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The POPULAR

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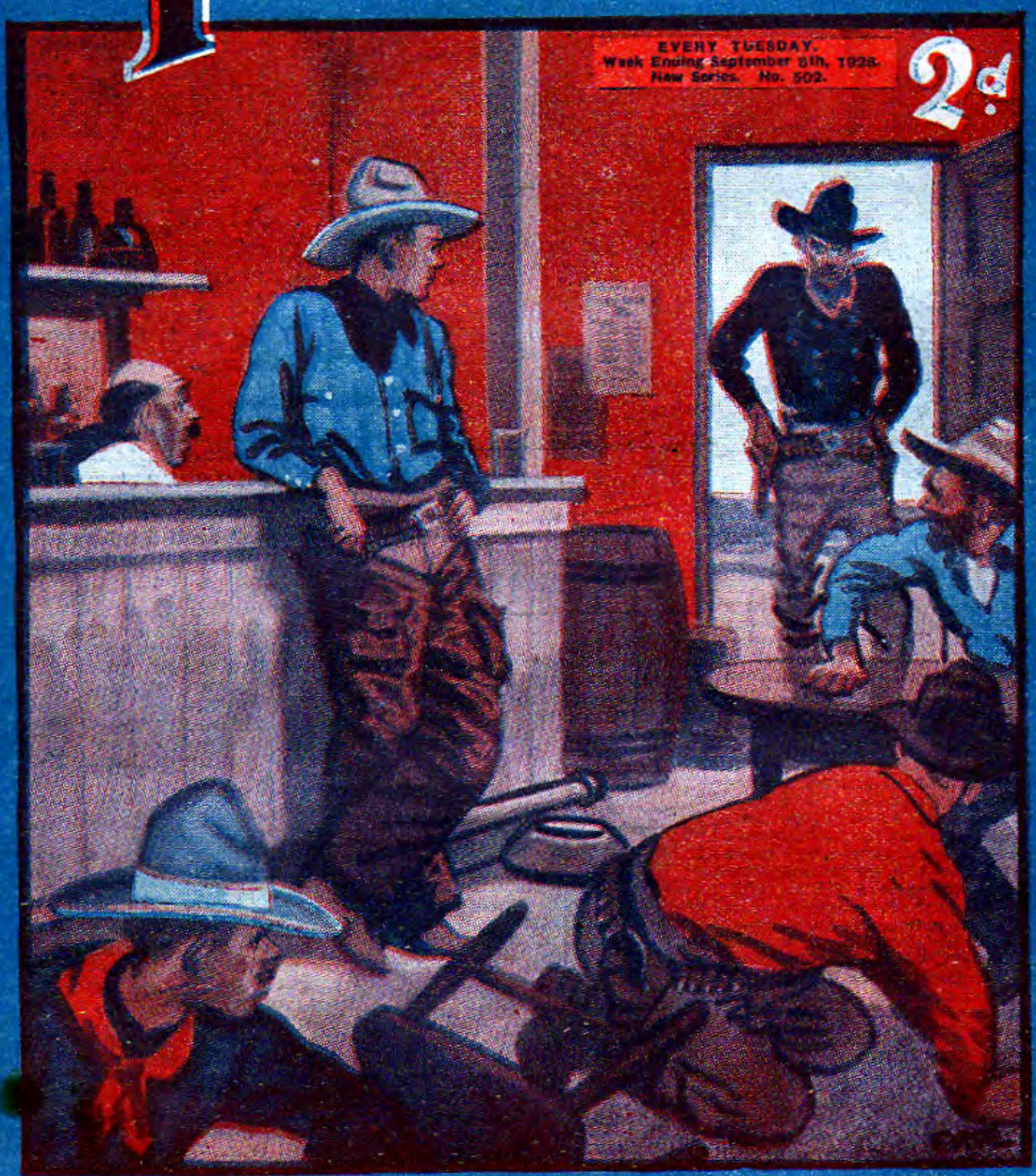
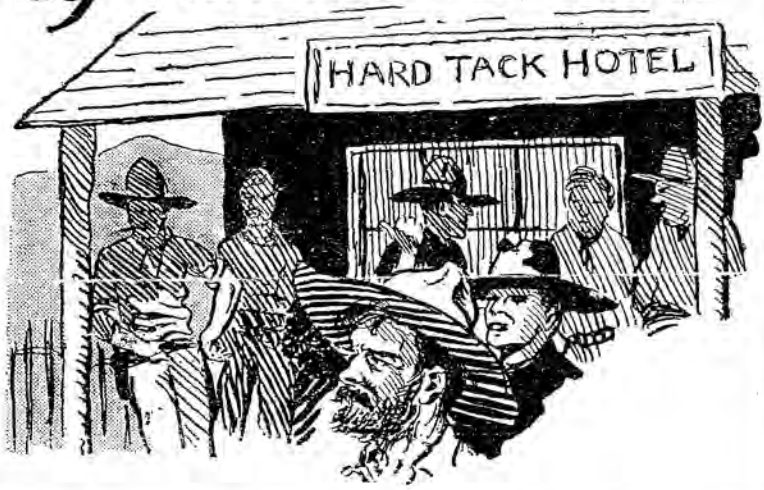


THE RIO KID DEFIES THE GUNMAN! As the figure of the notorious gunman appeared in the doorway of the Saloon, there was a stampede for cover. But the Rio Kid did not move; his hand was close to his gun-holster ready to draw.

(See the Roaring Western Tale inside.)

by RALPH REDWAY



knew, or thought he knew, the tenderfoot.

"Thunder!" he repeated.

"Senor——" faltered the boy.

The black-bearded man grasped him by the shoulder and drew him nearer, to scan his face more intently in the failing light.

The boy gave a cry.

The Rio Kid slipped from his mustang. His face was grim, and his hand was very near his gun as he stepped up to the black-bearded man.

"Let up, feller," said the Kid coolly. "I guess my pardner ain't used to being handled that-a-way."

The marshal did not seem to heed him, but his hand dropped from the boy's shoulder. His gaze remained intently fixed on the startled olive face.

"It's the son of Escobedo!" he exclaimed.

There was a buzz at once.

The name was strange to the Rio Kid, but evidently it was well known in Hard Tack. A dozen men were crowding round, all of them staring hard at the startled olive face of the little Mexican.

"Spill it, boy," snapped the marshal. "You're the son of Escobedo, trailing back here to look for the old man's mine."

"No, senor," faltered the boy.

"You lie!" exclaimed the marshal savagely. "I'd know the Escobedo face anywhere. You're his son."

"I am not his son!" exclaimed the Mexican.

"Your name, then?"

"Alvaro."

"I guess he's got the Escobedo face, marshal," drawled one of the loungers. "He looks soft to be that old fire-bug's son, but he's sure got the Escobedo face."

"He sure has," said the marshal.

The Kid whistled softly. He drew nearer to the slim Mexican. He had had little doubt that the tenderfoot would hit trouble in a wild camp like Hard Tack, but he had not looked for this. He could see that the mention of the name of Escobedo had caused a sensation. Quietly the Kid interposed between the shrinking tenderfoot and the curious, staring crowd.

"Let up, gents," said the Kid. "I guess I don't savvy who Escobedo is, or was, but if he's some galoot who's got your goat——"

The black-bearded marshal turned to him.

"You don't know who Escobedo was?" he exclaimed.

"Never heard the name, feller."

"You're a stranger in this country, then?"

"Right in once," assented the Kid. "Texas is my country. I reckon I'm jest down from the sheep country in Wyoming. Who's this hyer Escobedo, who seems to have got the goat of all this camp?"

"I guess you know as well as I do, when you've come riding in with his son," snapped Jeff Oakes.

"I am not the son of Escobedo, senor!" exclaimed the tenderfoot. "If I look like him, I cannot help it: I am not his son."

"You hear what my pardner says," drawled the Kid. "What he says, goes. But suppose he was the son of the galoot you call Escobedo, what about it? Any law in Colorado agin a galoot being the son of Escobedo?"

"I guess if he's the son of Escobedo, he knows where to look for old Escobedo's mine, the richest strike ever made in Colorado!" snapped the marshal.

"Sho!" ejaculated the Kid.

He remembered the paper which the Mexican had refused, at the risk of death, to hand over to the hold-up man on the trail, and the Kid thought that he knew now why the tenderfoot had come to Hard Tack.

The marshal's intent stare at the Mexican relaxed, and he stepped back.

"Well, if you allow you ain't Escobedo's son, that goes," he said.

And he went into the timber hotel.

Under the staring eyes of a score of men the Rio Kid and his companion turned their horses into the corral. The tenderfoot's face was pale, and the Kid murmured in his ear:

"I guess if you want to hit the back trail, feller, I'll ride herd over you as far as White Pine and see you clear."

"No."

"There's trouble in the air here," prophesied the Kid. "The galoots sure have a hunch that you're the son of the pilgrim they call Escobedo, and that seems to be a name that gives them the jumps. And that fire-bug with the black beard ain't let the matter drop, not by long chalks he ain't, if I'm any judge, though he lets on he's satisfied. And seems like he's the marshal of this burg. You want to mount and ride."

"No!"

The Kid laughed.

"Let's get into the shebang, then."

And the Rio Kid and his protege entered the timber hotel together, still under many staring and curious eyes.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
The Story of Escobedo!

HARD TACK was a rough camp, and the accommodation at the timber hotel was of the simplest.

The building was all on one floor, with wooden shutters to the windows, glass being unknown in the camp. There was a corral for horses, and bare rooms, with a plank bed each for guests; guests in Hard Tack brought their own bedding or went without. The proprietor, a fat man with one eye—the other having been gouged out in some trouble—told the newcomers they could pick their rooms; there were no other guests at the Hard Tack Hotel. There seldom were; the business of the place was chiefly in the saloon branch, where fiery fire-water was sold in open disregard of all laws to the contrary, and a faro-table was run by hard-faced gamblers who found their last resort in that remote mountain camp.

The Rio Kid, with his slicker pack on his arm, went to look at the rooms, of which there were five or six in a row, opening on a passage behind the saloon, with windows looking over waste ground towards the towering wall of the canyon.

"I guess, feller," said the Kid cheerily, "that we'll bed down in one room; it will be safer for you, I reckon."

The tenderfoot gave a start.

"Oh, no, senor!" he exclaimed.

"E porque?" asked the Kid, in astonishment. "Why? I tell you that you ain't safe in this camp, boy; you don't even pack a gun, and I reckon you wouldn't know how to use one if you did. That black-bearded galoot means you no good, feller, for all he allows he's let the matter drop. Don't I keep on telling you I'm riding herd over you?"

The boy smiled faintly.

"You are too good, senor!"

"Oh, shucks!" growled the Kid. "I guess I ain't letting a benighted tenderfoot like you run loose. You're going to bed down in my room, and I guess if any fresh galoot horns in, he'll find me at home, sabe?"

"No, no!" The boy seemed strangely alarmed. "Oh, no, senor! I will fasten door and window, and I shall be safe!"

"Now, ain't you an ornery little cuss?" complained the Kid. "But have your own way! I guess I know your reason, too!"

The boy gave a violent start.

"Senor, you—you know——" he faltered.

The Kid chuckled.

"Yep! You being a Mexican greaser, you want to fix up a crucifix over your bed, and you don't want a Gringo around!" he grinned. "Ain't that it?"

"Oh, senor!" exclaimed the boy.

He did not answer directly, but he looked relieved, as if he had feared that the puncher had found some other explanation.

The rooms having been selected, the Kid deposited his slicker pack in his own. But the Mexican had no pack.

"I guess there's a store next door to this shebang," said the Kid. "You want to buy some things, boy. They don't

give you nothing but a plank bed to sleep on in this hyer palatial hotel. I reckon your hoss ran away with all your fixings in the hills, and you won't never see that cayuse again. Lucky we cinched that hold-up gent's cayuse for you to ride into camp. You come with me, and I'll see the storekeeper don't rob you, as he sure would if I didn't ride herd."

From the timber hotel the two strangely assorted comrades went into the store adjoining.

The storekeeper stared at them hard as they came in, ceasing to pick his teeth with a jack-knife in his keen interest.

"Sho! Young Escobedo!" he exclaimed.

"I see it's all over the town!" grinned the Rio Kid. "But you've got it wrong, feller; my pardner's name is Alvaro!"

"I am not the son of Escobedo!" said the Mexican wearily.

"I guess fellers fit up with a lot of new names sometimes!" said the storekeeper, with a wink.

"Oh, can it!" said the Kid. He leaned on the counter while the tenderfoot proceeded to select his few purchases. "Look here, feller, who's this Escobedo that the whole camp seems wild about? I never heard the name before I horned into Hard Tack."

"I guess you're the only galoot in this country that ain't heard it, then!" grinned the storekeeper.

"Well, who was he? And what was he when he was at home?" asked the Kid.

He was curious on the subject.

"Well, he was a Mexican, and it's ten years since he was in Hard Tack," said the storekeeper. "I reckon there never would have been a camp here at all but for old Joaquin Escobedo. He was a prospector up from Mexico, and he struck it rich hereabouts. He used to come down the mountains with a burro and bags of gold-dust and nuggets. The boys got the office at last and trailed him up to this canyon. There was some strikes made round about, and the camp grew up, but old Escobedo's strike was never located. He used to disappear into the sierra, and when he came back that old burro of his carried plenty gold, but where he got it no galoot ever knew."

"Sho!" said the Kid. "I sure wonder that no galoot ever got on his trail and located the mine."

"More than one galoot sure got on his trail," grinned the storekeeper, "but them galoots never came back! It was sure talked up and down the camp that old Escobedo laid for them in the hills and shot them up!"

The Kid whistled.

"And what became of Escobedo?" he asked.

"He was shot up at last by a galoot who was trailing him for his mine," answered the storekeeper. "Leastways, he was found spread out on the trail, with his burro standing beside him, and as full of holes as a colander. The boys planted him, and that was the end of Joaquin Escobedo!"

"And they never found the mine?"

"Nix! I guess there's pilgrims hunting for it still. Every galoot that goes out fossicking from this camp has got a hunch that sooner or later he'll hit up against the Escobedo mine." The storekeeper grinned. "But nobody ain't found it—yet!"

"I guess that's a fortune waiting for some lucky galoot!" remarked the Rio Kid.

"Sure!"

"And he never staked out a claim and registered it?" asked the Kid.

"He sure never did. He kept it a secret. I guess his claim would have been jumped if he'd made it known!" grinned the storekeeper. "The boys round here sure wouldn't have let a greaser walk off with the richest strike in Colorado. I guess Hard Tack wouldn't have stood for that. But it's known that he used to send letters from White Pine to his people in Mexico, and when he was drunk sometimes he used to talk about his son. So the boys figure that sooner or later Escobedo's son will come along hunting for the lost mine."

He gave the tenderfoot a grinning look.

"And that boy has sure got the features of old Escobedo," he added. "I reckon the whole camp will have a hunch that he's Escobedo's son. He is sure the first greaser to come up to Hard Tack since old Escobedo was rubbed out. Mexicans don't come here. Why, the whole camp has been waiting for the son of Joaquin Escobedo to turn up. He was sure to show up here sooner or later, looking for the old man's strike. And I sure reckon he's come!" added the storekeeper, with a grin.

The Kid's face was thoughtful as he left the store with his companion, carrying the purchases back to the hotel. It was dark now in Hard Tack; and a naphtha lamp was flaring outside. By the gate of the corral a group of men stood in talk, among them the black-bearded marshal.

"Feller," muttered the Kid. "You've given me your name as Alvaro, and that goes, so far as I'm concerned. But if you are the son of that old Mexican fossicker, Escobedo, this hyer camp ain't a healthy place for you."

"I am not his son."

"That goes, then," said the Kid cheerily.

The group by the corral gate moved out as the Kid and the Mexican came along to the hotel, and the marshal held up a hand to arrest their progress.

"The boys have been looking at the critters you'uns rode into camp," said the marshal, "and it sure looks like one of you has rode in on a stolen horse."

"Oh, can it," said the Kid. "I guess my cayuse has carried me all the way from Texas."

"It's this boy's horse I'm speaking of," said the marshal. "Fellers here have recognised it as belonging to a Hard Tack man."

"Oh, sho!" ejaculated the Kid. "I'll put you wise at once, marshal. We was held up on the trail coming here, by a fire-bug that was riding that hoss—a durned pesky dog-goned road-agent. I guess he came out at the little end of the horn, and he beat it when I was walking him into camp to hand him over. My pardner's hoss took a scare and hit the trail, and I reckon we had a right to rope in that trail-thief's hoss in it's place."

There was a murmur.

"That cayuse belongs to Four Kings, a Hard Tack citizen," said the marshal. "You allow that Four Kings held you up on the trail?"

"He sure did, if that's his call-by," said the Kid. "I'd know the galoot anywhere, and if he's got the gall to step into this camp, I'll put it to him in plain language. The man we got that hoss from is a road-agent, a thief, and a gol-darned fire-bug, and you can tell him so from me."

The marshal eyed him narrowly.

"Well, that's your say-so," he remarked. "I reckon Four Kings may have another story to tell when he comes into camp."

"I'm sure ready to ram his story back down his throat, with a bullet to follow it up," said the Kid pleasantly.

"You'll sure have a chance," said the marshal. "Four Kings ain't the man to take tall talk from a cow-puncher."

"He'll find me at home," said the Kid disdainfully, and he walked into the timber hotel with the tenderfoot.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Trouble Ahead!

MANY of the Hard Tack citizens came to supper at the trestle table in the long shed which was called a dining-room at the Hard Tack hotel. The fare was rough and ready—and the guests helped themselves—and one tin plate had to serve all needs. But supper was welcome to the Kid, hungry from a long trail through the mountains; though his companion ate little. The crowded room was noisy; the shifting of benches and boxes and heavy boots incessant, and Carlos Alvaro could scarcely conceal the nervous uneasiness that filled him. And the Kid guessed that the crowd in the chuck shed was more numerous than usual, many pilgrims having been drawn there by the rumour that Escobedo's son had come to town. The storekeeper had put the Kid wise on that subject, and he knew why the mere rumour of an Escobedo in camp raised such keen interest. But for the fact that the Kid was obviously protecting the tenderfoot, and equally obviously, quite able to do it, the boy would have been subjected to a good deal of rough questioning. But the Kid looked—what he was—a tough proposition. He wore two guns slung low from his belt, in the gunman style, and the look in his eye was enough to tell that he knew how to use those guns, and was ready to draw if crowded. And no one seemed keen to crowd the Kid nor the tenderfoot, so long as the Kid was riding herd.

The Hard Tack citizens were a hard crowd, one of the hardest the Kid had ever seen, and he had been in many a hard place. But most of them were miners and prospectors, not looking for trouble, at least, when they were sober; though the Kid guessed that few of them would have hesitated to "jump" the rich mine that old Escobedo was said to have located in the hills. There were two or three hard-faced gamblers in the bunch, men who lived by taking the miner's hard-earned dust over the poker table or the faro lay-out. Among the crowd the Kid calculated that there were, at least, a dozen likely enough to take "hold-ups" on the trail, if a claim petered out and left them stranded. He had not been surprised, therefore, to hear from the marshal that the man who had held him up, on his way to Hard Tack, was a citizen of the camp. Under his eye at the present moment were some more "citizens" of the same calibre. On the whole, however, the Hard Tack pilgrims, rough as they were, were neither hold-up men, nor gunmen; but more likely to have lynched the road-agent had the Kid "toted" him into camp. While the Kid was eating his bacon and beans, with the healthy appetite that was always his, he was sizing up the crowd round him, and he figured that a guy could depend on fair play from most of the

bunch. Indeed, two or three fellows, whose rough aspect made the tenderfoot shrink as they came near, gave the Kid a good-natured warning on the subject of the man called "Four Kings." Few, if any, doubted the statement the Kid had made, that the tenderfoot's horse had been taken from a trail robber. Four Kings evidently had a bad reputation even in that hard camp. But some of them warned the Kid to watch out for trouble when the gunman came in. At the same time, they were openly looking forward to what would happen when he did.

"Thar'll be shooting, pardner," a big, brawny prospector said to the Kid. "You want to keep your eye peeled. Four Kings is a bad man when he's riled, and I guess he will be riled some, when he finds his hoss in the corral, and you calling him a hold-up man."

The Kid smiled.

"I'll sure watch out," he assented, "and I'll call him a hold-up man so loud that all Hard Tack will hear me toot."

"You've sure got some gall, for a kid puncher," said the big miner, grinning. "Four Kings has got six notches on the handle of his gun."

"I guess he will be packing a new gun," grinned the Kid. "He lost his gun when he held me up on the trail."

"Sho!" Long Bill whistled. "I guess the marshal don't believe that Four Kings held you up on the trail, puncher."

"I guess the marshal don't wan' to," said the Kid. "But I ain't asking the marshal to horn in. All I want is a fair break when the band begins to play."

"You'll get it here, puncher. I guess most of the bunch would be some glad to see Four Kings get it where he lives. There's six galoots in the camp cemetery now what would be walking about if that gunman hadn't pulled on 'em. He is sure a hard cuss. But when it comes to a hold-up story, I guess it's your word agin his, and you're a stranger here."

Long Bill strolled away, evidently in a state of happy anticipation of what was to come. The tenderfoot glanced at the Kid, almost fearfully. The Kid gave him a reassuring grin, and finished his bacon and beans. He rose from the trestle-table, pushing back the packing-case he had been seated on, and strolled from the chuck-shed. Every eye was on him as he went, the Mexican at his side. The Kid turned into the passage that gave on the sleeping-rooms.

"Now, feller," he said. "Reckon you want to go to your little bunk. You ain't horning into what's coming to me."

"That man will kill you!" muttered Carlos.

The Kid chuckled.

"I guess not. But if he did, I sure tell you you want to git on my mustang, and beat it before another sun rises on this sierra. That black-bearded galoot, Jeff Oakes, the marshal, has got his eye on you. That galoot is after old Escobedo's gold-mine, and he sure allows that you know something about it. And I reckon he won't believe that Four Kings is a thief and a road-agent, because he wants the fire-bug to shoot me up, and then you'll fall to him like a ripe plum. Savvy?"

"Dios!" muttered the Mexican. "I could see it in his face. You are in danger because you have befriended me, senor."

"Jest that," assented the Kid. "If that fire-bug Four Kings gets away with it, I reckon the marshal will run you into the calaboose with a story of having stolen that horse. And once in the jug, I reckon he will make you tell him all you know about the Escobedo mine."

The Mexican's dark, long-lashed eyes sought the Kid's face, in the dusk of the passage.

"You think I know something of the Escobedo mine, senor?"

"That ain't my funeral," answered the Kid. "What counts is, that the marshal reckons you do, and he's sure after that lost mine like an Injun after tanglefoot. He ain't asking for trouble with a two-gun man, if he can get away with it easier, and I reckon I'd fill him full of holes if he tried to run you into the calaboose while I'm around. He won't show his hand till after Four Kings has tried on his game with me. I tell you, feller, I've got that galoot placed, and I know his game."

"Oh!" muttred Carlos.

"But you don't want to worry," said the Kid reassuringly. "I've woke up worse fire-bugs than that galoot Four Kings, and I ain't gone up the fluma yet. You was sure a looped guy to come to a camp like this. If you was to strike the lost mine, I guess it would be the last thing you'd do on this side Jordan. Now you go to your bunk, and don't you worry if you hear gun-play."

The tenderfoot was trembling.

"Good-night, nino!" said the Kid. "Bolt your window-shutter, and put the bar across your door. I reckon there ain't no locks in this hyer shebang, but you can keep safe."

"Si, si, senor! Buenas noches."

The tenderfoot went into his room, and the door closed. The Kid turned away, relieved. For the coming trouble he had no fear; but he was glad to have the tenderfoot off the scene.

He strolled into the saloon, which was crowded. The one-eyed fat man presided over the wooden bar at one end of the long room, busily serving drinks to many thirsty customers. The faro layout was in full blast, the table crowded by miners, still in the heavy boots and dusty red shirts in which they had come in from the gulches. The air was heavy with the fumes of tobacco and the reek of spirits, and hummed with many voices. The Rio Kid's eye took in the whole crowd at a glance, and he smiled pleasantly to several men, who greeted him with friendly nods.

"Four Kings is back in camp, feller," called out Long Bill.

"Sho!" said the Kid indifferently.

The Rio Kid leaned idly on the bar, his look cool and careless. But where he leaned he could keep an eye on the wide-open door that gave on the dusky, straggling street of Hard Tack.

The Kid watched the busy scene before his eyes with mild interest. But the

(*Continued on page* 28.)

AFTER THE GUN-PLAY! The Kid strode into the passage, and through the open door he caught a glimpse of the tenderfoot. "Senor, you are not hurt——" asked the boy, with trembling lips. The Kid laughed. "I guess not!" he replied. "Get back to your bunk, amigo, and sleep sound!" (*See Chapter* 5.)

"THE RIO KID!"

(Continued from page 5.)

usual evening programme at the saloon was not absorbing the attention of the Hard Tack citizens. Even the gamblers at the faro table looked away continually from their stakes, to keep an eye on the open door. There was a sudden murmur when the tall, black-bearded figure of the marshal strode in, and by his side a hard-faced, burly man, whom the Kid instantly recognised as the road-agent who had held him up on the mountain trail. The murmur died away, and there was a breathless silence as the two men turned towards the Rio Kid, lounging carelessly on the wooden bar.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Gun Play!

"EVENIN', marshal!" drawled the Rio Kid, with a cheery nod to the marshal of Hard Tack.

For the moment, at least, he had no open hostility to look for from Jeff Oakes. That the man had an iron will and plenty of courage the Kid did not need telling, and he had not the slightest doubt that Oakes was gunning after the lost mine, and intended to wring from the tenderfoot what he knew about the Escobedo strike. But it was not the marshal's cue to make such a play openly for all the camp to see, even in a rough hole like Hard Tack; the town marshal had a reputation to consider. That he was the most dangerous man in that wild camp the Kid was assured; but that he would, so far as he could, strike from cover, he was equally sure. It was likely that half the citizens of Hard Tack had already resolved to get at what the Mexican boy knew of the Escobedo mine, by fair means or foul; but no man cared to reveal his intention openly, least of all the marshal of the town. And Jeff Oakes returned the Kid's salute with cool civility.

"Evenin', feller! I guess you've seen this galoot before!" He indicated the scowling gunman at his side.

"I sure have," assented the Kid. "I reckon he's got the marks still on his face that I gave him on the trail."

Four Kings made a movement.

"Hold on," said the marshal. "Let's have this fair and square. You allow that Four Kings held you up on the trail in the hills, and you got his cayuse when he lit out."

"That's so, marshal."

"This here camp don't stand for that sort of game," declared the marshal. "If you kin prove it up, I guess there's a rope and a branch waiting in this very street for a road-agent. But Four Kings allows that you and your pardner stole his horse while he was fossicking in the hills."

The Rio Kid laughed.

"Is that your say-so, feller?" he asked, with his eyes fixed on the scowling face of the gunman.

"Yep!" snarled Four Kings. "You're a gol-darned hoss-thief, and your tenderfoot pardner, too, I'll tell a man."

"And you're a dog-goned liar, hombre," said the Kid cheerfully. "You're a road-agent and a thief!"

The Kid, lounging against the bar, did not touch a gun. But his eyes were warily on the eyes of the gunman. He was ready for the draw, and the Rio Kid was lightning when it came to pulling a gun. But Four Kings, for the moment, made no hostile movement, and the Kid did not need telling that it was the marshal of Hard Tack who was running this game.

"Well, your talk sure don't agree," said the marshal. "I guess there ain't no proof on either side, and I don't see how I can chip in. I reckon it's me to step out and leave you to argue if you want."

"That's it, marshal," said Long Bill; and there was a murmur of approval from the breathless crowd looking on at the scene.

The marshal moved along the bar, and the fat man behind it spun a bottle and glass across. The marshal filled his glass and drank, with the air of a man who had washed his hands of the matter in dispute. But even while he was drinking his eyes did not leave the Rio Kid and the gunman.

There was a shuffling of feet in the crowded room as men backed away from the line of fire. In a few seconds now bullets would be flying, and all present knew it, and no pilgrim there wanted to stop a bullet.

The Rio Kid had straightened up from the bar, and stood at ease, his hands within easy reach of the low-slung guns at his sides. But he did not draw; he was waiting for his enemy. Neither did Four Kings draw, though his hand was very near his gun. Pace after pace he backed away, the Kid watching him intently, never leaving his eyes. A tenderfoot might watch a man's gun; but the Kid knew better than that. It was in the eyes of his enemy that he could read when the draw was to come.

Four Kings stopped. He was standing on the tips of his feet in the half-crouching attitude of the practised gunman. When the draw came it would be sudden and swift, and many times had the gunman taken an adversary by surprise by his swiftness. The silence, the breathless excitement, were growing almost painful; as life or death for one man, perhaps for both, trembled in the balance.

It was with a swiftness that beat the eye that Four Kings suddenly pulled the gun from his belt.

Swift as the action was, the boy puncher from the plains of Texas was swifter. It was the Kid's gun that rang a fraction of a second sooner.

Bang!

The gunman's revolver followed it like an echo. The two shots were blended almost into one.

There was a breathless roar on all sides, the relief to pent-up excitement.

For a second it seemed that neither shot had taken effect. The Rio Kid passed his hand across his cheek, where a bullet had grazed the skin. The gunman sagged heavily, his knees gave under him, and he crumpled down to the floor.

"Gee!" yelled Long Bill. "He's got his!"

Still the crowd held back, for they knew the desperado, and they knew that if there was life enough in him to pull the trigger he would fire, and fire again. But the gunman lay where he had fallen, and the gun rolled from his relaxing grasp. And then the crowd surged forward again, and there were shouted congratulations to the puncher who stood by the bar, his smoking gun still in his hand. The corner of the Kid's eye was on the marshal of Hard Tack; but the marshal gave no sign. If he had put up the gunman to this deadly game, and if he was angered to see him fail, he did not betray as much.

From the buzzing room the Kid strolled out into the passage to the sleeping-rooms. Through the half-open door he had caught a glimpse of a white face.

"Senor, you are not hurt?"

The Rio Kid laughed.

"I guess not! Get back to your bunk, amigo, and sleep sound."

"Si, senor."

And the Rio Kid, after he had heard the tenderfoot's door barred, went to his own room—but not to sleep. There was no sleep for the Rio Kid that night.

THE END.

Whatever the Kid's faults are, no one can say he is not a sticker. He sticks to the little tenderfoot through thick and thin, and you will read more about these two strange companions in next week's story of the Wild West.

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