

## THE KID IN TROUBLE AGAIN!

Most of the Rio Kid's ill-luck can be traced to the one source—his unfortunate knack of walking into other people's troubles and becoming involved therein. He's up to his neck in it again this week!



A TOPPING LONG COMPLETE TALE OF WESTERN ADVENTURE, FEATURING THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW.

### THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Held up on the Trail.

IT was no business of the Kid's. Twice or thrice he told himself so. Perhaps because he was not quite convinced.

Horning into other folks' troubles had been the Rio Kid's bane. Most of his ill-luck could be traced to that one source.

He sat on the high bluff overlooking the Wildcat trail, with indifferent gaze—or gaze that he tried to make indifferent. It was no business of his, and this time, at least, he would keep clear of a "rookus" that did not concern him.

The Rio Kid was in Montana now. Many a long hundred miles lay between him and his own country of Texas—long hundreds of miles that weighed, sometimes, on the Kid's cheery heart. He was in cow country again, but different from the cow country he had known in the south, along the banks of the Rio Grande. And every difference was, to the eyes of the Texas puncher, a difference for the worse. There were too many hills, and too many mountains; the stretches of grass-land were not so fertile, not so rich and fragrant; the sun had lost the burning blaze to which he had been used from his earliest years. Towns lay too near together; railways disfigured the country; telegraph wires stretched in the most unexpected places. The Rio Kid avoided towns as if they had been plague spots. He hated to hear his spurs ring on a pavement; he wanted no means of transport other than the saddle on the black-muzzled grey mustang. He had no use for telephones and telegraphs, for Pullman cars or automobiles—still less use for fences and notice-boards. He had ridden into the Wildcat country because it was cow country, and because a pilgrim he had met up with on a trail had told him that it was the roughest, wildest cow country in Montana—the most unspoiled, from the Rio Kid's point of view.

In the Wildcat section men still packed guns, and sometimes used them; cattle camps were rough and ready; it was not unknown for a bunch of cowboys to "shoot up" a town while on a bender. Frontier feuds still survived there, and on lonely trails rustlers and road-agents still plied their peculiar calling. It was

### This Week: "THE SPARSHOTT FEUD!"

a country where the Rio Kid could feel more or less at home; where he could camp down in the timber without seeing the smoke of any man's chimney on the horizon. So the Kid, putting the memory of Texas, and the Rio Frio, and the old Double-Bar bunch out of his thoughts, rode the Montana trails with a cheery face and a light heart. More than once he had looked in at a ranch, and passed on his way. The Kid, with a fat roll in his belt, was his own man these days, and could afford to please himself. That was how it happened that he was camped, in the heat of the day, on the bluff that overlooked the Wildcat trail, intending to ride again in the cool of the later afternoon, when the two-horse hack from the railway depot at Singer came along, and was stopped almost under the bluff where the Kid sat looking down.

That little hack, with its two horses, driven by a red-bearded man in shirt-sleeves, ran once a day from the railway depot to the cattle town of Wildcat—a long trip. The Kid, sitting among the mesquite on the high cliff, watched it idly when it appeared from a bend of the trail, and came clattering along over a stony, sun-baked track. His keen eyes, keen as an eagle's, noted from a distance that there was one passenger in the hack—a young fellow who looked like a puncher. The Kid watched the hack idly, without any special interest, simply because it was the only moving object in a wide landscape. His interest awakened more keenly when there was a movement at the trail twenty feet below the bluff where he sat and two horsemen pushed out into view from the cover of the rocks. The Kid could see little more of them than their Stetson hats, but he did not need telling what their game was.

"Gee-whiz!" murmured the Kid.

It was plainly a hold-up.

Both the horsemen were masked. Each of them had a gun in his hand. One of them rode into the trail in front of the advancing hack, and lifted his gun to a level.

"Halt!"

That sharp command reached the ears of the interested Kid above.

The hack driver pulled in his team at once. The little vehicle clattered to a stop on the stony trail.

The other horseman rode to the side of the hack, his gun up, his eyes gleaming over it through the holes in his mask.

"Light down!"

That order was given to the passenger within.

The Kid watched.

It was no business of his. That was as clear as daylight. He had come to Montana to punch cows, not to intervene in a trouble of this kind. In far-off Texas the Kid was wanted, himself, by many a sheriff. In his own country he was an outlaw, though not by his own choice. He had no call to chip in here. A hold-up on a Montana trail was nothing to him, and the Kid stilled the impulse to drop his hand on a walnut-butted gun at his belt. He sat and watched.

The man in the hack looked out at the horseman.

In his sun-browned, rather handsome face, the Kid could read a doubt. He knew that the pilgrim was considering whether to pull a gun. But a revolver was looking him in the face, and he decided not.

"Light down!"

The man in the hack smiled as he answered:

"I guess you've made a poor strike this time, pardner! I've come back on the railroad with nothing over my hack fare to Wildcat."

"Light down!"

"Any old thing!" drawled the cowman in the hack, and he stepped down into the trail.

"Put 'em up!"

The young man elevated his hands over his head.

His face still wore a careless smile.

"Nothing in it, I keep on telling you!" the Kid heard him say. "No roll, and no baggage. You're wasting your time, hombre."

The horseman did not heed him. He called out to his comrade, who pulled his horse aside from the trail.

"Drive on!"

The hack driver looked round in surprise. But a gun was staring him in

the face, and he shook out his reins and drove on.

"Here, I say!" exclaimed the passenger who had alighted. "I guess you don't want me to walk the other two miles to Wildcat! What's this game?"

"Keep your hands up!" rapped out the horseman, holding him steadily covered with the six-gun. "Here, Rube!"

"Yep!"

"Get hold of his gat."

Rube dismounted, and advanced on the young cattleman. Under a levelled gun, the passenger of the hack did not resist, though his eyes were gleaming now. It seemed to occur to him—as it occurred to the Kid watching from above—that there was something more in this than a common hold-up. But he was at the mercy of the road-agents, and he kept his hands up.

Rube drew a gun from the young cow-man's hip-pocket, and slipped it into his own. But the masked horseman's gun still covered the cow-man.

"Rope up his paws, Rube."

"You bet!"

The young cow-man made a move. But the threatening gun was within four feet of his face. His hands were drawn behind him, and bound together with a length of trail-rope. Far in the distance the clatter of the hack died away in the direction of Wildcat.

"What's this game?" asked the young cow-man, and there was an angry ring in his voice. "This ain't a hold-up! What's the game? What do you want with me?"

"I guess we'll put you wise, now we've got you dead to rights," said the horseman, and he dragged the mask from his face. "Look, Kent Loring! Look, you durned galoot, and see who is going to string you up on a cedar beside the trail."

The young cowman looked at the face revealed by the removal of the mask—a hard-featured tanned face. His own face paled.

"Eben Sparshott!" he muttered, and he dragged fiercely at the rope that held his wrists. But he dragged in vain.

"Rig a rope to a branch, Rube!" said the horseman, curtly, "When the punchers find him swinging by the trail, they'll know that there's an end of the Sparshott feud! You've got five minutes, boy!"

He dropped the gun into his holster, and dismounted. The other rustler had removed his mask now, showing a hard face very much like the other's. The two evidently were near relatives. Rube Sparshott took a trail-rope from his saddle, noosed the end, and flung it over a branch by the trail. And on the top of the bluff, the Rio Kid dropped a hand on the walnut butt of a gun. A hold-up on the trail was no business of his—he had no call to chip in, though he had found it hard to resist the impulse to do so. But this was his business—any white man's business. The Rio Kid rose quietly from his seat among the mesquite; a gun in his hand, and with silent footsteps crept down a winding path that led him to the lower trail.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### The Rio Kid Horns In!

**K**ENT LORING stood motionless, the pallor showing through the tan on his cheeks, his eyes burning.

There was no sign of fear on his face: only the bitter knowledge that death was close at hand.

Rube Sparshott was fixing the rope

that was to swing him to death. Eben Sparshott stood watching him, with a grim grin of triumph on his hard-featured face.

"You coyote!" said the cowman, at last. "You'd never have got me, if you hadn't covered up your faces, and made me figure that it was jest a hold-up! You was always a cowardly crew."

The elder Sparshott grinned.

"I reckoned we knew you was handy with a gun, Kent," he said. "If you'd been wise to us you'd have chanced a draw. I reckoned it was safe to get you fixed."

"You durned coyote."

"Shoot off your mouth while you've got time," said Sparshott, grimly.

"The minutes are going. The Sparshott feud comes to an end to-day, Kent—you're the last of your crowd, and you're going up as soon as that rope's ready. You're going to be strung up like Peter Sparshott was ten years ago."

"Peter Sparshott was a cow thief."

"I guess the Lorings said he was," grunted Sparshott. "I guess they got a lynch crowd to believe it."

"It was true, you durned coyote; he rustled cows off a dozen ranches, and changed their brands," said Kent. "He was lynched because he was a cow thief."

"Keep it up!" jeered the other. "You ain't got much time. The Lorings lynched Peter Sparshott; but I guess they've paid for it. What became of your father, who led the lynching? Where are your uncles, who had a hand in it? Where's your brother, who shot a Sparshott in the Red Dog saloon at Wildcat? You're going after them, Kent, and you're the last of the crowd—the feud ends this day."

Kent made no answer; but his eyes gleamed up and down the trail. The elder Sparshott laughed grimly.

"There ain't no help coming to you," he said. "Nothing on this trail after the hack goes, you know that, Kent. I guess if some puncher should trail this way, he won't help you any—he'll find you swinging from that branch. If you've got any prayers to say, you don't want to lose any more time, Kent."

"I guess that rope's ready, Eben," drawled the younger Sparshott.

"You ready, Kent?" grinned Sparshott.

"You durned galoot!" muttered the cowman, huskily. "I guess if I had a hand loose, and a gat in it—"

"You won't never grip a gat again, Kent! You was too handy with a gat when you shot up George Sparshott last fall at Wildcat."

"He drew on me," muttered Kent. "Sure he did, and you beat him to it. But I guess we've beat you to it this time, and you're going up."

There was a movement among the rocks by the trail. The Rio Kid, silent and unseen, had wormed his way down from the high bluff at a little distance, and under cover of the rocks, he had reached the spot now. Both the Sparshotts started, as they heard that movement by the trail; but the Kid made no sound till it was too late for them to take warning. Their startled eyes fixed on the Texas puncher as he stepped into view, a gun in either hand, grinning over them.

"Let up on it, fellers," drawled the Rio Kid. "It ain't good enough. Don't touch them guns, I advise you."

Both the men had reached for their weapons, at that unexpected apparition.

"Let up!" rapped the Kid, with sharp menace in his voice. "Put up your paws, both of you, pronto."

The younger Sparshott lifted his hands. But the elder, with a curse, dragged the gun from his belt.

Bang!

Eben Sparshott gave a wild yell, as his right arm dropped to his side, his gun clanging on the stony trail. The limb had been broken by the Kid's swift bullet.

"I guess I warned you," said the Kid. "You asked for that, feller! You want to be thankful that I didn't put the lead through your cabeza. You other galoot want any?"

His eyes gleamed at Rube Sparshott. "None in mine, puncher," said Rube, and he held his hands high above his head.

The elder man sank down on a boulder, his tanned face white as chalk, gripping his wounded arm with his left hand. From his white face his eyes burned at the Kid.

"Darn you!" he muttered, thickly. "What call have you got to chip in here, you dog-goned puncher?"

"Nix," said the Kid, cheerily. "I guess I'm a galoot that never could mind his own business. That's always been my little trouble, Mr. Sparshott. I allow you've sure got cause to be mad at my horning into this rookus; but I guess the other side will be mighty pleased. How about that?" asked the Kid, with a smiling glance at the bound cowman.

Kent Loring breathed hard and deep. "I don't know you, puncher," he said. "I guess you're a stranger in this section. But I allow I'm mighty glad to see you here. I reckon it was me for the long jump if you hadn't horned in."

"I guess so," assented the Kid. "I don't know the rights of this matter, and can't say I want to—I've happened on feuds in my own country, and I know they're powerful bad medicine for a stranger to horn into. But I wouldn't stand for seeing a white man strung up like a horse thief. No, sir."

"Let me loose—"

"All in good time," smiled the Kid. "I guess these Sparshott gents want attending to first. You Rube, if that's your call-by, you drop that gun from your belt—and don't happen to lift it, or there will be a dead Sparshott lying on this trail the next second."

Rube Sparshott's gun clanged on the trail. Then, at a gesture from the Kid, he elevated his hands again above his head.

"You sure are a good little man, and know how to take orders," smiled the Kid, approvingly. "I ain't come to Montana to horn into trouble with any man, and I don't want any Sparshott feud on my hands; but I'll sure make it last sickness for you if you try any gun-game. Chew on that, and stand where you are, feller."

"I guess I know enough to go in when it rains," said Rube Sparshott. "You've woke up trouble that will come home to you, puncher, if you hang on in this country. But you've got the pull now."

"I sure have," agreed the Kid. He dropped one gun into a holster, stepped up to the wounded man who sat on the boulder, and disarmed him of a second gun and a knife.

"Now I guess we can talk quite comfortable and cosy, without any gun-play interrupting the harmony of the meeting," remarked the Kid, good-temperedly. And with Sparshott's knife he cut through the rope that bound Kent's wrists. "You want to get hold of your gun, Mr. Loring; I've sure got a hunch that you'll feel better with a gat in your grip, with all these Sparshotts around."

"You've said it," grinned the cowman.

Ebenezer Sparshott leaned back heavily against the rock. He was almost fainting with loss of blood; but his deep, sunken eyes burned at the Rio Kid.

"I'll remember you," he muttered, faintly. "I'll sure remember you."

"I guess I take that kindly," said the Kid, cheerily. "Remember at the same time that you want to be mighty sudden on the shoot, feller, if you stir up trouble with me next time we meet up; I sure might blow a hole through your cabeza next time. Mr. Loring, now you've got hold of your gun, likely this bulldozer Rube would jump at a leetle gun-play, with me looking on to see all fair and square."

"I guess I want him to," said the cowman, his eyes gleaming at the younger Sparshott.

"What about it, feller?" asked the Kid. "I've had to shoot up your pard, but your still spry and lively, and if you want to get on with this hyer feud, I'll hand you a gat and see fair play. Mr. Loring is ready and willing; what about you?"

Rube shook his head.

"I guess I don't want any gun-play," he said, sullenly.

"Not on a fair break, what?" grinned the Kid. "Yep! I reckon I had sized you up pretty well, you dog-goned geck. You sure want to get the pull on a man, two to one, that's your style. That's what's the matter with you, you gink."

Rube gritted his teeth.

"I've got to look arter my brother—he's sure hard hit—"

"He sure is, and you can look after him all you want," said the Kid. "Take him home and tell him to be a good little man when a Texan puncher is around." The Rio Kid whistled, and the black-muzzled mustang came loping from the mesquite thickets. "I guess these Sparshotts get my goat, Mr. Loring, and I'm hitting the trail pronto. If you're coming my way, I'll walk a piece with you—unless you figure on borrowing a Sparshott cayuse."

Kent shook his head.

"I reckon I can walk," he said. "Let's get on, puncher—this gun sure burns my hand when there's a Sparshott around. You Rube, you reckon you don't want any gun-play?"

"Nope!" snarled Rube.

Kent beited the gun.

"After this, it's shooting on sight," he said. "Chew on that, you dog-goned coyote! I'm ready, puncher."

And the Rio Kid and his new acquaintance walked up the trail towards Wildcat, the grey mustang following; and the Sparshotts were lost to view behind them.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### The Kid finds a Job!

THE Rio Kid was not given to walking; like a true cow-puncher, he hated being afoot, and would not have gone fifty yards out of the saddle by choice. But he walked cheerily enough with the young Montana cowman, who had to go afoot, the hack having long vanished from sight. And he did not find the walk dull, for he talked cheerily on the way with his new acquaintance, and learned a good deal of the new country he found himself in. Kent told him of the history of the Sparshott feud, which for ten years and more had accounted for most of the mortality in the Wildcat section. Such feuds the Kid had

heard of often enough; they were not uncommon in his own country of Texas; and the tale was not new to his ears. The quarrel had started with the lynching of Peter Sparshott, suspected of cow-stealing—the necktie party having been led by a Loring. The whole clan of Sparshott had taken up the quarrel, and shooting affrays in the streets of Wildcat, and in the lonely gulches, followed—now a Loring, now a Sparshott, had been found shot up; the slayer sometimes known, sometimes only guessed. It had gone on till of the Lorings only young Kent remained living; and of the more numerous clan of the Sparshotts only three—the two brothers who had held up Kent on the trail, and another who had not been on the scene.

"I guess it was a case of six of one, and just as many of the other," Kent told the Kid, frankly. "This is a wild country, and galoots are rather quick to shoot; and nobody knows for dead sure whether old Peter Sparshott did rustle them cows; though most folks figured that he did; they had more cows on the Sparshott ranch than ever they could have accounted for, and they've got more now, I reckon. But I was a little kid when it began, and I was sure willing to let it come to an end, and I told them so—it's a hard row to hoe in this country without packing a gun every time you go out to rope a cow or mend a fence. But they wouldn't let it drop—the Sparshotts are a hard crowd. They're yellow, too, the three of them that are left—look at the way they roped me in to-day. I guess it will be shooting on sight after this—I'm not taking any more chances of that sort. They're three to one and they may get me. I guess a Texas puncher won't be on hand to horn in next time," he added, with a smile.

The Kid grinned.

"I'm sure glad I was on hand," he said. "I reckon it might be better for your health to pull up stakes and look for a new country."

"I guess so; but I ain't quitting," said Kent. "Besides, my land's here, and no Sparshott is going to drive me off it. Not that it amounts to shucks," he added, ruefully. "I had to fire my last man; what with cattle being run off or shot, and fences burned, and wells choked, and the rest of it, my ranch has gone all to pieces. The Sparshotts have a big ranch and a rough crowd of punchers, and they've been too much for me."

The Kid looked at him.

They had come to a fork in the trail, and Kent halted.

"You going on to Wildcat?" he asked.

"That was what I figured on," said the Kid.

"I break off here to get to my shebang."

The Kid paused.

He liked the Montana cowman; and he found Kent Loring a fellow after his own heart. He was interested in him; and in the losing fight he was waging against his enemies. No doubt it was the Rio Kid's old besetting weakness that was finding him out once more: horning into another man's troubles.

"You allow you fired your last man?" the Kid asked, thoughtfully.

"Yep."

"Why—if you don't mind a galoot asking."

Kent laughed.

"All Wildcat knows why," he answered. "Because there was nothing left to pay him another week's money."

"Then you're all on your lonesome now?"

"Just that."

"Ranching on your lonesome own?" said the Kid. "And with the pesky Sparshotts gunning after you. You sure have a day's work to get through every day, Mr. Loring."

"All that, and a little over," answered Kent. "I'd sell up and pull out, only I ain't letting the Sparshotts drive me away."

"Any stock left on the land?"

"Pesky few. A dozen cows and a couple of horses," answered Kent. "And I reckon I may find those cows drove, when I get back. I've been to Butte on the railroad to fix up a mortgage, if I could—but the money galoots don't want mortgages on Wildcat lands. They wouldn't give me ten dollars on a sale, let alone a mortgage. But I guess I'm keeping on."

"You want a new man?"

"I sure do, but I keep on tolling you there ain't any pay for a man on my ranch," he said. "And a man on the Loring lands has a good chance of being shot from behind a tree. You looking for a job in Montana?"

"You get me," assented the Kid.

"You'll find a better, and you couldn't find a worse," said Kent. "You ride on to Wildcat and you'll land a job fast enough if you know how to handle a rope and tie up a steer."

The Kid chuckled.

"That's where I live," he said. "They used to say on the Double Bar that I was fairly good with the steers. Look here, Mr. Loring, I've a hunch that I'd like to work on your ranch for a spell."

"Forget it," said Kent. "No cowman works for no pay, and find himself in food."

"I guess that will suit me, for a spell," said the Kid. "If you've got only a dozen cows left, the work sure won't break me. And if the Sparshotts come gunning after you, I'm the very galoot you want around."

Kent paused.

"Look here, puncher," he said. "I don't know your name—"

"You can call me Kid Carfax."

"Well, Kid Carfax, I get you," said Kent. "You'd like to lend a galoot a hand in his trouble, and you're a white man to make the offer. But it ain't good enough, Mr. Carfax. After shooting up Eben Sparshott, you'll have the whole crowd on your trail; and you want to ride, cowboy, and ride as fast as your critter can hit the trail; that's what you want. After what you've done for me, I should be real sorry to see you laid out on the plains with a bullet-hole through your head."

The Kid laughed.

"You reckon you're obliged to me, some, for horning in yonder on the trail?" he asked.

"Yep."

"Make it square, then, by handing me a job on your ranch as long as I want to hang on. No pay, and grub-stake myself," said the Kid. "I've sure got a hunch that it will suit me."

"If you put it like that—"

"I sure do."

"Then it's a cinch," said Kent. "I guess you'll soon get fed-up and want to pull out; but so long as you want to hang on at my ranch, you're more than welcome, and I'll be dog-gone glad to have you there!" he added frankly.

"It's a cinch," said the Kid.

And with the grey mustang following, the Rio Kid turned off the trail with the cowman, and struck across country for the Loring Ranch.

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

## The Attack!

**K**ID CARFAX—for the name of the Rio Kid was never used by him on his wanderings since he had pulled out of the Rio Grande country—looked round him with interest as he reached the home of his friend. Kent's description of the place had prepared him for poor quarters, and the quarters were poor enough. At one time it had been a prosperous little ranch, but frontier feuds did not make for a continuance of prosperity. Here and there round the buildings fragments of burnt fences showed in the grass—a burnt barn made a heap of black ruin—and on the shutters of the ranch house itself, unpainted for years, the gashes of bullets were clearly visible. More than once, the Kid figured, that little timber building had stood a siege, with plenty of lead flying. There were signs on all sides of the havoc wrought by bitter and unceasing enmity—an enmity that never slept by day or night. But desolate as the place was, Kent's face brightened when he reached it, and the Kid could see that he was relieved.

"I reckon they made sure of getting me, coming back from the railroad," Kent remarked. "I sure figured that they might have been hyer while I was gone to Butte, and I'd find the ranch burning when I got back. But they reckoned for sure they'd get me on the trail."

The Kid whistled.

"What about the sheriff?" he asked. "Ain't it his business to keep a man's house from being burned while he's away?"

"I guess the sheriff sings small when the Sparshotts are around," answered Kent. "They're a hard crowd, and they've got a tough bunch at their ranch, and the sheriff don't want no trouble with them. Besides, who's to prove it up against them? I reckon they don't bring witnesses with them when they burn my fences and fire my barns and drive off my cows. There's law and judges down at Butte if I want them, but I guess I've no use for them. It was sure Eben Sparshott who fired that barn, but his whole bunch would swear that he was at home at the ranch when it was fired. Feuds in the cow country ain't settled in law courts, Mr. Carfax."

"I sure know that," assented the Kid. "But you've got a hard row to hoe with that crowd against you, feller."

"Sure!" said Kent. "Every galoot in Wildcat figures that they'll get me soon or late, and I dare say they're right. What I'm afraid of is that they'll get you, Mr. Carfax, if you bed down here."

"I guess I'm chancing that," said the Kid carelessly. "Where's the horses and cows you told me of? I don't see them."

"The cows are at pasture in a hollow where they wouldn't be found in a hurry," said Kent, "and the hosses are trail-roped by the creek—among the cedars yonder. You can turn your cayuse into the shed. There's a heap of alfalfa there. Let's get into the shebang."

The Kid carried his slicker pack into the timber ranch house. Kent made a fire in the wide chimney, and the Kid carried water from the creek. The well close by the house, Kent explained, was choked—a dead mule had been pitched into it one dark night. The Kid's face was thoughtful as he sat at supper with the young rancher. He was not sorry that he had thrown in his lot, for the time, with Kent Loring; he was glad



**THE CHALLENGE!** Outside the hut, in the bright moonlight, a tall, powerful man could be seen beating on the door with a heavy quirt. "Come out, Kent Loring, you gol-darned skunk!" roared the intruder. "Come out, man to man!" (See Chapter 4.)

that he was there to help a white man who was down on his luck. But the game that Kent was playing was a losing game; the Kid could see that. He was playing a lone hand against big odds, and if the Wildcat galoots figured that his enemies were sure to get him, the Kid opined that the Wildcat galoots were not far off in their guess. All the more because he realised that very clearly, the Rio Kid was glad that he had happened on the Sparshott feud, and it was no regret to him that he found himself ranged on the weaker side against the stronger. That had always been the Kid's way. If ever a man needed a friend to stand by him, this Montana cow-man did; and the Kid, who was an outlaw in his own country, was just the man to do it.

"I guess they've got you, pard," the Kid remarked, as he negotiated beans and bacon, mostly from his own pack. "You don't figure on running off the cattle from the Sparshott Ranch, and burning their fences, and poisoning their wells."

"That's not a white man's game," said Kent. "They're yellow, and that's what's the matter with the whole crowd. I'd have let the feud end if they'd been willing; but if it goes on, I ain't following their methods."

"A yellow galoot fights yellow, and a white man fights white," said the Kid approvingly. "But they've got you if it goes on, feller. Looks to me as if it's coming near the finish."

Kent shrugged his shoulders. "All Wildcat's told me that," he answered. "I sure know it, but I ain't quitting."

"Good for you!" said the Kid. "Eben Sparshott will give you a rest

for a piece, anyhow. He won't use his gun again in a hurry."

"That pesky coyote Rube, and his brother Walt, will be getting busy," I reckon," said Kent. "Look here, puncher, it's an even break whether they round me up in this shebang this very night. They sure know I've got no men left on the ranch, and we're miles out of Wildcat; and if the Wildcat galoots knew, I reckon there isn't a galoot there who would come into the feud. I'd sure be glad of your company, but if you're here when they come you'll get rounded up along with me; and they'll be fighting mad when Eben is taken home with a broken arm."

The Kid looked at him curiously.

"You figure that they may round you up to-night," he said, "and you ain't riding?"

"Nope!"

"Same here," said the Kid cheerily. "If they round you up, Loring, they'll sure round up two of us; and maybe they'll be sorry they didn't stay at home in their little bunks. Quien sabe?"

The Kid looked out at the doorway of the ranch-house before bedding down. He locked the door of the shed where his mustang was bedded, and returned to the ranch-house; and Kent locked door and shutters before they went to their blankets.

The Rio Kid slept soundly and peacefully. He knew that he would awaken at the first sound of an enemy, came he never so stealthily. But it was not stealthily that the enemy came. The midnight moon hung over the timber building, when there was a clattering crash at the pine-wood door, which filled the rancho with deafening sound.

The heavy butt of a quirt was crashing on the door. The blows suddenly ceased, and a hoarse voice shouted:

"Kent Loring! Wake up, you galoot, wake up!"

Kent did not answer. He was fumbling with a rifle in the darkness of the interior of the ranch-house.

"You Kent Loring!" roared the voice. "You dog-goned coward, are you afeared to open your door?"

"That's Walt Sparshott!" murmured Kent. "I know his toot! I guess he was sure mad when Rube brought Eben home with a broken arm. You're for it now, puncher, as bad as me."

Crash! crash!

The quirt was beating on the door again. The Kid stepped to a wooden shutter, and put his eye to a crack; there was no glass in the windows of the Loring ranch-house. Outside, in the bright moonlight, he sighted a tall, powerful, black-bearded man, with two guns low-slung in his holsters, beating on the door with a heavy quirt.

"Come out, Kent Loring, you gold-darned skunk!" roared Walt Sparshott, crashing the quirt on the door again. "Come out, man to man!"

"You're alone?" called back Kent.

"Sure! If you ain't afeared to open your door, you'll sure see that I'm alone!" leered Walt.

The Kid heard Kent breathing hard, and there was a sound of a bar moving at the ranch-house door. In an instant the Kid gripped the cow-man's arm.

"Let up!" he whispered. "Wolves hunt in packs, you darn gink; and I guess there's a pack of them in cover. Let up!"

Kent drew his hand back from the door.

"You're sure?" he asked.

"You watch out!" breathed the Kid with a grin in the darkness.

He went back to the cracked shutter. Kent, with his eye to a chink in another shutter, watched. Where the Kid stood, the crack was wide enough for a bullet to pass; and his six-gun was in his hand now. The Kid's keen eyes was on the ruins of the burnt barn at a little distance. An insect stirring in the grass would not have escaped the Kid's watchful eye. From a heap of burnt timber, the brim of a Stetson hat showed, revealing a man hidden in cover—one of a crowd, as the Kid figured. He watched and waited, and as the quirt crashed on the door again,

and Walt Sparshott shouted taunts, the Stetson hat emerged more and more from its cover, as the man who wore it watched his leader. And when the Kid saw enough of the hat, he fired.

Bang!

There was a wild yell, as the Stetson went spinning, and a man leaped into view, with blood running down his face. He was out of sight again in a moment, though his yelling and cursing were still heard, and the Kid chuckled. Walt Sparshott ceased to beat on the door, and with a bound, vanished into cover. And the next moment, from nine or ten different points, rifle-shots rang out.

"What did I tell you?" chuckled the Kid.

Kent drew a deep breath.

"It's the whole Sparshott bunch?" he muttered.

"I reckon so—and they've found us at home, and ready for a rookus!" said the Rio Kid, and his laugh rang out cheerily, while rifle after rifle roared, and bullets crashed and rang on the ranch-house.

(How the Kid fares in this amazing adventure you will learn in next week's roaring tale of the West.)

THE END.

## "LEVISON'S TRIUMPH!"

(Continued from page 11.)

head, but there was a sound of rapid running feet on the footpath.

The ruffian paused, and gazed round, with an oath.

"Help!" yelled Mr. Selby. "This way! Help!"

He would have given a year's salary at that moment to have seen a policeman's helmet.

But it was not a constable, it was a breathless schoolboy who dashed up. It was Ernest Levison. Levison had only been a little way further in the woods, where his minor had caught him up. Frank had been explaining why he had followed his brother when the Form master's cries had fallen on their ears. Those cries had spurred Ernest into immediate action.

"Stand back, you young fool!" shouted the footpad, as Levison rushed on the scene, and the footpad swung up the cudgel.

Levison did not heed.

Right at the ruffian he dashed, his eyes gleaming, his face set. The cudgel swept down, but a rapid swerve saved Levison from the blow. It grazed his arm as he sprang upon the footpad.

With a spring like a tiger he was on the ruffian, and the burly rascal went staggering backwards under the rush.

Crash!

The man was on his back, Levison on top, clutching at him desperately. The cudgel went into the grass as the man sprawled.

But he caught at Levison, and grasped him in his powerful hands.

Frank Levison came tearing up.

Levison and the footpad, grasping each other desperately, were rolling over and over in the grass in desperate conflict.

It was boy against man, and the man was burly and muscular; but the boy was as hard as nails, and desperately determined. Frank halted, gasping, staring at the terrible scene with starting eyes. He saw the cudgel in the grass, and made a spring for it, and caught it in his hand.

"Help! Help!" Mr. Selby was yelling; but it did not come into his terrified mind to help himself.

THE POPULAR.—No. 494.

Frank leaped towards the struggling combatants, grasping the cudgel, his eyes blazing. The footpad released one hand; his fist was clenched, and he dashed it with terrible force at the junior who was grasping him. The blow landed between Ernest Levison's eyes—a blow that was like the kick of a horse. A faint moan escaped Levison of the Fourth, and his hold on the ruffian relaxed, and he rolled helplessly in the grass, stunned by that terrible blow.

The footpad, panting, was staggering up, when Frank's blow reached him. With all his force the fag struck, and the cudgel crashed on the ruffian's head.

There was a yell from the footpad, and he collapsed in the grass and lay still.

"Ernie!"

Frank Levison dropped the cudgel, and fell on his knees in the grass beside his brother.

"Ernie!" he panted.

Levison did not speak.

Frank raised his head; it hung like lead in the fag's hands. Ernest Levison's eyes were closed; there was blood on his face, and he was quite insensible.

Mr. Selby tried to pull himself to—"Ernie! Ernie!"

The hot tears ran down Frank's face, and dropped on the white, insensible face of his brother.

The hot tears ran down his face, and dropped on the white, insensible face of his brother.

"Is—is that Levison? Is—is he hurt?" panted Mr. Selby huskily.

"Oh, heavens! He is killed!"

"Impossible!" gasped Mr. Selby.

He bent over him. His own face was ghastly white.

"He is not dead!" he breathed. "He is stunned! We must get him back to the school, Levison minor!"

He lifted Levison's shoulders, and Frank took his feet; and between them the insensible junior was carried up the footpath, back towards Rylcombe Lane.

It seemed an age to Levison minor before they reached the stile, and his brother was lifted over into the lane. Mr. Selby leaned on the stile and panted for breath. There was a gleam of bright head-lights in the shadowy road; the whir of a car. Frank Levison ran into the middle of the road, and held up his hand, and shouted.

The motor-car whirred to a halt.

"What—"

"Help!" panted Frank. "My brother's hurt, dying, perhaps! Give me a lift with him, for the love of Heaven!"

The motorist jumped down.

A few hours later that evening all St. Jim's was in a buzz. Ernest Levison had been brought back to the school in a car by Mr. Selby and his minor, and there was not a fellow from the Sixth, or the Second who had not heard the story of the expelled junior's gallantry.

The fellows went about speaking in low voices, for Levison was lying in the sanatorium, still unconscious. All the next day his condition was serious, but on the following morning brighter news reached the anxious juniors outside the sanatorium walls. Levison was improving! He was getting better rapidly, and now there was no fear of his losing his life.

It was great news, for in those two dark days Ernest Levison had regained his old popularity. And there was something else which cheered the waiting school. It started as a rumour, but developed into solid fact, that Ernest Levison was not to leave St. Jim's!

When Levison was well enough to receive visitors, Tom Merry & Co. were the first to be shown to his bedside. They found him sitting up in bed, his forehead still bandaged, but there was a bright smile on his pale face.

"Jolly glad to see you fellows," he said. "My luck's held good, after all."

"You mean you are not going?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes; the Head told me I'm to stay."

"Bwavo!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "The fellows will be pleased to see you again."

And Gussy was quite right. When Levison resumed his old place in the Fourth Form, he received a hearty welcome there from his Form-fellows—and from all the Lower School, for that matter. There was hardly a fellow in School House and New House who did not rejoice at Levison's Triumph!

THE END.

(*"ST. JIM'S TO THE RESCUE!"* is the title of next week's rousing long story of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's. Don't miss it.)

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**"THE MISSING HERO!"**  
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When the Rio Kid finds the odds heavily against him, it is not in his nature to turn tail and bolt. He puts all his faith in his big six-shooters, and they never let him down!

# The RIO KID!

by Ralph Redway



ANOTHER BREATHLESSLY-THRILLING COMPLETE WESTERN YARN, FEATURING THE RIO KID, BOY OUTLAW!

## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

### The Sparshott Bunch!

THE firing ceased, and the Rio Kid yawned.

Bullet after bullet had crashed on the thick wooden walls of the little ranch house. Some of them had pierced the shutters and dropped within the building. But from the chink in the shutter, in the bright moonlight, the Kid could see no sign of the assailants, save the flashing of the rifles from moment to moment. The Sparshott bunch were keeping carefully in cover while they blazed away at the Loring ranch house.

But the firing ceased—the Sparshott bunch knew that they were burning powder for nothing. Silence fell on the ranch, and from the silence came the faint sound of the groaning of the man who had fallen to the Rio Kid's shot an hour before.

The Kid yawned.

"These jaspers sure get my goat," he said. "There's nine or ten in the bunch, but they ain't figuring on taking any chances."

"They've not gone," said Kent Loring.

"They sure ain't," agreed the Kid. "They won't go till daylight. I guess they won't keep it up after that, even in the Wildcat section of Montana. But it's hours to daylight yet."

"If you want to sleep, I guess I'll keep watch."

The Kid chuckled.

"No more sleep hyer to-night, feller. How long is it since it rained in this section?"

"Two weeks or more," answered the Montana cowman. "Why? What does that matter, Kid Carfax?"

This week:  
**"FACING  
THE ODDS!"**

"Heaps!" grinned the Kid. "I reckoned it had been dry here. Them galoots haven't any hunch to walk up to our guns; but they sure want to get us. If they've got any savvy, they'll fire the rancho—or try it on. I guess we ain't going to close our eyes, Loring! We want to watch out."

"Oh!" ejaculated Loring. "You can bet that will be their game," said the Kid. "But I guess they won't get home with it."

He looked from the chink in the shutter again.

The plains round the little rancho stretched white in the moonlight, the creek a trickle of silver. Sheds and broken fences, here and there a tree or a bush, afforded ample cover to the Sparshott bunch. Not a man was to be seen; but there were nearly a dozen enemies gathered round the building, as the Kid knew from the firing.

The Rio Kid waited patiently for the next move of the enemy. He hummed a tune softly as he waited. Kent Loring was grave and anxious,

but the Kid seemed to be enjoying life. Whether from motives of chivalry, or from the impulse that urged him so often to butt into trouble, the Rio Kid had taken the weaker side in the Sparshott feud; and now that he was in it, he was in it, as he would have said, body and boots. The Sparshott bunch believed, so far, that they had only Kent Loring to deal with in the lonely rancho; of the Rio Kid's presence they knew nothing yet.

A glimmer of flame spurted from the shadows behind a clump of ragged bushes. There was a sound of crackling. An arc of fire gleamed, as a burning torch was flung towards the rancho door.

"Try again!" grinned the Kid. The torch of twigs and pine knots fell short, and lay burning and smoking on the ground yards from the door.

Another followed it, falling as short. The Kid yawned again.

"If they was Injuns," he said, "they'd fix up burning arrows; but I guess they haven't the savvy to do it. But there ain't any cover near enough for that game they're playing. They'll have to come out."

"And then——" said Loring.

"Then I guess my gun will talk," chuckled the Kid.

There was a long pause.

Minutes ticked slowly away. Kent Loring watched from a chink, but there was no sound, no movement, nothing to be seen save the smoking torches that lay at a little distance. The Montana cowman turned away wearily to take a few turns up and down the room. But the Rio Kid did not stir from his chink. The Kid had the quiet patience of a Redskin, and he waited in silence, every nerve on the alert, unwearied.



When the move came, it came with startling suddenness.

From the cover of the bushes, a figure suddenly leaped, and darted forward to the house, a flaming torch in hand.

Hardly a second was required for the fellow to dash near enough to hurl the blazing torch against the door, and spring back into cover.

But a second was more than enough for the Rio Kid.

Bang!

The six-gun roared from the chink in the shutter, and the man with the torch pitched heavily forward, before he had taken three steps.

There was a terrible cry.

The man had fallen on the torch, which smoked and blazed under him, and his wild shrieks rang fearfully through the night.

He squirmed back, screaming, and disappeared behind the bushes again, leaving the torch smoking where it lay.

There was a yell of rage from the Sparshott bunch, and a roar of rifle-fire. Bullets rained on the walls and shutters of the ranch house.

"You got him!" panted Loring.

"Sure!"

From the night came a hoarse voice—the voice of Walt Sparshott, in husky tones of rage.

"That ain't young Loring! Kent Loring ain't all that sudden on the shoot! He ain't alone there."

"I guess he's on his lonesome, boss," said another voice. "They told me in Wildcat he had had to fire his last man."

"He ain't alone. I tell you," snarled Sparshott. "Kent Loring never fired that shot."

Loring laughed softly.

"They're wise to you now, Kid," he said.

"I guess so," the Rio Kid chuckled. "They won't try that game again. They'll sure give us a rest till the moon's down."

The Kid was right. The fring died away again; but there was no further attempt to fire the rancho. The torches burned out and expired. Silent—save for the muttering and moaning of two wounded men—the Sparshott bunch lay in cover and watched—and within the rancho watched and waited the Montana cowman and the boy puncher from Texas.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### At Close Quarters!

**K**ENT LORING made a sudden movement, as he heard the bar of a shutter softly and cautiously moved. It was dark now—the darkest hour before the dawn. The moon had sunk, and darkness lay over the still plains that surrounded the lonely rancho.

"What's your game, Carfax?" breathed Loring.

He heard the Kid's soft chuckle in the gloom.

"I guess I'm going to wake up those jaspers, feller. They're sure getting ready now to creep in and fire the house, and I guess there ain't any stopping them in the dark—only one way! I'm going out."

"Not alone?"

"Yep! I guess this is a game I know," said the Kid cheerily. "You stand by with your rifle, Loring, and leave this to me. They'd tell you on the Double Bar, down in Texas, that a kid about my size can sure beat the

Apache at his own game. Leave it to me."

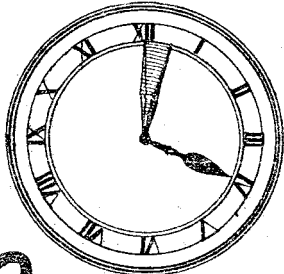
"But—"

"Feller, you got to leave it to me," said the Kid. "I'll be safer alone, if that's what's worrying you. I keep on telling you that this game is pie to me."

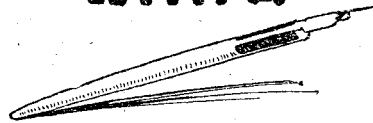
"But—" repeated Loring uneasily. "Oh, can it, and watch out!" interrupted the Kid.

"I'd rather come—"

"You'd sure spoil the whole caboodle if you did! Stand here with your shooting-iron and watch out! This is my game, hombre!"



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CLUB!**

The Kid opened the shutter softly.

Outside was deep darkness.

Through the long night the Sparshott bunch had watched and waited, and now their time had come. In the darkness it was possible to creep close to the walls of the rancho, with little danger from guns from within. The wooden building, dry as tinder after long sunny days, would burn like matchwood once the fire was placed to it. That was the game of the Sparshotts, and the Kid knew it as well as if they had sung it out to him. But the Kid had his own move to make first.

Silently he dropped outside the window.

The darkness that shrouded the enemy, shrouded the Rio Kid. He made no sound as he left the rancho. And Kent Loring, watching anxiously from the window, lost sight of him a moment later.

Stealthily as an Apache creeping on a foe, the Rio Kid crept round the building, and then, on his hands and knees, wormed his way across in deep shadow towards the shed where his mustang was bedded down.

Had the Sparshott bunch been on the watch for such a move, they could not have seen him or heard him. But the ruffians who were beseiging the lonely

rancho had no idea that the beseiged would break cover, with such odds against them in the open. They did not know the Rio Kid yet.

There was a murmur of low voices behind the shed. The Kid heard the hoarse voice of Walt Sparshott, muttering. He was within six feet of the gang gathered behind the shed, and he rose to his knees, covered by the corner of the building and gripped his guns.

"I guess I'll take it this time," Walt Sparshott was muttering. "I guess when that sticks agin the door, and a match is put to it, the hull shebang will go up in smoke afore them galoots can say no sugar in mine. You fellers watch out and wing them as they run."

"You bet, boss!"

"I reckon that galoot with young Loring is the feller who helped him on the Wildcat trail, and winged my brother Eben. It can't be anybody else. I know for sure that young Loring hasn't a single puncher left on his ranch. He's down to his last dollar, or near it, and, if he had the sense of a gopher, he would sell out and slide. I reckon the Sparshott feud is going to end to-night."

There was a rustling sound which the Kid knew was made by the gang bundling together dry wood and pine knots, to make the torch that was to fire the rancho.

He grinned.

Softly the Rio Kid rose to his feet. The Sparshott bunch, full of their ruthless intention, and sure of success now that darkness covered their approach to the rancho, were thinking of anything but an attack on themselves. But that was what was coming to them.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

There was a wild yell of alarm as the Kid suddenly leaped from his cover, fairly upon the crouching gang, fring right and left.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Startled men went plunging and scrambling in the gloom, wild yells and cries answered the rapid fring. Bang! Bang! Bang! Like lightning the walnut-butted guns, that had seen so much service in the hands of the Rio Kid, flashed and rang. For ten seconds there was pandemonium. And then hurried flying footsteps, panting breath, cries of terror, and a wild scrambling upon the horses to which the Sparshott bunch had fled. Bang! Bang! Bang! rang the Kid's six-guns after the fleeing bunch. The sudden attack in the darkness had been too much for the Sparshott bunch. Hardly a man of them escaped un wounded as they scrambled on their horses and fled, wildly galloping into the night.

Click! The Kid pulled trigger on an empty gun, and laughed. But he re-loaded rapidly, ready for the bunch if they turned back.

But they did not turn.

A wild bunch of horsemen, almost every one of them hit by flying lead, spurred frantically into the night, with a thunder of hoofs, and vanished into the shadowy plains.

The Rio Kid laughed.

The Sparshott bunch were gone! The thunder of hoofs died away into silence, and all was still again.

The Kid walked back towards the ranch-house.

"Don't shoot, hombre!" he called out.

"I guess it's little me!"

Kent Loring stared at him.

"But what—"

"They're gone," drawled the Kid.

"I guess they lighted out like they was sent for in a darned hurry."

"Gone!" breathed Kent.

"Sure! They ain't any fancy for

shooting at close quarters," said the Kid, with a chuckle. "I reckon they figured it was some earthquake when I dropped on them sudden. They seemed sort of surprised—they sure did! I reckon we can finish out our sleep till sun-up, feller."

The Kid stepped in at the window. Kent Loring, in silence, closed and barred the shutter.

"By gum!" he said, at last. "By gum! You are sure some gun-man, Kid Carfax. I guess they was rattled to light out like that."

"They sure was," agreed the Kid. And the Rio Kid rolled himself in his blanket, and slept soundly and peacefully till the sun was shining over the mountains and plains of the Montana cow country.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### Beaten to the Draw!

"YOU'RE sure some mule," the Kid said; and

Kent Loring laughed.

They were riding across the scrubby plain in the blaze of sunshine. The Montana cowman and the puncher from Texas.

For three days the Rio Kid had been at the Loring ranch. And in those days he had demonstrated that he had not forgotten all that he had learned on the old Double Bar in Texas.

The Kid was a cow-puncher, born and bred. And Kent declared that he was more useful on the ranch than four or five hired men.

Undoubtedly the Kid put his beef into it.

Why he did so, unless it was his friendship for the Montana man, it would have been hard to say. There was no pay on the Loring ranch, even if the Kid had needed to work for pay, which he did not, since his clean-up in the gold country

of Arizona. If the young cowman was not down to his last dollar, as Walt Sparshott had said, he was very near it. The feud with the Sparshott clan had ruined the ranch.

There was but a handful of stock left, no money to replace herds, no money or labour to repair burnt fences and ruined buildings. Six men had worked at one time on the ranch, but the last of them was gone. And, but for the advent of the Rio Kid, Kent would have worked alone till the end came. That the end had to come was clear enough to the Rio Kid—clear to Kent, if he would have seen it. But he would not see it.

"You're sure some mule," repeated the Kid. "You ain't an earthly against them pesky Sparshotts. Three of them left, and a bunch of rough range-riders to back them. All the law there is in this country you could pack into a hat, leaving heap room for your cabeza. You want to quit, and hit the trail while the trail's open."

Kent shook his head.

"The Loring's ain't quitters," he said. "What do you reckon you are going

to do against that all-fired gang of dog-goned ginks?" exclaimed the Kid.

"Hold on till they get me, anyhow."

"Oh, shucks!" said the Kid.

It was against all reason, and perhaps, for that cause, the Rio Kid, in spite of his arguments, agreed all the way with the Montana rancher. The Kid never would have quit; and he liked a man who was not a quitter. But he saw clearly how it must end. In that desperate feud—desperate even for the rough cow-country—all who bore the name of Loring had fallen, with the exception of Kent. And three Sparshotts remained to carry on the feud against him, and the outfit at the Sparshott ranch were numerous and rough—all of them fighting men. The young fellow hadn't a ghost of a chance

of thousands of hoofs, smiled at the idea of range riding after two or three cows. But the few cows that remained were all that Kent had—and the Kid was there to help him. Two or three cows meant much more than the young rancher could afford to lose; and for a whole morning the two had been riding. And as they rode, the Kid's eyes were as alert and keen as if he had been riding in a wild Indian country.

"So it's settled that you ain't quitting," said the Rio Kid.

"Sure!"

"If you ain't quitting, you got to get the Sparshotts before they get you," said the Kid decidedly. "You want to pack a gun and shoot on sight."

"I sure pack a gun all the time, and I'm sure going to shoot on sight, if I



**THE EMPTY SADDLE!** From the dark plains the beat of a horse's galloping hoofs came to the Kid's ears. He turned, and his face darkened as a horse came panting up. It was Kent Loring's horse—but the saddle was empty! (See Chapter 4.)

of getting away with it. The night attack on the little rancho showed what methods the Sparshotts were willing to use. Common-sense urged Kent Loring to sell his land for what it would fetch, and hit the trail for a new country. And the Kid argued with him, and liked him all the better, because he would not. Nothing had been seen of the Sparshotts since that wild night. No doubt their hot reception had daunted them.

But if open attack was over, treacherous attack was all the more likely to follow. A shot from behind a tree was likely to end the feud. The Kid's eyes were wide open while he worked on the ranch, mending fences, patching buildings, punching cows, doing the hundred tasks that a cowman has to be able to do. He never stirred outside the walls without packing a gun. He would have welcomed another attack from the Sparshotts; but it did not come.

Now the two cowmen were riding in search of two or three stray cows—stray or stolen. The Kid, accustomed in the old days in Texas to dealing with herds

see Walt or Eben or Rube Sparshott," grinned Kent. "But they're a yellow gang—they'll keep out of sight and shoot from cover."

"Then ain't that your game, too?"

"Nix! I'm a white man if they ain't."

"Oh, you're sure plumb loco," exclaimed the Kid. "You're jest asking to be fitted for a coffin, you are, feller."

"So all Wildcat has told me, and they ain't got me yet; though I reckon they would have fixed me sure if you hadn't humped along, last time," said Kent. "But darn the Sparshotts, Carfax—we're looking for cows. This ain't a big ranch, but it's sure a big one for only two range riders. I guess I'll take the north side of the creek and leave you the other, and we'll meet at the shebang at sundown."

"If it's still standing!" grinned the Kid. "I never go out of sight of the shebang without expecting to see it going up in smoke when I get back."

"We got to chance that."

"We sure have!" assented the Kid.

They separated, and Loring splashed through the creek and disappeared behind a fold of the prairie.

The Kid rode thoughtfully on his way. Rounding up two or three cows on a wide country, broken by thickets and rocky draws, was a long task and a difficult task, and not one that the Kid would have chosen. But he had thrown in his lot, for the present, with the Montana rancher, and he meant business. It was as likely as not that the cows had been driven off by some of the Sparshott bunch; in which case they were gone for good. But the Kid picked up a trail at last that led him into a deep grassy hollow of the plain, where he found three cows at feed. They blinked at him with sleepy eyes as he rode up, and the Kid, looking at them, spotted the Loring brand.

"I guess you're my beef, you-uns," grinned the Kid, glad that he had been

successful. There were not a dozen cows left on the ranch, and every beast counted.

The cows unwillingly left their pasture, persuaded by the loud cracking of the Kid's Texas quirt. They lumbered away across the plain towards the rancho, the Kid riding after them, cracking his whip to keep them in motion, and wondering what the old Double-Bar bunch would have thought, could they have seen him at this job of driving three cows.

But the ranch-house was not yet in sight, when two horsemen appeared from a hollow in the plain. And the Kid dropped the quirt at once, and felt for his holster to make sure that his gun was handy. One of the horsemen was the man he had seen in the moonlight the night the rancho was attacked—Walter Sparshott. The other was a rough puncher. They were riding on Loring land; and the Kid grinned at the thought that they had been engaged on the same task as himself—hunting for what remained of the Loring herd. They rode directly towards him, their eyes fixed on him, and, like the Kid, they kept their hands near their guns. But it was evident that they did not know that he was the fellow who had helped Kent Loring to defend the rancho, or their guns would have been drawn at the sight of him.

"Say, feller," called out Walt Sparshott, as he came within speaking range.

"Same to you," answered the Kid affably.

"I guess I ain't seen you here before," said Sparshott, eyeing the Kid keenly and grimly. "What are you doing here?"

"Punching cows, feller!" answered the Kid.

"Lifting cows, you mean," granted Sparshott. "I been looking for them cows, and I sure guess they belong to my outfit."

"You sure want to guess again," said

the Kid. "They got the Loring brand on their hides, feller."

"Brand blotting ain't a new game in the cow country," sneered Walt Sparshott. "You been changing the brands?"

The Kid's eyes flashed.

"Who are you, anyhow?" demanded Sparshott. "You ain't in young Loring's outfit—he ain't got a man left on his ranch, even a chore boy."

"I'm his new man," smiled the Kid.

"Oh shucks!" said Sparshott's companion. "Loring ain't got a dollar left to pay a new man!"

"Anyhow, they're my cows," said Sparshott. "You head them cows off towards my ranch, Hank."

"You bet!" said Hank.

"Hold on, fellers!" remonstrated the Kid. "Cattle-lifting ain't good enough. You let them cows alone. I'm rounding up them cows for my boss."

Sparshott gave him a grim look.

"You new to Montana?" he asked. He detected the lazy Texas drawl in the Kid's speech.

"Sure!"

"Where are you from?"

"The Rio Grande country," answered the Kid amiably.

"Waal, I reckon if you're wise, you'll hit the trail pronto, and get back to the Rio Grande country," said Walt Sparshott. "You don't want to butt in here, puncher."

"That's where you slip up, feller," smiled the Kid. "I'm butting in hyer, and keeping on butting in. I don't give a rap for all the Sparshotts in Montana. Let them cows alone if you ain't hunting trouble."

Sparshott's eyes gleamed at him with sudden suspicion.

"You the galoot that was with young Loring in his shack the other night?" he exclaimed.

"Sure!"

"Oh, gophers!" exclaimed Hank, "a little kid like you the galoot that shot up our crowd?"

The Kid grinned.

"Jest little me," he assented, "and I did admire the way you galoots started for the horizon. Nobody could have seen your heels for dust."

Walt Sparshott was staring at him with deadly menace. His hand was creeping nearer to his gun; and the Kid's keen eyes did not lose that movement.

"You want to let them cows alone," drawled the Kid. "I'm driving in them cows for my boss."

A quick glance was exchanged between Walt Sparshott and Hank. At the same second they grasped their guns and drew. One second more, and the Rio Kid would have rolled off his mustang with two bullets through his body. But with lightning speed the Kid's gun was in his hand, and it was the Kid who pulled trigger first.

Bang, bang!

The Kid fired twice, and only a single shot came back, and it missed by a yard. Walt Sparshott fell heavily from his horse, and Hank reeled forward and held on helplessly to his saddle. The Kid, his eyes like gleaming steel, looked at them over his smoking gun.

"Let up, puncher!" panted Hank faintly. "I guess I've got mine! Let up!" He stumbled from his horse.

"Drop that gun!" rapped out the Kid.

The puncher's gun dropped in the grass.

"You sure ain't got your ticket for soup yet, not by long chalks," grinned the Kid. "You've got off easy feller."

Hank, leaning heavily on his horse, stared down at Walt Sparshott. The Kid followed his glance. He had fired only in time to save his own life, and he had no regrets. It had been the Kid's life or Sparshott's, and the Montana man's life had gone out like a candle that was extinguished. With his gun still gripped in his hand, his face still savage and threatening, the eldest of the Sparshott clan lay extended in the grass—never to stir again of his own volition.

"I guess he's got his!" muttered Hank hoarsely. "You've got Walt Sparshott, puncher!"

"I sure reckon so," assented the Kid. "He asked for it, feller, and he sure got what he asked for. You want to tell his gang to keep clear of the Loring Ranch, hombre. You going to let them cows alone?"

"Sure!" gasped the Sparshott puncher.

"That's good enough."

The Kid drove the cows onward, the Sparshott puncher staring after him as he went, till the grassy ridges hid him from sight.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER. The Last Blow!

"SHUCKS!" The Rio Kid uttered the ejaculation suddenly.

The sun was sinking over the Montana uplands, when the Kid, driving the three loping cows, came in sight of the Loring ranch-house. But it was not the ranch-house that he saw first. What he saw was a thick column of smoke rising against the sky.

His sunburnt face set grimly. He had warned Kent Loring that he had no chance it keeping up the fight against a numerous and unscrupulous bunch of enemies, and his words were proved true enough now. The Loring homestead was going up in smoke and flames.

Since Kent had had to part with the last of his men, the outcome had been only a matter of time. But for the Rio

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Kid's help, the end would have come sooner. Now it had come.

The Kid rode on towards the burning house. The place was deserted; there was no sign of an enemy there. Eben and Rube Sparshott, or their men, had been there—and gone! Only the wooden walls of the ranch were still standing, and burning—the roof had fallen in. Here and there other thick clouds of smoke rose from burning sheds. The Sparshotts had made a clean sweep this time.

"Thunder!" murmured the Kid, as he stood gazing at the scene of destruction.

It was what he had expected—what Kent had expected, as a matter of fact. Feuds in the cow country were merciless and ruthless. In the Wildcat country of Montana, law had little hold. Sheriffs and town marshalls kept clear of cowmen's feuds. The fight was between the Loring's and the Sparshotts, to be fought out to a finish without interference. And this looked like the finish for Kent Loring.

"I guess it's bedding-down on the prairie for you and me to-night, old hoss," said the Kid to the grey mustang.

He drove the three cows along the creek, to the hollow, screened by bushes and live oaks, where the handful of cows that remained to Kent had been concealed. But the cows were gone. Evidently they had been searched for and found in the hidden hollow. The Sparshotts had done their work thoroughly. Trampled ground, hoofmarks of cows and horses, remained to tell of what had become of the little bunch of cows, and that was all. Of all the Loring herds, the three cows that the Kid had rounded up were all that remained.

The Kid whistled.

It was the last blow, and after this it was impossible for Kent to carry on. The Loring ranch had gone up! The Kid put the three cows to the grass, and returned to the burning ranch-house.

He camped down at a little distance from the burning ranch, and unpacked his supper from his slicker pack. He wondered why Kent did not return. He could not still be hunting cows after darkness had fallen on the plains.

"Shucks!" the Kid muttered uneasily. "Have them pesky galoots got him? If they have, I guess I'll sure shoot up that Sparshott bunch before I hit the trail out of Montana. That crowd are sure pizen."

The moon came up over the dim hills. The fire was dying down now in a mass of glowing red.

Thud, thud, thud!

From the dark plains came the beat of a horse's galloping hoofs, and the Kid turned with a sigh of relief. But his handsome face darkened as the horse came panting up to the ranch. It was Kent Loring's horse—but the saddle was empty!

The Kid's teeth came together hard.

He caught the horse, and soothed the startled, frightened animal. There was blood on the saddle, blood on the sweating flanks of the horse. Harder grew the grim face of the Kid. He knew now that Kent Loring had met

# Your Editor's Note Book

Readers will find on page 17 of this issue another long list of Birthday Dates. This is the second list, and I advise all my clumps to look over it carefully. The date of your birth may be mentioned there, and should that be so, and you are also a registered member of the Birthday Club—then claim an Annual.

And here again, I would give you a timely piece of advice. Don't leave your claim too late, for you have only a few days in which to send it in. That's important!

Think of the issue in the balance. A six-shilling Annual absolutely Free! Worth while taking a little trouble over it—what?

Let me again emphasize the point to all those of my readers who have not so far filled in the registration coupon for the Club, that they are missing a wonderful treat by neglecting to do so.

The stock of Annuals is limited, and I do want you clumps to be in the running for one of these topping books.

Think how ripping it would be if the postman suddenly knocked at your door and handed you a parcel containing a "Hobby" or "Holiday" Annual.

Now, take the tip, clumps, and join the Birthday Club to-day!

enemies on the prairie—and had not been lucky like the Kid.

"They've got him!"

The Kid tethered the horse. He called to his mustang to follow him, and left his supper untasted. Kent Loring, dead or wounded, had fallen from his horse, and the Kid's task now was to find him. Higher rose the moon over the Montana hills, higher and clearer, streaming down silver light on the prairie. In the dark the Rio Kid could have picked up a trail; in the clear moonlight it was child's play to him. Step by step he followed the trail of the horse that had come galloping home with empty saddle. It was a mile from the ranch that the Kid suddenly halted, as he heard a low groan from the shadowy grass.

A moment more, and he was bending over Kent Loring.

A white face looked up at him, white as chalk under the tan, in the glimmering light of the moon.

"You're hit, feller," said the Kid softly.

"They got me from behind a clump of live oaks," muttered Kent faintly.

"You ain't over the range yet," said the Kid. "I guess I'm going to doctor, you, feller."

Kent Loring lay silent in the grass, though he winced with pain as the Kid examined his wound. He had been shot from long range, and the bullet had gone clean through his shoulder. He was weak and faint from loss of blood; and had not the Kid found him he would have bled to death in the grass before dawn. But the Kid had found him, and the Kid was tending him with hands as gentle as a woman's. With his own silk neck-scarf, torn into

strips, the Kid bound up the wound.

"You'll pull through this, feller," said the Kid softly. "You've got a pard to look after you, and you'll pull through. I guess we're bedding-down for the night right here, and in the morning I'll sure get you into Wildcat and under a roof."

And, with his own blankets, the Kid made a bed for the Montana cowman in the thick grass.

"The game's up, puncher," said Kent, in a low voice. "I reckon I was a mule, jest as you told me. The ranch is gone up, and I reckon they cleared off what was left of the cows—"

"They sure did—except for the three I found and drove in," said the Kid. "The game is sure up for you hyer, feller, so long as the Sparshotts are cavorting around. But you're going to be on your feet again in a week from now, and I'm sure watching you all that time."

Kent smiled faintly.

"You reckon I shall pull out of this?"

"You sure will!"

"I shall owe it to you, puncher. It was a lucky day for me when you rode into the Wildcat country."

"You want to sleep now, feller," said the Kid.

During the night the Kid watched over the wounded man, who lay in fitful slumber in the blankets. The Kid's face was grim while he watched.

In the morning Kent was conscious, though white and weak, and unable to help himself. But the Kid was there to help him. He fetched the horse from the burnt-out ranch, and mounted Kent upon it, and mounted his own mustang, holding the Montana cowman in the saddle as they rode closely side by side through the thick grass, heading for the town of Wildcat.

"You'll pull out of this, feller," said the Kid, "and before you begin ranching again, you'll go gunning after the Sparshotts, with a Texas puncher to help you. And you'll get a mortgage on the ranch, and start fresh and fair."

Kent grinned faintly.

"I guess I shall be looking for a job on a ranch to punch cows," he answered. "Nobody would lend me a hundred dollars on a mortgage in the Wildcat country. I guess I've tried that."

The Kid shook his head and smiled, thinking of the fat roll in his belt.

"I've sure got a hunch that you'll get a mortgage, and easy," he said. "There's a lawyer shark in Wildcat who will fix it up. You'll get five thousand dollars on a mortgage and start fresh, I tell you, feller."

And the Rio Kid knew what he was talking about. The Sparshott feud was on his hands now, and it was to come to an end, if the Rio Kid had not forgotten how to shoot, and if the notched walnut-butted guns in his low-hung holsters did not fail him.

THE END.

(Will the Kid fail his new-found friend, or will the Sparshotts succeed in their deadly scheming? Next week will tell. Don't miss: "THE KID'S LONE FIGHT!" next Tuesday.)

THE POPULAR.—No. 495.

# The BUNTER BROTHERS

— Merry Mirthmakers. —

ON THE TRAIL OF THE GRUB RAIDER!



Billy Bunter one day made a raid on his schoolfellows' tuck basket. But he didn't get away with it unseen. A wild shout, and Harry Wharton & Co. were in full cry after the podgy raider. "Yoicks! Tally-ho!" "Oh dear!" panted Billy, as he made a break for the school gates.

Down the road tore Billy, the raider. "I'll outwit them yet!" he gasped. "I've got a good start, and when I'm in the woods they won't be able to pick up my trail! This is where I smile! Ha, ha, ha!"



But Billy hadn't noticed the hole in the corner of the basket through which his tuck was falling, leaving a clear trail behind for his pursuers. "Ha! He went this way!" cried Harry Wharton merrily. "He thinks he'll get away!" "But he won't!" added Bob Cherry.

At last, in the shade of a tree, Billy sat down on a nice round stone to enjoy his looted tuck. Munch! Munch! "These tarts are the finest Mrs. Mimble has made for a long time!" he warbled merrily.



But suddenly there was a terrific upheaval beneath Billy. For the object he had taken for a stone, turned out to be a prize porker having its afternoon nap. Porker didn't like such a weighty matter on his shoulders, and proceeded to shift it forthwith and instanter. "Yaroop!" howled Billy, leaping into the air.

Of course, that did it! Billy didn't wait to finish his purloined tuck, but started off helter-skelter in chase of the porker who had spoilt his picnic. And as he disappeared over the hill, Harry Wharton & Co. came up with a rush, and commenced to make hay with their rescued tuck. "This is where we smile! Ha, ha, ha!"

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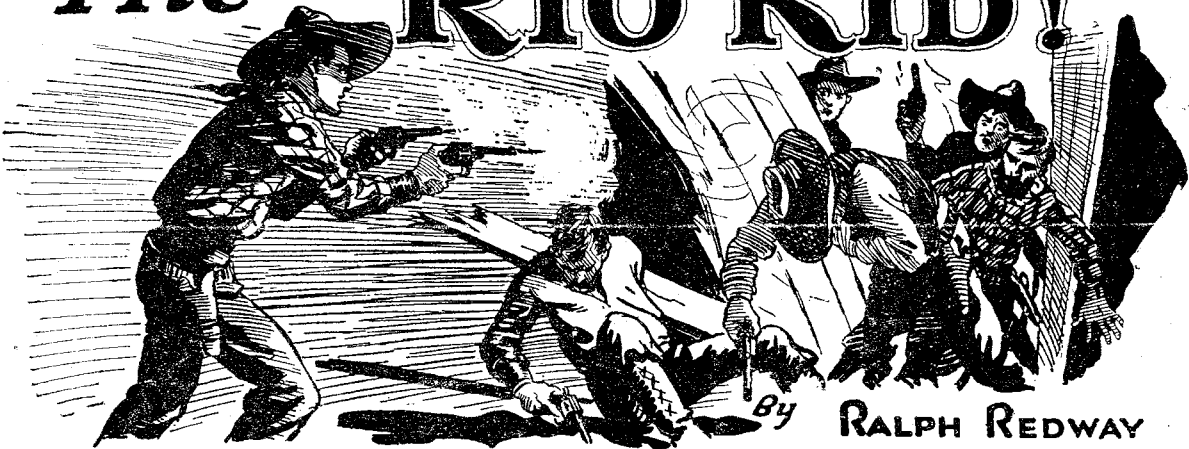


**"WHOA-BACK  
NEDDY!!"**

## HE'S NO QUITTER!

The Kid's got his work cut out in fighting a deadly feud, and saving a ranch from ruin. But, then, the Kid never was a chap to count the odds!

# The RIO KID!



Another Roaring Long Complete Tale of the Wild West, featuring The Rio Kid, Boy Outlaw!

### THE FIRST CHAPTER.

#### The Kid Does not Quit!

THE Rio Kid looked from a window of the shack hotel in the town of Wildcat, with a thoughtful expression on his face. A hot wind blew from the plains and filled the single street of the little Montana cow town with dust. Men who rode or lounged on the street glanced at the shack hotel as they passed, and especially at the window where the boy puncher from Texas was standing.

Across the street, in the shade of the wall of Henson's store, three cow-punchers were loafing. Farther down the street a group of three or four stood in talk, occasionally glancing towards the hotel. All of them, as the Kid knew, belonged to the Sparshott outfit, and he knew that there were more of that outfit in town that day. They circled the shack hotel, as if on the watch. And the Rio Kid knew for whom and for what they were watching. There was trouble brewing in the little cow town in the wildest section of the cow country of Montana, and the Rio Kid was the centre of it. The cheery grin on the Kid's sunburnt face did not indicate that it worried him.

He turned from the window at last and crossed the room to the plank-bed where Kent Loring lay on his blankets.

Kent, white and bandaged, looked up at him. Voices and murmurs from the street and the occasional crack of a gun fired in the air had reached the wounded cowman, and he knew as well as the Kid that trouble was on hand. For three days the Kid and his comrade had been in Wildcat, and in those days the wounded cowman had begun to mend, but it was likely to be a week or more before he was on his feet again. The Wildcat doc had done his best for him, but the cowman's healthy constitution was doing more. He was on the mend—if he was given time to mend. And the Rio Kid was there to see that he had it.

"Feeling chirpy?" smiled the Kid. "I guess I'm mending," said Kent. "But I reckon the Sparshotts won't give me time to mend, Kid. This is their chance to put an end to the feud, and I guess Eben and Rube Sparshott won't miss it. I guess they're in town now with most of their outfit."

THE POPULAR.—No. 496.

#### This Week:

## "THE KID'S LONE FIGHT!"

"Correct!"  
"I guess I'm sorry you horned into the trouble, Carfax. It ain't healthy to mix in a cowman's feud in a cow country."

"I'm sure wise to that!" said the Kid cheerily. "But I reckon I'm seeing you through, feller. The Sparshotts ain't got you yet."

There was a thump at the pinewood door of the room, and it opened. McCane, the landlord of the shack hotel, stepped in. The Rio Kid turned towards him with a smile on his face, but with his hands very near the guns that were slung low against his chaps. There was an uneasy expression on McCane's face, uneasiness mingled with doggedness. It was plain that he had come there on an unpleasant errand.

"Uncork it, feller!" said the Kid. "What's the news?"

"I guess I'm wanting this here room," explained McCane. "I'm powerful sorry, but this here room was booked last week, and I plumb forgot it when I let you galoots in."

The Kid smiled.  
"Then ain't it lucky that my pard is well enough to shift into another room?" he remarked. "Point it out, feller, and we'll shift pronto!"

"There ain't another room!" explained McCane. "Every room in the shebang is took!"

"You've sure got an unusual crowd in Wildcat, then," said the Kid. "I ain't seen all them pilgrims around the house yet."

"They ain't all on hand, but the rooms is took," said McCane. "I'm sorry, feller, but you'll have to quit!"

The Kid smiled again, but there was a glint in his eyes that belied the smile.

"You want us to quit?"  
"Sure!"

"Mr. Loring wounded and all?"  
"Can't be helped!" said McCane doggedly. "I want the room!"

"You've sure found out all of a sudden that you want this here room since the Sparshott outfit came to

town!" remarked the Kid. "I'll tell a man! You want an answer, I suppose?"

"I want the room!"  
"Sure! Well, you ain't getting the room!" explained the Kid. "My pard, Mr. Loring, is staying jest where he is till he's mended, and I'm staying with him! You get me?"

McCane scowled.  
He was a big and powerful man, and he towered over the puncher from the Rio Grande, sturdy as the Kid was! McCane was accustomed to dealing with a rough crowd; the Wildcat citizens were a rough bunch, and the punchers who came in from the ranches were rougher. The wounded man was helpless, and the Kid looked a mere boy; McCane did not figure that he had a difficult task on hand.

"I get you," he said. "Now you get me! You're vamooseing the ranch pronto! I give you half an hour!"

"Make it a week!" suggested the Kid.

He laughed lightly.  
"Put it plain," he said. "The Sparshotts are in town gunning after Kent Loring. You don't want them gunning after him in this hyer shebang, and I sure don't blame you. You want to keep clear of the Sparshott feud, like all the other galoots in Wildcat, town marshal and all. But you see how we're fixed! We ain't going!"

"I guess I'll put it plain," said McCane. "The Sparshotts are like enough to burn the shack over my head if I keep a Loring here out of their reach! I ain't being burned out to please any galoot!"

"What about the marshal?" asked the Kid. "Ain't it his duty to keep law and order in this here-cow town? Call him in!"

"The marshal ain't hornin' into a cowman's feud," answered McCane. "He got on his cayuse and rode away for Singer when the Sparshott bunch began to collect in town."

The Rio Kid chuckled.  
"He's sure a wise hombre," he said. "I guess you'd do well to get on your cayuse and ride after the marshal, feller!"

"You're going, both of you!" said McCane. "I've said I'm sorry, but I ain't any concern with the feud between

Sparshotts and Lorings! You're going!"

The Kid shook his head. "That's where you slip up!" he said. "But I'll tell you this—I've got a wad in my belt, and I'll pay for the damage when it comes. Is that good enough?"

"It ain't! You quit!"  
 "Guess again!" smiled the Kid.  
 "It ain't my way to take back-chat from any galoot!" said McCane.  
 "You'll walk out of this shebang here and now, and I'll send Loring arter you! Now, then, that's the way down the stairs!"

McCane was evidently determined. For ten years the feud between the Sparshotts and the Lorings had made existence lively in the Wildcat section of Montana. Shooting on sight had been the rule, and Wildcat had been the scene of more than one desperate affray. Of the Lorings, only Kent was left; of the Sparshotts, only two brothers. And now that the last of the Lorings lay helpless and wounded in the shack hotel, all the town knew that the Sparshotts were looking for the finish. And in that finish McCane did not want to have a hand. He wanted to keep clear of the feud, as all other citizens of Wildcat kept clear of it.

"Now, listen here, feller," said the Rio Kid in a tone of patient remonstrance. "Here's my pard wounded; they got him from behind a bush, the darned coyotes! They've burnt out his ranch and run off his cattle. I've brought him into town for the doc. I'm standing by him to the finish! He ain't moving! Forget it!"

"You going?"  
 "Nix!"  
 "I guess I'll see you do!"  
 And the burly McCane came at the Rio Kid.

The Kid did not touch a gun. He met the man with his hands, and it was a surprise to the big man who had handled hefty cowpunchers and teamsters in his time. The Kid gave grasp for grasp, and it was the burly McCane who crumpled up.

The wounded man on the bed had gripped a gun, but he only stared at what followed. There was a wild trampling and struggling for a minute or more, and then the burly McCane went whirling through the doorway in the grasp of the Rio Kid. On the little landing outside they struggled for another minute, and there was a terrific crash as a burly body went spinning down the rickety wooden stairs.

Crash on crash till McCane landed at the bottom of the stairs. There was a shout from below. Five or six startled faces stared up. The bar-keeper came on the scene with a gun in his hand. But the Rio Kid, looking smilingly down the stairs, had a gun in his hand now.

McCane did not rise. He lay groaning where he had fallen. His leg was twisted under him, and he was hurt.

"I reckon you want to pick up that jasper and carry him to bed!" remarked the Rio Kid pleasantly. "He reckoned that he was tired of my company in this shebang, but I figure that he has changed his mind now some!"

McCane rose on one elbow, his face white with pain and rage. He grabbed a gun from his belt.

Bang!  
 It was the Kid who fired, and the gun went spinning from McCane's hand and a spurt of blood with it. McCane sank back again with a yell.

"You're sure slow on the draw in Montana!" drawled the Kid. "Any more of you galoots looking for a little fancy shooting?"

"I guess not, puncher!" grinned the

bar-keeper, and his gun disappeared. "You take the pot!"

"That's plumb polite of you, feller!" smiled the Kid. "Take that galoot away and bandage him up, and tell him to be a good little man before something happens to him!"

The Kid holstered his gun, and lounged back into the room. Kent Loring gave him a faint grin.

"Notice to quit withdrawn!" remarked the Kid. "McCane is heap scared of the Sparshott crowd, but I guess he's wise to it now that he's got a firebug in this shebang who's got a bigger bite than any Sparshott! You don't want to worry any."

And the Kid crossed to the window again and stood looking out into the hot, dusty street.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER. Money Talks!

WHEN the Rio Kid lounged out of the shack hotel and walked down the dusty street of Wildcat all the cow town seemed interested in him. From doors and windows of saloons, from store and smithy, the Wildcat citizens stared at the puncher from Texas, and harder still stared the crowd of punchers from the Sparshott ranch, who were loafing on the street in twos and threes. They were a rough bunch, and every man of them packed a gun, and had used it more than once, and the Rio Kid was on the alert for gun-play as he walked easily and lightly down the street.

Only too well he knew that there would be no intervention from the Wildcat citizens if gun-play came along. The town had stood strictly outside the Sparshott feud, taking neither one side nor the other, and no man in the cow town meant to horn in now, now that the feud was approaching its tragic climax.

Sympathy, probably, was with the last of the Lorings, who lay wounded at the shack hotel at the mercy of his many enemies. But that sympathy was not likely to take a practical form. The fight was between the two clans that had been at war in the Wildcat section for ten years, and it was no other man's business. The Wildcat citizens only wondered that that reckless puncher from Texas had horned into it. He had thrown in his lot with the losing side, and unless he slid out quick he was booked to "go up" with the last of the Lorings, in the general opinion of Wildcat. They marvelled to see him walking the street so coolly and easily, humming the tune of a Mexican fandango as he went.

But the Sparshott punchers did not draw. They stared at the Kid as he walked with his light, elastic tread, and muttered to one another and glanced after him, and some of the glances were admiring. The Sparshott punchers were backing up their boss, and they were a rough and lawless bunch, but some of them could appreciate grit when they saw it, and the boy puncher from Texas was clear grit all through.

It was not mere bravado that made the Rio Kid walk the street in sight of his enemies. He had business on hand. He stopped at a frame-house a block from the shack hotel, and kicked open a rickety wooden door and entered. A thin man, with a foxy set of features, in his shirt-sleeves, was picking his teeth with a jack-knife, while he read a paper three days old from Butte, and he looked up at the Kid.

"I guess this is where Lawyer Dunke hangs out, feller?" the Kid remarked.

"Correct!"

"Is he on hand?"

"I guess so! I'm him!"  
 "Oh, you're him!" said the Kid, scanning the man, and then closing the door behind him. "Waal, I reckon I've some business with you, Mr. Dunke."

"Locating in this town?" asked Dunke, eyeing the Kid. "I guess all the real estate in this section this side of Singer is in my hands. You want to come right here if you're after a town lot!"

The Kid grinned.

"I ain't after a town lot, feller! I ain't locating in this section. I'm jest hanging on to see my friend Loring through his little trouble with the Sparshott bunch, and when that's through I guess it's me for the trail!"

"Oh, you're the Texas puncher?"

"Sure!"

Lawyer Dunke cast a rather uneasy glance from his window. Three punchers of the Sparshott bunch passed the window and glanced in as they passed. The lawyer breathed more freely when they were gone. Like the landlord of the shack hotel, he did not want the shooting, when it began, to begin in his house. And all Wildcat knew that it was coming.

"You don't want to get rattled, Mister Dunke!" smiled the Kid. "The circus won't begin jest yet! The Sparshott bunch are jest watching round; but the Sparshotts ain't in town yet, and I guess the band won't begin to play till they horn in."

"You sure came hunting for trouble, puncher, when you came up here from the Rio Grande!" said Dunke.

"I guess I struck a heap of trouble before I got as far as Montana, and I never came out at the little end of the horn!" answered the Kid easily. "But that ain't what I come about. I'm after arranging a mortgage, feller!"

"Not on Wildcat land?" asked Dunke.

"Yep!"

"You won't get it! You can try down at Singer or in Butte, and they'll tell you the same! It ain't easy to collect dues in this district!" explained Dunke. "The galoots are sure too handy with their guns!"

"So I've heard," assented the Kid. "Kent Loring has sure tried to get a mortgage on his ranch, and slipped up on it. But that's the land I want a mortgage on."

"Forget it!" said Dunke, shrugging his shoulders. "Kent Loring has been burnt out of his ranch, and I guess he will be got by the Sparshotts before the town's a day older! His land ain't worth shucks! The Sparshotts have ruined his ranch, and they'll get him! Forget it!"

"I guess you're going to fix up a mortgage for five thousand dollars on that ranch, all the same!" persisted the Kid.

"Loco?" asked Dunke.

"Nope! Money talks!" said the Kid. And he threw a wad of notes on the rough pinewood table in the office. "Count that out!"

The lawyer, in astonishment, counted the bills. He stared at them and stared at the Rio Kid.

"There's six thousand dollars here," he said.

"Correct! You'll give me a receipt for it and fix up that mortgage," said the Kid, "and you'll keep mum as an oyster! Kent Loring ain't going to know who's fixed it up for him! Savvy?"

"I guess money talks!" assented Dunke. "I can fix it up all right on them lines. But you're throwing your money away, puncher! The mortgage



of the brothers. Both had guns in their grasp, but they did not raise them. The coolness of the puncher from the Rio Grande daunted them. Across the street, from every corner of every building, excited and eager faces were watching, waiting for the trouble to break. It was the wildest night that even that wild cow town in the uplands of Montana had ever seen.

"What about it?" smiled the Kid. "You've called to see me, and you've found me at home!"

With an oath, Eben Sparshott threw up his gun and fired. The Rio Kid's gun roared before he pulled the trigger.

Bang!  
A bullet whistled by the Kid's head and cut away a lock of hair as Eben Sparshott, dropping his gun, sank down in the street.

A dozen guns were up the next moment as the Kid leaped back into the shack hotel and slammed the heavy pinewood door.

Crash, crash! rang the spattering lead on the thick pine planks. The Kid glanced round him. The big room was empty. The crowd had scattered by back door and window as soon as the shooting started. The Kid grinned. Not even the bar-keeper remained. With the butt of his Colt the Kid smashed the swinging lamp, and the room was plunged into instant darkness. Bullets crashed on the door, while the voices of the Sparshott bunch roared. The Kid heard the voice of Rube Sparshott, hoarse with rage.

"Eben's gone up! Have that puncher out! Follow me, and have him out!"

There was a roar, and the pinewood door swung open under pressure from without. From the darkness of the interior two walnut-butted guns, gripped in hands that never missed, began to roar, and a hail of fire met the Sparshott bunch as they crammed furiously in. Right and left stricken men reeled, and in the middle of the doorway, with a bullet in his heart, sprawled Rube Sparshott!

**THE FOURTH CHAPTER.**  
**The End of the Feud!**

**W**ILDCAT town had seen wild nights, many of them, but never so wild a night as now.

Back from the blazing guns of the Texas puncher, the Sparshott bunch had retreated, firing furiously as they backed—but all of them did not go. Three men, desperately wounded, crawled away in the shadows, and one lay still where he had fallen. Across the street the Sparshott bunch halted and rained lead on the shack hotel.

In that building only three men remained—Loring on his bed, listening to the wild uproar, with beating heart; McCane held in his bed with a broken leg; and the Rio Kid, a gun in either hand, the glint of battle in his laughing eyes, watchful as a cat, fierce as a panther, ready for a rush of the Sparshott gunmen if it came again.

But it did not come. From across the street the gunmen rained bullets and roared threats, but the tiger in his lair would have been as safe to attack as the Texas puncher in the dark building, and they kept their distance.

Through the long, wild night, under the glimmer of the stars, the wild uproar went on, shot after shot ringing out, singly or in volleys, and the Wildcat citizens kept close within their cabins while the trouble lasted. It was not till the sun was gleaming over the Montana Mountains that the firing ceased at last, and the Sparshott bunch went to their horses. In the fight both

of the Sparshotts had fallen, and the feud was indeed at an end, though not in the way that the Sparshotts had intended.

In the light of dawn a puncher came across the street with a white rag tied to a rifle—a flag of truce—and he stared into the shack to find himself looking

now with the last of the Sparshotts. Had the bunch got at the Texas puncher during that wild night, they would have shot him up or lynched him without ceremony; but with the day came reflection. The Sparshotts were "gone up" now, and no man in the outfit had any hunch to carry on the feud on

**THROWN OUT!** On the little landing the Kid and the hotel-keeper struggled grimly. There was a terrific crash as a burly body went spinning down the rickety wooden stairs. A startled face peered up at the amazing scene of the defeat of big McCane at the hands of the boy puncher.  
(See Chapter 1.)



at the Rio Kid's gun, with the Kid's smiling face behind it. The Sparshott puncher made a hasty motion with the white flag.

"That goes, feller, if you 'don't try any tricks!" grinned the Kid. "You want to palaver?"

"I guess we want that, hombre!" The puncher made a gesture towards Rube Sparshott. "You've sure fitted him for the pine box, puncher, and we want to plant him decent afore we hit the trail. I guess the Sparshott feud is over now, and Kent Loring takes the jackpot. There ain't any Sparshotts left to carry it on, and I reckon this bunch will be hitting the trail to look for a new boss. You can put that gun away, stranger. You won't want it any more."

The Kid chuckled. "I guess I'll keep it in my fist till you 'uns have lit out of the town!" he answered.

Half an hour later the bunch rode out of Wildcat. The feud was dead

his own. Those in the bunch who looked back as they rode saw the Rio Kid standing in the doorway of the shack looking after them, but the sight did not tempt them to return; it rather hastened them on their way. And Wildcat town breathed more freely when the Sparshott bunch were gone.

The Rio Kid went up the rickety stairs and entered the room where Kent Loring lay, sleepless, pale in his bandages. The Montana cowman looked at him.

"That bunch have hit the trail," drawled the Rio Kid. "I guess there ain't any more feud, feller. There ain't any more Sparshotts, and that's the reason why. You want to get mended and get to your ranch, and you won't have any more cattle run off or fences burned or barns fired. There ain't any more feud."

When the Rio Kid strolled out on the street of Wildcat he was the cynosure

first; it was the sixth or seventh constable he had passed that afternoon, and he supposed that he was going to pass this one like the others. But on that point he was mistaken. The stumpy constable stepped into the middle of the lane and held up his hand.

Lovell's heart beat a little.

He "honked" emphatically on his horn as a hint to the man to get aside; but the representative of the law did not stir. In the middle of the road, with raised hand of command, stood the representative of the law, and Lovell had to jam on his brakes.

He jumped from the saddle as the jigger stopped.

"Look here," he exclaimed hotly, "what are you stopping me for?" "I've 'eard about you, I 'ave!" said the policeman, in a deep, husky voice. "You're the young rip what rides without a licence!"

Lovell stared at him. He had never had any great admiration for the perspicacity of the police. But, really, this seemed like magic. His lawless proceedings, apparently, were already known.

"I—I say—" he gasped.

"Where's your licence?"

"Can't you see it sticking on the machine?" snapped Lovell.

"I'm speaking of your driver's licence."

Lovell paused.

Many a fellow would have said that he had left it at home, but Lovell was not a fibber. He looked at the policeman and slid his hand into his pocket.

"The fact is—" he said slowly.

"Well, where is it? I've got to see it!"

"The fact is, I haven't received it yet!" stammered Lovell. "I've applied for it and paid for it, but it hasn't come along yet!"

"I've 'eard that story afore!" said the policeman, with a nod.

"It's true!" exclaimed Lovell indignantly.

"I dessay. That ain't my business.

My business is to take you into custody for breaking the lor!"

Lovell shuddered.

"I—I suppose that will make it all right?" he murmured.

And he tried to slip a couple of half-crowns into the official hand.

The official hand was jerked back.

"The police can't be bribed, young man!" said the plump constable, with a great deal of dignity. "I'm sorry, but I shall have to report this!"

"For goodness' sake!" gasped Lovell.

"I—I— This will get me into a fearful row at my school! Go easy!"

"I can't 'elp that!"

"Look here, I'll make it a pound!" said Lovell desperately. "And—and I'll promise not to ride the jigger again till my licence comes!"

The policeman took out a pocket-book and wetted a stump of pencil.

"Offered me two 'arf-crowns, and then increased the bribe to a pound!" he murmured, as he scribbled.

"Oh dear!"

Arthur Edward Lovell fairly shivered. He had made matters worse instead of better.

"You come alonger me!"

"You've no right to take me into custody!" snapped Lovell. "I'm jolly certain of that! You can take my name and address!"

"Not arter you tried to bribe me!" said the policeman stolidly. "I shall 'ave to take you to the station now!"

"Look here—"

"'Nuff said! You wheel that there bike along, and come alonger me!"

Lovell glared at the impassive man in blue.

"Wheel it yourself, if you want to!" he growled.

The constable stepped to the scooter. He turned on sufficient gas to move it at a walking pace and started. Lovell walked on the other side of the scooter, a prey to deeply troubled thoughts.

The constable did not speak a word as he tramped on.

Lovell's steps lagged.

What was going to happen to him?

At the station he would have to give his name and address—Arthur Edward Lovell of the Fourth Form at Rookwood School. The charge would be motoring without a driver's licence and attempting to bribe the police. It would not be called "tipping a bobby," it would be called bribing the police—a very serious matter. What was the penalty? A fine—perhaps a heavy fine. Surely it couldn't be chokey! Lovell shuddered. After all, he was only a schoolboy and a first offender. No, it couldn't possibly be chokey. But the Head of Rookwood, of course, would be referred to. A constable would call at the school; and Lovell fairly shuddered as he thought of the interview with the Head afterwards.

He lagged still more.

The policeman did not seem to observe it. Perhaps it had not occurred to him that the owner of the scooter might think of abandoning his jigger. But that was, in fact, exactly what Lovell was thinking of.

He worked it out in his excited mind. Nine pounds had been paid for the scooter. But the fine might be more than that—ten guineas, perhaps. It would be cheaper to lose the scooter than to pay the fine. And if he could get clear that awful scene with the Head at Rookwood could be escaped.

Evidently Lovell's best move was to escape if he could, leaving the scooter in the hands of the policeman.

Lovell dropped quite behind, his heart beating fast. At the station he would have to give his name and address. But so far he was unknown. This man could not even know that he belonged to Rookwood at all. Now was his time.

The policeman glanced round.

"Keep moving," he said. "You're wasting time. 'Ere, you come back! Where are you going? My eye! Stop!" Lovell did not stop.

He had turned from the road, and was tearing up one of the little paths into the wood.

"Stop!" roared the policeman. Lovell vanished into the wood.

## "THE RIO KID!"

(Continued from page 11.)

of all eyes. The roughest gunman in the cow town made respectful way for him; men who lived on trouble wanted no trouble with the puncher who had faced the Sparshott bunch and beaten them to it.

But the Kid's manner was mild and inoffensive; he wanted no trouble with any man, though the walnut-butted guns were ready if trouble came. Day by day he sauntered in the street of Wildcat or rode the black-muzzled mustang, or watched by the bedside of the cowman; and McCane, who was hobbling about on a crutch, treated him with the deepest respect.

The town doc pronounced at last that Kent could leave his bed, and the Montana cowman was glad enough to climb into the saddle again and to ride the trails without fear of a bullet from behind a rock or a clump of mesquite.

And a day or two later Kent had news for the Kid—news to which the Kid listened with an air of surprise.

"I've got that mortgage!" the Montana cowman told him.

"Sho!" ejaculated the Kid. "I'll tell a man!"

"It's a cinch!" said Kent, with a bright face. "Lawyer Dunke came to see me, and he allows he's fixed it up

with a client of his to lend me five thousand dollars on the ranch."

"Search me!" said the Kid.

"It's sure the biggest lump of luck that ever came my way!" said Kent. "Mind, I sure figure that I shall pull through easy and pay off that mortgage, now that I can get to work without them pesky Sparshotts gunning after me. But it's sure a heap of luck, all the same, and I guess I'd be glad to know who's behind Lawyer Dunke in this hyer deal!"

"Ain't he told you?" asked the Kid innocently.

"Nope! Not that it matters; the galoot won't lose his money, whoever he is. Look here, Kid Carfax, I guess I'm going to make a fresh start, and I want to take you in as partner, and we'll raise beef together on the Loring ranch. What about it?"

But the Kid shook his head.

"I guess I've got a call to hit the trail, feller," he said, "but I'll sure see you fixed before I ride."

"When you're through with riding the trails come back to Wildcat and put in at the Loring ranch," said Kent.

"I sure will!" agreed the Kid, with a smile.

And for a couple of weeks longer the Rio Kid stayed on in the Wildcat country, and saw a new ranch-house rise on the Loring ranch on the ashes of the old building burnt out by the Sparshotts. And when at last he mounted the mustang to hit the trail, he left

the Montana cowman working with a busy outfit on a prosperous ranch.

The Rio Kid's face was thoughtful as he rode. He stopped by a mountain creek to draw a legal document from his pocket, and, after a glance at it and a smile, to tear it into fragments and scatter the fragments in the stream. He sat his mustang and watched the scraps of paper float away and vanish. Kent Loring was never likely to be called upon to pay off that mortgage.

Then the Kid rode on again with his face set to the south.

"Old hoss," he said, speaking to the black-muzzled mustang, as he often did on his solitary trail-ridings—"old hoss, we sure vamoosed out of Texas to dodge trouble, and we've sure woke up trouble every time since we pulled out across the Staked Plain. There's a country south of this, old hoss, where they raise sheep instead of cows, and where they don't pack guns, and we're sure hitting the trail for that country. You and me are hitting the sheep country, old hoss, where they don't pack guns!"

And the Rio Kid rode on, by mountain trail and grassy plain, heading for the sheep country—perhaps to have done with trouble, and perhaps to find there that trouble dogged his steps as of old.

THE END.

(Yes, the Rio Kid will sure give you a thrill in next week's roaring Western yarn.)