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THE "POPULAR" BIRTHDAY GIFT CLUB RE-STARTS TO-DAY!

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THRILLS GALORE!

Many and varied have been the experiences of the Rio Kid, boy outlaw. But he has never yet taken on the role of hold-up man—until this week!

The Rio Kid's Hold-Up!

By Ralph Redway

OUR GRIPPING LONG COMPLETE WESTERN YARN, STARRING THE RIO KID.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Put Wise!

THE Rio Kid did not realise, for some minutes, that voices were speaking quite close to him. No doubt it was the sound of the voices that had awakened him from slumber; but he lay with half-opened eyes, dreamy, in his bed of leaves, without stirring, or giving any attention.

The Kid had been riding long and hard, late into the night; and he had slept on while the new day dawned and the sun climbed higher and higher in the blue sky over the Rio Grande. Rolled in his blanket, in the thick bed of leaves, there was little to be seen of the Kid, even had a curious eye peered into the tangled mesquite round him. Those who were talking only a few yards from him evidently had no suspicion that the Kid was there. They talked with the careless confidence of men who figured that they were far from all other ears.

As the mists of sleep cleared from the wearied Kid's brain, and he realised that the murmur in his ears was the sound of human voices, he lay as still as before—motionless, silent, on his guard, glad that he had been careful to seek deep cover before he lay down to rest. With a reward of a thousand dollars on his head he could not be too careful.

Only his eyes turned towards the mustang that lay in the mesquite by his side. A movement of the horse would have betrayed his presence.

But the black-muzzled, grey mustang, the constant companion of the Rio Kid's wanderings, was too well trained to give sound or sign. More than once had the boy outlaw's life depended on the sagacity of his steed, and it had never failed him.

Who the men were who were talking by the margin of the creek a few yards away the Kid had no idea; but he knew they were more likely to be foes than friends. In the wide lands of Texas the fate of the Rio Kid was like that of Ishmael of old—his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him. The walnut-butted guns were close; but the Kid did not want to handle them if the could help it. He was content to lie doggo till the strangers were gone. Their talk had no interest for him; and he gave it no attention. But it came to his ears, all the same, and suddenly a sentence struck him, and he had to attend.

"I guess the timber, a mile out of El Cerro, is the place. The hack will be there from Malpais hours before sundown. The driver won't give any trouble—he ain't paid to handle a gun. Don't you go a-shooting, you 'uns. There mayn't be any other passengers, mebbe, besides Hank Schulz; and I guess that driver's got to witness that it's all fair and square—a reg'lar hold-up."

A hoarse chuckle followed.

The Rio Kid smiled faintly. He had fancied at first that it might be a bunch of cow-punchers who had stopped in the shade of the chaparral, out of the glare of the sun. Now he knew that he was listening to the talk of trail bandits, planning a hold-up of the hack that ran from Malpais by a lonely prairie route to El Cerro, on the banks of the Rio Grande.

Well, it was no funeral of his. The Rio Kid, hunted far and wide by Texas sheriffs, had no call to horn in and do their work for them.

But what he had heard excited his interest a little; for it was perplexing. He had heard the discussion of a hold-up; but not, it appeared, an ordinary hold-up. He gathered that there would be a passenger in the hack—one Hank Schulz, in league with the outlaws. The Kid gave attention now.

"The widder must sure be loco to trust a thousand dollars with that galoot Schulz," said another voice.

"I reckon he's been her foreman ever since Old Man Cassidy went over the range," answered the first speaker. "She reckons he's white all right."

The Kid heard a grunt.

"I'll say he's a durned coyote to play it low down like this hyer, on a widder woman, Hanson!"

The Kid started a little, ever so little, at the mention of that name. He knew the name of Black Hanson, the outlaw; and he knew now that it was the Hanson gang who were talking in his hearing.

There was a scoffing laugh from Hanson.

STOPPED ON THE TRAIL! The Kid pulled in his mustang, and like magic one of his guns leaped into his hand. "Halt!" he cried. "Put 'em up!" The driver of the hack jumped. "Waal, I swow!" he ejaculated, and then he dropped the reins, and elevated his hands above his head. From the passenger came a startled exclamation. (*See Chapter 2.*)

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"Forget it, Kansas. I guess if you don't want to touch your share you can stand out."

Another grunt. Apparently the man called Kansas did not want to carry his objections to that length.

"I got word from Schulz last night," went on Black Hanson. "The widder's sending him to the bank at El Cerro by the hack to-day, with a thousand dollars in a bag. I guess Mrs. Cassidy has been selling stock. Them durocks ain't going to see the bank vault at El Cerro, and don't you forget it! But it's got to be a reg'lar hold-up—Schulz is particular about the look of the thing. He ain't finished with the Malpais ranch yet—I allow he makes a good thing out of it—the widder trusts him, and I guess he makes it pay."

"I allow he does," said another voice.

"All fair and square," went on Hanson. "The hack will be held up in the timber about a mile out of El Cerro, and we cover Schulz with our guns, and the driver's a witness that he hadn't a chance to resist. He puts up his hands and we go through him and find the dollars. He goes back to Malpais and explains that he was robbed on the trail—witnesses and all complete. Who's to smell a rat? There's been robberies on that trail afore, and will be agin—so long as we're around."

There was a chuckle again.

"Schulz takes half, and we divide the rest," went on Black Hanson. "That's the arrangement."

"I guess I don't see leaving him mosey on with half!" grumbled Kansas. "I guess——"

"Schulz put us on to it, and it will pay to treat him white," said Black Hanson. "This ain't the first time he's put us wise, and it won't be the last time. Dog-gone you, we pick up five hundred dollars for the trouble of an hour's ride!"

"I guess I'd rather lot daylight through Schulz and freeze on to the thousand."

Black Hanson laughed.

"Suit me fine," he answered, "only I got a lot more use for Schulz yet. He gives us all the news of the Malpais country, and I guess we find it good. Don't you go a-shooting, Kansas, or you'll sure get yours so sudden you won't know what hit you!"

There was a growling threat in Black Hanson's voice, and the man Kansas did not answer.

The scent of tobacco came to the Kid, on the wind in the mesquite. Black Hanson had lighted a Mexican cheroot.

"When we hitting the trail?" asked Kansas, after a silence.

"Plenty time yet. We want to be in the timber soon arter midday, to make sure. I guess we can rest hyer a spell."

The Rio Kid lay very still.

The talk of the outlaws went on, in a desultory way, as they rested in the shade, their horses cropping the grass by the creek.

The Rio Kid figured that this belt of chaparral was the rendezvous of the gang; the three ruffians had doubtless met there, coming from different directions. The Kid had been too sound asleep to hear their arrival. Now that he knew who they were, and what they intended, the Kid's mind was in a state of doubt.

What did it matter to him if the El Cerro hack was held up in the timber, and the faithless foreman of the Malpais ranch handed over to these thieves the money he was entrusted to take to the town?

Nothing! But——

The Kid grinned ruefully.

His besetting weakness was finding him out again. He told himself that this was not his funeral; but he knew that he was going to horn in.

It was the mention of the "widow-woman" that had done it. The Kid was not going to loaf idly by, while a woman was robbed, especially by a man whom she trusted.

Without moving, or making a sound, the Rio Kid lay in his bed of leaves and considered the matter.

Had it been needed, he would not have hesitated to show himself, and back his walnut-butted guns against the fire of the three ruffians a few paces from him.

But the Kid was not anxious to do that. Black Hanson and his gang were gunmen of the first water; and though the Kid was insensible to fear, he was not looking for a chance to back his gun against three at close quarters—three of the most deadly in Texas.

Certainly, had it been the only way, he would have taken the chance, relying on his swiftness and skill; he had taken such chances before, and lived to tell the tale. But it was not the only way.

The Kid had plenty of time to think the matter over, as the outlaws smoked and yawned under the trees by the creek.

A smile broke over his face.

His mind was made up; and he only waited for the Hanson gang to vamoose before he proceeded to action. If the plan that had formed in the Rio Kid's active mind was a success, the widow of Malpais would not be robbed of her dollars. And the Kid reckoned that it would be a success.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
The Hold-Up!

"I GUESS it's time we hit the trail, old hoss," yawned the Kid.

He rose and stretched himself. The outlaws were gone.

Looking from the cover of the chaparral, the Kid could see three Stetson hats bobbing over the grass in the distance towards the west.

Black Hanson and his two companions were riding for the El Cerro timber, where they were to lie in wait for the hack a mile out of the town for which it was bound.

The Rio Kid knew that country, and he knew that the spot for the hold-up was well-chosen. The hack travelled twenty miles from Malpais before it struck the timber, by an open prairie trail, where there was little cover for hiding men. But where the trail ran through the timber, was ample cover; and the Hanson gang would remain unseen until the hack was fairly in their hands. Black Hanson knew his business.

But the Rio Kid knew his business, too.

There was a smile on his sunburnt face as he watched the three Stetson hats disappear in the grass in the far distance.

At the Kid's voice, the black-muzzled mustang rose from its grassy couch. The Kid smoothed the glossy neck with an affectionate hand.

"I guess, old hoss, that that durned coyote Schulz is going to meet up with a surprise," drawled the Kid. "He sure is going to have the surprise of his life, old hoss."

The Kid chuckled.

"Them fire-bugs will be waiting for the hack at the timber a mile from El Cerro, old hoss," he went on. "But just figure if that hack is stopped a dozen miles out of El Cerro, on the prairie, by a galoot about my size, and the dollars grabbed? What about it, old hoss?"

The Rio Kid sometimes talked to his horse as if it were a human comrade.

"I guess," drawled the Kid, "that them dollars will never get so far as the timber where Black Hanson will be waiting for them, critter. I sure allow they never will. I guess them dollars is getting to the bank by safer hands than Mr. Schulz's. I ain't never seen that widder woman, old hoss, and I don't figure to; but she's sure going to owe it to this Kid that she don't lose a thousand dollars."

And the Kid laughed.

Another glance across the sunlit, grassy prairie showed him that the Stetson hats had vanished. Black Hanson and his gang were out of sight.

That was all the Kid was waiting for. He drew his mustang from the mesquite, tightened the cinch, and mounted and rode away in another direction.

Black Hanson aimed to strike the stage-trail a mile out of El Cerro, miles south-west of the creek where the Rio Kid had camped in the mesquite. The Kid aimed to strike it a dozen miles out of El Cerro, and his way lay to north-west.

Black Hanson and his comrades had disappeared, and the Kid was not likely to see them again. He had no business with them. His business was with the man who was carrying the bag of dollars on the hack.

There was a cheery smile on the Kid's face as he rode at an easy gallop through the high grass.

Since he had left the Sampson ranch, down at San Pedro, and his comrades there, to wander once more by lonely trails, the Kid had lacked his usual high spirits. But only action was needed to restore him to his accustomed care-free mood.

There was something very entertaining to the Kid in the thought of the Hanson gang lying in wait for the plunder that would never come their way, and of Mr. Schulz meeting up with a real, instead of a pretended robbery on the stage-trail. The expression of the Malpais foreman's face would be worth watching when he found himself held up by the wrong party.

The Kid struck the stage-trail at last; a track that was marked across the prairie by the trampling of hoofs and the ruts of wheels. Once on the trail between Malpais and El Cerro, the Kid looked round for what cover might be found. Holding up the hack on the open prairie was rather a delicate matter, with the risk of some bunch of cowpunchers seeing what was going on, and butting in with their guns—which was not what the Kid wanted at all.

But there was little cover; the trail ran over open grassy plains all the way from Malpais to within a mile of El Cerro, where lay the belt of timber chosen by Black Hanson for his ambush.

That timber was a good ten miles from the spot where the Kid had struck the stage-trail.

Save for a few post-oaks, and some bunches of mesquite, there was no cover for the Kid; but he was used to making the best of any situation in which he found himself. The black-muzzled mustang lay down in high grass, and the Kid stood among three or four post oaks to watch the trail. The hack, he knew, was not due to pass yet; but it seldom ran on time, and might easily be an hour early, or an hour late. He settled down to watch; and in half an hour, the sound of hoof-beats on the trail warned him of newcomers.

But it was not the hack. Four punchers came cantering along the trail going easy; and the Kid sank out of sight among the post-oaks, lying in the grass till they were past.

They rode on towards the distant town, and their hats vanished in the sea of grass. Then the Kid rose again and once more watched the trail.

A distant rumble came to his ears.

It was the sound of a wheeled vehicle bumping over a rough track. The going was hard on the prairie trail.

The Kid watched patiently.

The hack, with two horses trotting, driven by a man in a grey shirt, came into sight on the trail, round a fold of the prairie.

The Kid watched it keenly as it came. His eyes, keen as an eagle's, discerned that there was only one passenger in the hack while it was still at a distance. That, undoubtedly, was Mr. Hank Schulz, foreman of the widow's ranch at Malpais. The Kid smiled.

He gave a long, keen glance round at the sunny prairie. It was solitary, save for himself and the approaching hack. Far in the distance was a moving object, which might have been a bunch of cows or horsemen, too far off for even the Kid's keen eye to pick it out clearly. Too far off, at all events, to worry the Kid, whatever it was.

He called to his mustang, and mounted and rode out into the trail. The driver of the hack gave him a quick glance, the passenger put out his head to look at him. Both of them saw a handsome young cowpuncher; and the passenger sat back, and the driver, reassured, waved a hand and drove on. The Kid grinned, pulled in his mustang, and like magic one of the walnut-butted guns leaped into his hand.

"Halt!"

The driver jumped.

"Waal, I swow!" he ejaculated.

"Put 'em up!" said the Rio Kid.

The hack driver gazed at him for a moment, and then, dropping the reins, elevated his hands above his head.

From the passenger came a startled exclamation.

"Keep 'em up, feller," drawled the Kid. "I ain't honing to spill your juice, but if you let them paws down, sree, this hyer hack will sure want a new driver."

"This hyer is a hold-up?" asked the driver, staring at the Kid.

"Guessed it in once."

"I sure ain't horning in," said the driver placidly. "I guess I'll come along to see you when you're strung up, feller."

"You'll sure be welcome!" said the Kid politely.

While he was speaking to the driver, the Kid had a keen eye on the man in the hack.

The passenger was eyeing him with a strange mixture of alarm and uncertainty and questioning. Hank Schulz, certainly, was expecting to be held up on that trail, and robbed of the widow's dollars. But this was not how he had expected it to happen. This boy puncher was a stranger to him, and he reckoned he knew all Hanson's gang. This might be a new member of the gang whom he had not yet seen; but he was troubled and uneasy. If, by some unlooked-for chance, a real hold-up preceded the pretended one, it meant disaster to Mr. Schulz's little schemes.

Light down, feller!" called out the Kid.

The passenger stared at him uncertainly.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

The Kid laughed.

"I guess I'm the galoot that's holding the gun," he answered, "and the gun sure will talk, if you don't do as you're told, like a good little man. Light down, I'm telling you."

And the passenger, breathing hard, stepped from the hack into the trail.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
The Kid Takes the Dollars.

HANK SCHULZ eyed the Kid searchingly, savagely.

If this was the hold-up he had been looking for, it was happening in the most unexpected way. It should have been carried out by a gang, which would have made it clear, with the driver to witness, that Schulz had no chance of resistance. And it should not have happened on the open prairie, where interruption might come at any moment.

"Look here——" muttered the foreman of Malpais uneasily.

"I guess you're Hank Schulz?" drawled the Kid. "Foreman of the Widow Cassidy's ranch at Malpais, what?"

"Sure!" muttered Schulz.

"Then you're my mutton, with the wool on," declared the Kid. "I guess I'm saving you the trouble of taking them dollars all the way to the bank at El Cerro, hombre. Hand them over!"

"How'd you know I'd got dollars for the bank?" demanded Schulz, bending his brows at the Kid.

"I guess these hyer things get out, feller," drawled the Kid. "Black Hanson has his own way of getting wise to them."

Schulz drew a breath of relief.

If this unknown rider came from Black Hanson, all was well; and the mention of the name seemed to imply as much.

In the presence of the stage-driver, Schulz dared not ask questions; neither did he care to draw the outlaw beyond hearing. It was necessary for him to keep up appearances, and the driver was watching the scene curiously, as he sat with his hands clasped on his hat.

"You belong to Hanson's gang?" asked Schulz.

"You sure want to know a lot!" drawled the Kid. "I ain't here to spill chin music, feller. I'm hyer for them dollars."

Schulz's eyes glittered at him.

The mention of Black Hanson's name had reassured him, but he wanted to be quite sure before he parted with the bag of dollars.

The Kid understood his uncertainty of mind, but he was not in the least disposed to relieve him.

"You want to get a move on, hombre," he said; "I'm sure getting tired of holding this gun."

Schulz turned back to the hack, and lifted out a little buckskin bag. He came closer to the Kid with the bag in his hand.

"I guess I want to see them dollars," said the Kid. "Open that leetle grip, feller, and let a galoot look."

Schulz opened the string at the neck of the bag, and the Kid satisfied himself as to the contents. The faintest of whispers dropped from Schulz's lips at the same moment.

"Where's Hanson?"

"Ten miles away," answered the Kid, in the same tone.

"He put you wise to this?"

"He sure did," grinned the Kid.

"Why didn't he come?"

"I guess he's somewhere else," said the Kid. "Say, that driver will get plumb curious if he spots you whispering, feller."

"The fool!" breathed Schulz. "There should have been three of them at least—what will it look like, me being held up by a single man, and handing over the dollars? The fool!"

"I guess one man is sure able to hold up a galoot of your heft," said the Kid, with a contempt that brought a flush of rage into the Malpais foreman's dark face. "If you want to put up a rookus, I'm sure your mutton, and I'll give you a chance to get out your gun."

"You fool!" hissed Schulz. "Are you mad?"

"I guess not!" grinned the Kid. "Only anxious to oblige, if you figure that you're able to stop this flyer hold-up."

Schulz gritted his teeth.

He was sure now that the road-agent came from Black Hanson, and that was what he wanted to be sure of. But he was deeply enraged by the Kid's tone and words, and by the unexpected way the hold-up was taking place. The driver was a witness to the robbery, as intended; but he was also a witness to the fact that Schulz handed over the bag of dollars tamely to a single adversary—a mere lad; which the rascally foreman of Malpais had not intended at all.

"Look here," he breathed, in too low a tone for the driver to hear, "you better let up on this. It sure looks too bad for me. Get back to Hanson, and tell him it won't do—you get me? I'll pull a gun, and you'll hit the trail like you was scared—that will do for the driver. Shoot one of the hosses as you go—that'll delay the hack, and give Hanson time to horn in with his gang. You get me?"

"I get you!" assented the Kid, grinning cheerily, "and I warn you that if you touch a gun, you'll get yours, Mr. Schulz."

"What?" hissed the Malpais foreman.

"Hand over them dollars!"

"I tell you——"

"I guess you've spilled enough," said the Kid. "Put that grip in my hand, and quit chewing the rag."

His revolver looked the Malpais foreman full in the face, with his cool eyes glinting over it.

"Pronto!" he snapped.

"I tell you——" snarled Schulz.

Bang!

The Colt roared, and the Malpais foreman started, with a yell, as a bullet clipped by his ear.

"That's a warning!" grinned the Kid. "The next one will sure give you your last sickness, if you don't hand over that grip."

Schulz stood trembling with rage and doubt. With the tail of his eye, the Kid noticed that the driver was staring away across the plain, with an interested expression on his face. The Kid guessed the meaning of that. The moving object he had seen in the distance was nearer, and he figured that it was a bunch of cowpunchers, and that the driver was hopefully looking for an interruption to the hold-up.

"Pronto!" he snapped; and Schulz, gritting his teeth with rage, handed over the bag of dollars.

"Now drop your gun!"

The Malpais foreman drew the gun from his belt. That he was thinking of chancing a pot-shot, was evident from the savage glitter in his eyes, and the Kid's face hardened.

"Don't!" he said quietly.

And the Malpais foreman did not. He dropped the gun to the earth, and the Kid motioned him back to the hack.

Then the Rio Kid glanced round in the direction in which the driver was staring.

Two horsemen were coming towards the spot, as fast as their bronchos could fly under the urging of whip and spur.

Two punchers, who had spotted the hold-up from a far distance and were riding hard to horn in. The Kid had guessed as much from the expression on the stage-driver's face.

Many a time the life of this daring young outlaw, the Rio Kid, has been saved by his wonderful grey mustang. Always the Kid's first thought is for his big, four-legged pal, in and out of danger. And this horse has shown the same faithfulness to his master. Through storm and sunshine these two ride, carefree and happy. Meet 'em every week!

He laughed lightly.

"Them galoots are sure honing to get in touch with me," he said. "You want to tell them where to find me when they get here, driver."

"You put me wise, and I sure will!" grinned the driver.

"Sure! I'm going to bank this money at El Cerro," drawled the Kid. "It sure ain't safe toting it around on the prairie, with so many bull-dozers and bad men around!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the driver.

The Kid chuckled.

"I'm sure giving you straight goods," he declared.

And he rode away at a gallop, leaving the stage-driver laughing and the passenger scowling blackly. That the hold-up man intended to ride into El Cerro and bank the dollars he had taken from the passenger appealed to the stage-driver as a good joke.

The Kid looked back from the saddle of the galloping mustang.

The punchers reached the halted hack, and then, after a momentary halt, came galloping after the Kid.

The Rio Kid waved his hand at them, and urged on his mustang. There was no broncho between the Rio Grande and the Cimarron that could equal the mustang the Kid rode. Shots spattered out behind him, falling far short; and for an hour or more the punchers hung desperately on his trail, anxious to get hold of the daring hold-up man. But the black-muzzled mustang showed them his heels, and at last the Kid dropped them behind on the prairie. And once out of sight of his pursuers, the Kid changed his course and rode for the town of El Cerro. Little as the stage-driver had believed him, the Kid had stated his exact intention—he was heading for El Cerro to bank the dollars he had taken on the trail.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
When Rogues Fall Out!

"HALT!"

"Jumping gophers!" ejaculated the stage-driver.

Hold-ups had happened on the Malpais trail before, but two hold-ups in one day was a record.

But there was no doubt about it. The hack, rolling on to El Cerro, had reached the belt of timber a mile out of the town. Suddenly from the timber three horsemen emerged, and levelled revolvers surrounded the hack.

The driver pulled in his horses.

From the interior of the hack, Hank Schulz glared at the outlaws. He was more astonished than the driver.

For this gang was Hanson's gang. He knew that. Their faces were masked with cotton handkerchiefs, but he knew his associates. But what the hold-up meant he could not begin to guess.

"Hands up, driver!" rapped out Black Hanson.

"Up they goes!" grinned the driver, elevating them above his head. "I'm sure getting a piece tired of putting them up, feller, and I hope you're the last lot to-day. I reckon it's raining road-agents on this here trail."

Black Hanson stared at him, and then rode to the side of the hack.

"Light down!" he snapped.

Schulz stepped out.

Black Hanson flourished a revolver.

"I guess you're Hank Schulz," he remarked. "Put your hands up, feller! Hyer, Kansas, you go through the galoot!"

Kansas dropped from his horse and "went through" the foreman of Malpais. The expression on Schulz's face puzzled Black Hanson. All was going according to programme, so far as he knew, and he could not understand the rage and astonishment in the Malpais foreman's looks.

"I guess there ain't nothing in his duds!" said Kansas.

"Look in the hack—I reckon he's got suthin'! He ain't going to El Cerro for nothing," said Black Hanson.

Kansas began to search the hack.

"Nothin' hyer," he announced.

"I guess you galoots are too late," said the stage-driver. "This hyer hoarse has been held up way back on the trail, and the hold-up man sure waltzed off with the goods."

"Can it!" snarled Hanson.

"It's true!" breathed Schulz. "I thought it was one of your gang. He got the bag of dollars——"

"Guess again!" said Black Hanson, in a tone of menace. He made Schulz a sign to back into the timber, out of hearing of the driver, who looked on with a grin.

"Now, what's the game?" asked

Black Hanson savagely. "We're here according to schedule, and I guess we want that bag of dollars, Hank Schulz. If you're double-crossed me, you durned coyote, same as you have the Widder Cassidy, you won't ever tell the world how you done it! Spill it, pronto!"

Schulz snarled with rage.

"The hack was held up ten miles back," he choked. "The galoot allowed he came from you, and I thought——"

Hanson's eyes glittered through the holes in his mask.

"That won't do for me!" he sneered. "If a galoot held up the hack, how'd he know there was any dollars along? I reckon you didn't sing out to all Malpais that you was taking dollars to the bank at El Cerro."

"He said you put him wise!" hissed Schulz. "I figured that he was a new man in the gang. Anyhow, he allowed he came from you."

"Forget it!" said Black Hanson. "I ain't said a word to any galoot, 'ceptin' Kansas and Mohave hyer. Not a durned syllable. You pesky coyote, you've fixed this up to get the whole caboodle, and leave us out in the cold!"

Schulz's eyes blazed.

The two rascals glared at one another. Each was firm in the belief that the other was seeking to double-cross him.

"You lying coyote!" snarled Black Hanson. "No man of mine held up the hack! You fixed it——"

"I tell you——" hissed Schulz.

The outlaw's revolver was aimed.

"Hand over them dollars, you double-crossing thief! Pronto!" His eyes glared over the revolver.

"I tell you, that galoot got them!" howled Schulz. "And it was one of your gang——"

Crash!

Black Hanson had fired!

. . . . . .

The Rio Kid hitched his horse to the post outside the bank at El Cerro, and strolled into the building.

He glanced round him and sauntered up to the long desk, where the cashier sat with books and papers before him and a six-shooter close to his right hand. Bank hold-ups were not infrequent at El Cerro, and in that lively town a bank clerk required to be able to handle a gun as easily as a pen. And the man behind the counter had an alert look in his eyes at the sight of a two-gun man coming in.

The Kid gave him a reassuring nod and a grin.

"I reckon you got the Widow Cassidy's dust in this here shebang, feller," he remarked—"Widow Cassidy, of Malpais?"

"Mrs. Cassidy, of Malpais, has an account here, certainly," answered the cashier.

"I reckoned so," assented the Kid. "And the widder's sure sent a thousand dollars to herd with the rest, feller."

And the Kid slammed down the bag of dollars.

"You a new hand on the Malpais Ranch?" asked the cashier, as he counted over the contents of the bag. "I haven't seen you before."

The Kid smiled.

"Nope! I reckon I jest took this job on for once," he drawled. "Mr. Schulz started with them dollars, but I figured that they wasn't safe on the trail, so I just bunged in with them. I guess the widder'll be pleased to know they got here safe. You want to hand out a bit of paper, I reckon?"

The cashier smiled.

"There's the receipt," he said. "Received one thousand dollars to credit of Mrs. Cassidy, of Malpais."

"I guess that's square," said the Kid. "So-long, feller!" And with a cheery nod he strolled out of the bank, and ten minutes later the receipt was posted to Mrs. Cassidy, at Malpais, in El Cerro Post Office.

The Rio Kid had remounted the grey mustang and ridden out of the town long before the hack from Malpais rolled in with startling news.

It was a nine days' wonder at El Cerro. The stage-driver told of what had happened. How the hack had been held up by a road-agent who looked like a kid-puncher, who had taken the bag of dollars; held up a second time by Black Hanson and his gang, who had shot Hank Schulz in their rage and disappointment at getting nothing. And much sympathy was felt for the Widow Cassidy till it was learned that the bag of dollars had arrived safely at the bank, with not a dollar missing. It was a strange story, and it got all the Texan town guessing. And a search was made for the kid-puncher who had held up the hack and brought the money on to the bank. But he was not found. By that time the grey mustang had travelled far, and many a long mile lay between El Cerro and the Rio Kid.

THE END.

(Another roaring complete Western yarn of the Rio Kid next week, chums!)

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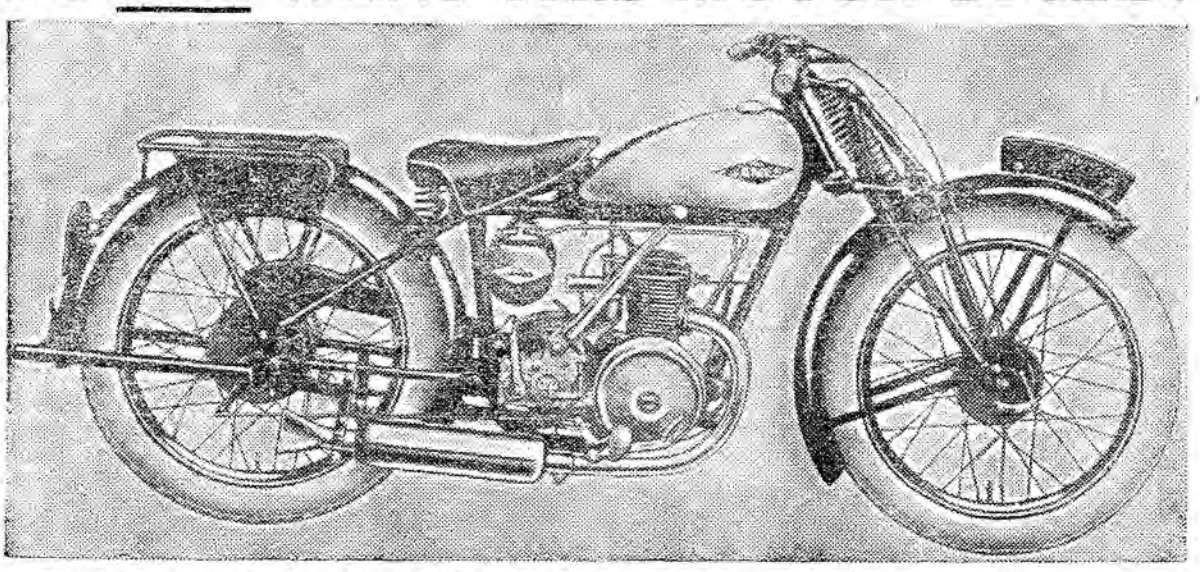

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