why the Kid had sent Yuba to the lumber hotel to feed by himself. He wanted the horse-wrangler off the scene while he handled the situation with Poker Smith.

Poker Smith was standing outside the Ace of Spades, looking over the two horses hitched there. His hard face expressed satisfaction. He had reason to be satisfied. Dick's pinto was a good horse; but the grey mustang was a cayuse of ten thousand. The gambler was examining Side-Kicker's points with delight in his ice-cold eyes. He knew horses; and he knew there was no cayuse in Kicking Mule that was a patch on this grey mustang painted with brown stockings.

"Say, you reckon that's a good cayuse, feller?" drawled a gentle voice at his shoulder.

Poker Smith spun round.

His face hardened; his eyes narrowed almost to pin-points as he looked at the Kid. There was nothing hostile in the boy puncher's look or manner; but the gunman was on his guard at once.

"I figure he's some cayuse!" he answered. "Say, I reckon you're standing for your pard's game? He allowed that you'd stand for it when I put five hundred dollars on the cards agin that cayuse."

"I guess I'm standing for it," said the Kid.

"He's a good cayuse!" said Poker Smith, as amicably as his hard and cold nature allowed him to speak. He did not want trouble with this side-partner of the man he had fleeced, if he could help it. "Say, what's the big idea painting him brown stockings? He's pure grey if you leave him alone."

"Oh, just a fancy of mine!" said the Kid carelessly.

Poker Smith made a movement to unhitch the mustang. The Kid gently touched his arm.

"Go slow!" he remarked.

"What's the idea?" asked Poker Smith. "You're standing for what your friend done; this hyer cayuse is mine."

"I guess if Yuba lost him fair and square, I'd have to stand for it, though I'd sure be a whole lot sorry to lose that cayuse!" said the Kid. "I guess I'll put you wise, Mister Smith! I'm standing for what Yuba done—but I ain't standing for what you done."

"How come?" asked the gambler quietly.

"If Yuba lost that hoss in a fair game, what'd his friend have to say?" said the Kid. "Nothing! But he didn't."

The gambler breathed quickly. He knew that it was war; and he longed to reach for a gun. But though the Kid's hands were not near the walnut butts of his Colts, Poker Smith knew how lightning swift was his draw. He was fast himself with a gun; but he doubted whether he would get his gun out before the Kid fired.

"You saying it wasn't a fair game?" he asked.

"Am I?" grinned the Kid. "Why, Mister Smith, I guess anybody but that gink Yuba would have seen it wasn't a fair game. Didn't I see you stocking the cards on him and dealing yourself aces from the bottom of the pack?"

Poker Smith started.

"That's what I don't stand for!" said the Kid casually. "You ain't stealing that hoss, Mister Smith; and you ain't stealing Yuba's hoss! No, sir, I don't stand for a thief, whether he lifts the goods with a deck of cards in a dive, or with a gun in his paw on a prairie trail. No, sir!"

The gambler's face had a quiver. The Kid was calm, cool, smiling, as he spoke; but his eyes were like steel. No other man in Kicking Mule could have spoken those words without facing fire the next instant; but Poker Smith was not keen to draw on this puncher.

"If Yuba ain't satisfied, he packs a gun!" he sneered. "Is that geck hiding hisself behind you, cowboy?"

The Kid set his lips.

"You don't want to talk that-a-way about my friend, Mister Smith!" he said. "Yuba don't know I'm hyer talking to you. He figures that I'm looking to borrow a hoss to ride home—jest what I'd be doing if he'd lost them cayuses fair and square. Yuba don't even know that you double-crossed him, and I ain't told him."

"Waal, what you want?" asked the gambler restively.

"I'm telling you, what I want. I want you to walk along to the Golden Mule and see Yuba."

"Next?"

"You'll play another game of poker with him," said the Kid.

Poker Smith laughed harshly.

"I guess he ain't got nothing more to lose."

"That cuts no ice!" said the Kid. "You got something to lose."

The gambler stared.

"You figure that that soft jasper could win anything off me at poker?" he jeered. "What you dreaming of?"

"You'll lose them two cayuses to him in a single game," said the Kid calmly.

"How come?"

"That's what I'm asking. I'm pointing out that it will be better for your health to do it."

Poker Smith's lips were drawn back from his teeth in a snarl.

"That's your stunt, is it, Two-gun Carson?"

"That's the very thing!" assented the Kid. "You won't say a word to Yuba about me talking to you. You won't put him wise that I've horned in at all. I ain't letting Yuba figure that his friend is going around protecting him; he sure wouldn't stand for it. You'll jest drop in promiscuous and get him into that game and lose them two hosses back to him. You can keep the dollars you've cheated him out of; I guess he deserves that for bein' such an all-fired bonehead. You'll do jest as I tell you, like a good little man, because it's right! Ain't it right, now?" asked the Kid pleasantly.

Anyone looking at the Kid would have supposed that he was chatting amicably with the gunman. But his

eyes, like steel, were watching the gambler's face intently. He was ready for what he knew must come; for Poker Smith was not the man to stand for this.

"And you figure that I'll do as you say?" hissed the gambler.

"I sure hope you will."

"Forget it!" gritted Poker Smith, between his teeth. "I ain't hunting trouble with you, cowboy; but any guy in Kicking Mule will tell you that I can't be crowded! Forget it!"

"You ain't playing up like I say?" asked the Kid regretfully.

"Not in your lifetime!"

"I guess I'm powerful sorry!" said the Kid. "You see, you cheating, thieving, double-crossing lobo-wolf, you're giving me the trouble of shouting out to all Kicking Mule that you're a cheat and a thief, and of—"

The Kid did not finish the sentence. The gambler was snatching at his gun; and the Kid, dropping his banter, reached for a Colt like lightning.

Bang!

Poker Smith's weapon went spinning through the air, carried away by the bullet that struck it as he raised it.

The Kid had beaten him to the draw. Bang, bang!

A wild yell broke from the gunman as a bullet grazed his left ear and another his right.

There was a roar in Main Street, and men crowded back to get out of the way of the bullets. But there was no need. The Rio Kid never wasted a ball; he knew just where his lead was going.

Bang, bang!

Poker Smith yelled again, as the bullets clipped through his boots, grazing his toes.

"Dance, you dog—dance!" snapped the Kid. "You hear me yaup? I'm fanning you, you lobo-wolf, and if you don't dance, I guess you'll want wooden legs to hop on around Kicking Mule! Dance, you double-crossing thief—dance!"

Poker Smith danced—he had to dance.

He leaped into the air at every shot. For the Kid was firing at his feet now, not to graze them; and only by rapid leaping could the gambler prevent the bullets from crashing through flesh and bone.

With the face of a demon, his eyes burning with rage and hatred, the poker sharp danced, while the Kid fanned him with bullets.

There was a roar of laughter from fifty throats. Often had the Kicking Mule men seen some hapless Chinaman dancing while a thoughtless puncher fanned him with bullets.

Sometimes such a rough joke was played on a tenderfoot. But the sight of Poker Smith, the hard-bitten gambler, the desperate gunman, dancing to fanning bullets, was an unexpected sight in the street of Kicking Mule.

Poker Smith's gun lay smashed a few feet away; and he had to dance for his life. Doors and windows of the Ace of Spades were crammed with staring, grinning faces.

Poker Smith was a dangerous man and a dreaded man; and such a man was not likely to get sympathy in his fall.

Many a man in Kicking Mule suspected, or knew, that the poker sharp had swindled him at his game, but had not ventured to back up the knowledge with his gun. Poker Smith was now where plenty of Kicking Mule galoots were glad to see him.

Bang, bang!

Breathless, panting, covered with humiliation as with a garment, Poker Smith danced to the roar of the six-

guns, knowing that after this his game was done in Kicking Mule; after this show-down he would never be able to show his face in the street again. He had to pull up stakes and find new pastures—if he lived! For while he danced desperately to the bullets, he was not at all sure that the Kid would not wind up the performance with a bullet through his heart.

The Kid ceased fire.

"You sure are some dancer, Mister Smith!" he said. "I guess you can hop lively when you want!"

He glanced round at the grinning crowd:

with bitter hatred in his face, he shook his head.

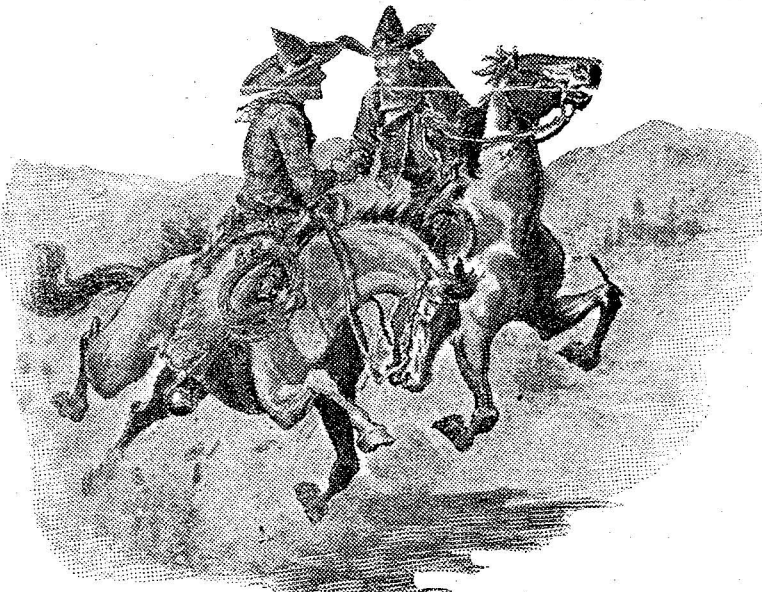
"You ain't standing for it?" asked the Kid pleasantly.

"Durn your hide, no!"

"You playing the game with Yuba?" asked the Kid, pleasantly and implacably.

"You've got me!" muttered Poker Smith. "It's your say-so!"

"Good man!" said the Kid agreeably. "Take them hosses down the street to the Golden Mule; you'll find Yuba there at feed. And keep in mind that I'll be hanging around all the time, and if you don't play up I'll know the



"I'm finished with cards!" said Dick, as he tossed the pack into the air. "Shake on it!" The hands of the two churn met.

"Say, you guys, this here ain't an entertainment; it's jest between Mister Smith and me!"

And the onlookers, taking the Kid's hint, moved off. The boy puncher stepped nearer the panting, infuriated gunman, and spoke in a low voice:

"Say, Mister Smith. I ain't honing to shoot you up, though I sure opine the cow country would be better off if they fixed you in a pine box. You dog, gone double-crossin' lobo-wolf, I'd have given you yours for keeps, only I want you to play that little game with my pard Yuba." His eyes glinted at the defeated gambler. "You standing for it, you durned scallywag, or you want me to fan you again? I'm telling you that if I burn more powder on you, it's you for the long jump!"

Poker Smith gave him a deadly glare. "You durned bull-dozing hobo!" he said thickly. "If I had a gun—"

"You don't want to let that worry you none," said the Kid. "I ain't shooting up a man without a gun in his hand, not even if he's a thief and a cheat. If you want a finish, I'm handing you a gun, and giving you an even break."

The Kid took one of his walnut-buttend guns by the barrel, and extended it to Poker Smith.

The gambler panted.

He longed to grasp the gun and stake all on a last desperate chance. He half extended his hand, but it dropped again. His nerve was shaken to rags by the fanning, and he knew that the Kid was his master at gun-play. He knew that it was not revenge, but death, that he would be grasping. And,

reason why! You say a word to Yuba to put him wise, and I'll fix you for the cemetery in short order, you dog! Get going, durn you; and be glad that you're alive to quit town to-night, for I'm telling you, Mister Smith, that if you hang on in Kicking Mule, I'll hunt for you next time I hit town, and shoot on sight!"

Without a word, the sullen-faced gambler unhitched the two horses, and led them away to the lumber hotel at the other end of the long, irregular street of Kicking Mule.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Yuba Dick's Luck!

THE Rio Kid lounged under the cottonwood-tree that grew before the lumber hotel, and talked to Side-Kicker, who was hitched there with Yuba Dick's pinto.

Poker Smith was in the hotel; and the Kid did not reckon that he would have to wait long.

He was right.

A quarter of an hour later Poker Smith came out of the lumber hotel and walked away down Main Street.

He gave the boy puncher one look as he passed him—a look into which worlds of hatred and revenge were concentrated. The Kid smiled back at him sweetly, and raised his Stetson in ironical farewell.

With a black brow the gambler strode away—to pack his traps, saddle his own horse, and hit the trail out of Kicking Mule. Some other cow-town, at too great a distance to have heard of his defeat and humiliation, was to have

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tribe. Give them a wide palaver. Point out to them the advantages of a British Protectorate. Convince them that it will be for their own good, and get that silly delusion about the King out of their heads. Will you do it?"

The Baker Street detective nodded.

"Yes, I will go," he said. "And I will do more than you want me to do."

"Indeed! And what is that?" asked the chief.

"I will prove to the Mashombas that it was one of their own people who murdered the negro, Sambano."

"One of their own people? Good heavens! It can't be possible!"

"It is the truth, Sir Francis. It was the youth Sekundi I have mentioned, the brother of the chief, who committed the crime."

"You amaze me, Locke. I had no idea that you were investigating the case."

"I haven't been until to-day. By the way, do you happen to know a person called Prince Ali?"

"I have met him. It was at Le Pentiland's house."

"Well, Prince Ali is Sekundi."

Sir Francis stared in blank bewilderment, and listened to Ferrers Locke who told all he knew of the prince's past, what he had just learned, and what reasons he had for suspecting him of the murder.

"If I can fasten the crime on him, and I don't doubt that I can," resumed, "the trouble in Mashombaland will blow over, and you will give your British Protectorate peaceably."

"Of course we will," replied the chief. "The murder is at the bottom of it all. You will go, then?"

"Yes, I will take the matter in hand. I had serious thoughts of going to Africa after the murderer as it was."

"Very well. You have taken a great load off my mind, Locke. But there is no time to be wasted. When will you start?"

"As soon as possible. I am under the impression that the Calabarbar Castle leaves the day after to-morrow, and, if so, Drake and I will sail by it."

"It is awfully good of you, Locke. You will get me out of a deuce of a mess, for the arrangements of establishing a protectorate have already been made, and the troops are only waiting orders. Before they march, though, you must bring the Mashombas to their senses."

"You will draw on the Foreign Office for expenses, of course. Call to-morrow morning, and I will have a further talk with you, and will give you a letter to Captain Marker, who is in charge of the military station at Naijari, some miles south of the Mashombaland borders. He has a force of Haussas under him, and he will render you every assistance in his power, and will report to me by cable any news you may bring or send to him. It may be a dangerous errand for you, but Marker will be the best judge of that. I dare say he will send a detachment of troops with you to—"

Sir Francis broke off and glanced at his watch.

"I must leave you at once," he added. "I had no idea it was so late. I have an urgent appointment with a foreign minister. Call about eleven o'clock to-morrow morning, Locke. Good-bye!"

With that the chief hurriedly departed, and Ferrers Locke, smiling grimly, stepped to the telephone and rang up the offices of the West African Steamship Line.

"Unless I am greatly mistaken," he said to himself, "there is a rod in pickle or Prince Ali, otherwise the chief's brother, Sekundi!"

THE END.

(Ferrers Locke, and his young assistant, Jack Drake, in Africa. That sounds good for a real long thrill, and you're just about right. Next week's DETECTIVE-THRILLER is a winner, and in it we find the two daring detectives up against many perils in the heart of the great African Continent. Look out for: "ON HIS MAJESTY'S SERVICE!" next week.)

"YUBA DICK'S LAST GAME!"

(Continued from page 11.)

the future benefit of Poker Smith's presence.

"Say, Two-gun!" roared a cheery voice.

Yuba Dick came out of the Golden Mule with an irradiated face, and he waved his Stetson at the Kid. Yuba was bubbling with glee.

"Waal, what's the news?" asked the Kid, looking at his friend curiously.

"You allow I can't play poker?" grinned Yuba. "Waal, I'm telling you, you pesky jay, that that tinhorn came hornin' in and asking for another game, and I've sure beaten him to it. Say, Poker Smith dealt the cards, and the hand I got I'd have betted my life on! What do you say to four of a kind—four aces—and a king over? That sharp's so pesky lucky, I reckoned he'd have a royal flush to beat it; but he hadn't. He had a pesky full house, and that's what's the matter with Hanner!"

"Sho!" said the Kid.

"You want to believe me!" grinned Yuba Dick. "Yes, sir, that poker guy had three kings and two jacks, sir; and he staked both them hosses on the hand. And he sure took it like a little man when I showed up four of a kind and beat him. Them hosses is ourn!"

"Sho!" repeated the Kid, with an air of great surprise.

"I'm telling you!" said Yuba. "And now we've got the hosses, Two-gun, I guess we want to hit the trail. We'll sure be late back at the Bar-One, anyhow."

He unhitched his pinto, and the Kid followed his example, and mounted the grey mustang. They rode down the street of Kicking Mule together for the prairie trail.

Kicking Mule was left behind, and the cowmen rode side by side by the trail over the grasslands. Yuba Dick was bubbling with glee, and the Kid's face wore a smile. But as the Bar-One came in sight over the prairie Yuba turned to his friend with a serious look.

"Say, Two-gun!"

"Shoot!" said the Kid.

"You sure was a white man to stand for my game as you did, and me a pesky locoed bonehead to lose that cayuse of yours! You wasn't mad with me, feller; but I sure was mad with myself. I guess I ain't forgetting it," said Yuba, "and I'm quitting poker! I'm sure quitting the cards, Two-gun, and that's a cinch."

"Feller," said the Kid soberly, "I'd sure rather hear you say that than see you win all the dollars in Texas, or win them myself. You sure do make me feel good!"

"It's a cinch!" said Yuba Dick.

He took a deck of cards from his pocket. For one moment he hesitated, and then, with a sweep of his arm, flung the pack into the air.

The cards scattered far and wide in the long grass, falling behind the cowmen as they rode on.

"Shake on it, Yuba!" said the Kid.

And they shook on it; and the Kid hummed a merry tune as he galloped on to the Bar-One with his friend.

THE END.



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(Thus ends another adventure for the Rio Kid at Bar-One Ranch. But there's no lull in the exciting career of this daredevil boy outlaw. He's in the thick of adventures again next week in: "THE MAN FROM MONTANA!")