

Once An Outlaw—

By JOSE VACA

THE FAT and resplendent *policia del trafico* who directed traffic every day at the corners of *Avenida Cinco de Mayo* and *Paseo del Simon Bolivar*, as a usual thing had an easy job of it. True, the town of Ciudad Morales could boast of several hundred cars, but as these two resplendently named streets were little wider—and almost as dirty—as metropolitan alleys, his work consisted mainly of diverting wood laden *burros* and prod-

uce laden *carretas* at what he deemed the proper intervals. A block away, due south was the *Plaza del Mercado*, where the produce growers brought their fruits and vegetable, their eggs, their hand woven *sombreros*, and *huaraches* made from discarded automobile tires.

Once, this district had been the show part of *Ciudad Morales*. Then the plaza had been named

The policeman's eyes bulged. For behind the musicians rode a certain caballero upon a black horse!



The Sabinas Kid could not imagine a life in which he was not a hunted man. He disdained the government pardon. Yet he agreed to help the Federales, because in this case there was a woman he once had loved



after a saint, as was only fitting, and each evening at six was filled with promenading girls, who walked arm in arm, coyly observing similarly promenading males, who walked always in the opposite direction. But that was long ago, before the big brewery and the distillery had brought added population to the town, and it had turned

up its nose and moved away from the more squalid section that once had been its glory.

All that remained of the plaza's past glory was that part that was indestructible. True, the fountain still squirted a turgid stream of water in the center, where *polados* and *burros* alike quenched their thirst. And the Church of Guadalupe raised its greyness on the east side, and the *Banco Nacional del Morales*, secure behind its ramparts of gold, was still to be found on the west edge. It was out of the way, now that the town had grown away, but why should it move? Customers came to the bank, the bank hardly needed to go after customers!

On this morning, shortly after ten o'clock, the traffic policeman a block from the plaza, literally pricked up his hairy ears. For sounds were floating to him, sounds were emerging from the squalidness of the *Paseo del Simon Bolivar*. Music! At this hour of the morning? Guitars, and a violin, and a harsh voice singing Pancho Villa's old and famous marching song, *La Cucaracha!* Now the procession turned into his street, from a block down, and he could see them plainly. His eyes bulged! Unbelievable! Three guitarists, a violinist and a player of the harp! And behind them, a man on a black horse, clad as a *caballero* should be clad, with a silver decorated *sombrero*, velvet *charro* jacket, tightly fitting britches ornamented with a wide silver stripe and flaring correctly at the ankle.

The director of traffic could see these things, because as the procession came to his corner, he blew

his whistle and held up his hand, although at the time there was absolutely no traffic coming from the other direction! Thus he was also able to see that the rider lolled in a richly carved saddle resplendent with silver *conchos*, with carved *tapaderos* to match. And when he pushed back the *sombrero* the policeman gasped, certain then that it was an illusion. For the smiling lips were jovial beneath a waxed mustache, the nose above the mustache was aquiline, like the bill of a hawk, and the eyes that danced so merrily on either side of that thin bridged nose were jet black, like basalt!

QUICKLY the traffic policeman crossed himself. Perspiration stood out on his forehead. He wanted most of all to run, to run anywhere at all, only away from here! For already his horrified eyes had caught sight of the gold mounted revolver hanging in its holster on the rider's right hip! With terror he noted that the gloved hand rested also on the rider's right hip, so very near the revolver butt! And so easily he observed that the smile of amusement was fading from the rider's face as the music came to a close.

A musician, evidently the leader, turned to the rider, said, "*Otro, señor?*"

The rider, never taking his black eyes from the trembling policeman, answered, "*Por supuesto! La misma! Certainly, the same!*" And to the quailing policeman, "*Pues, que paso, gordo?*"

Gordo! This one had called him *Fatty!* But at that the policeman deemed himself lucky. For the life

of him all he could think to do was to blow his whistle vigorously and turn his fleshy body, gesturing for the procession to come on. The musicians lifted up their voices, and sang of snatching the whiskers of Carranza to make a hatband for Pancho Villa. The broad velvet back of the rider presented a tempting target, but the policeman only groaned. There, he told himself, rides one hundred thousand pesos and I am afraid to collect!

He hurried a half block down the *Paseo del Simon Bolivar* into a *botica* and rang his superior on the phone. "With *Jesus* as my witness, on the head and beard of my father, I swear it, *mi capitan!* With these eyes I saw him, Jose Maria Gardinia Guedea, the Sabinas Kid!" He listened for a moment, growing a pale yellow color. Twice he protested. At last, with the look of a doomed man, he said, "*si, mi capitan*, even if I go to my death! I will watch the front of the *banco* until he emerges! But help you will rush to me at once, much help?"

He went out into the sunshine. Walking slowly down the street, he felt like a man ascending the steps to the gallows. From the far side of the plaza he could see the black horse the Sabinas Kid had ridden, standing at ease before the bank itself! That one! To ride into *Ciudad Morales* in broad daylight, to go into the bank! Doubtlessly he was in there even now, cutting the ears from the cashiers, and the book keepers, dropping gold and paper pesos into his great morrals! That, decided the policeman, called for a drink. Anyway he could go into the nearby *cantina*

and reinforce his courage with a *copita* or two of *tequila!* Perhaps he might even be able to keep watch from the *cantina!* After all, he was a family man, and he valued his ears greatly.

THE *Banco Nacional*, in spite of its out of the way location was modern, from its great time-locked vaults to the president's secretary. She was as pert, as rouged, and as shapely as any president's secretary to be found north of the Rio Bravo! Except, perhaps, that she was old fashioned and romantic enough, as *Mexicano señoritas* sometimes are, to thrill at mention of the name tossed at her by the *caballero* who strode so magnificently into her severe anteroom. She returned from her employer's office with flashing eyes and provocative lips. She touched her shiny black hair with her polished nails, knowing the upward movement of her arm threw her peaked and pointed breasts into silhouette. She even sighed a bit deeply as she said to the Sabinas Kid, who sat nonchalantly on the edge of her desk, that *Señor Valdez* awaited him.

"*Señorita*," said the Kid gallantly, "I can see a banker any time. You—you are rare! Like a gem. Your name I do not know, for me, Jose Maria Gardinia Guedea, the Sabinas Kid,—I shall always call you *Diamantita*, a little diamond!"

It was more than the girl could stand, more than she had hoped for. The most sung about man since the great Pancho complimenting her thus! She swayed toward him—and evidently he was

expecting it. His hands swept her closer to him, flattened her body so tightly against his that she could scarcely breathe. Before closing her own eyes she saw the white gleam of his teeth, the flash of his black eyes. Then there was only the aching pain of his lips on hers, the sweet pressure of his mighty arms and the hot surge of blood in her veins. . . .

SEÑOR VALDEZ was a banker who believed in promptness. The Sabinas Kid had been expected promptly at ten. He was fifteen minutes late. He had been announced, had been told that Valdez and Coronel Roque Reyno, of the government, awaited him. And still he did not enter the office. Famous man or not, who was this outlaw, this *bandido*, to keep honest men of business and government officials waiting? *Señor Valdez* bustled to the door and opened it.

The Sabinas Kid was doing a very thorough job of kissing the Valdez secretary. Somehow, in the struggle, the secretary's blouse had slipped from a shapely shoulder, the upper slope of one satin skinned breast was partly exposed! The short skirt had crept stealthily upward until a halo of similar satin shone resplendently above the silk of her stocking. *Señor Valdez*, being a Latin, had often imagined himself doing this same thing, but with the shoe on the other foot, cold anger flooded his fat being.

At his oath of surprise, little Diamantita, startled, managed to pull away. Valdez glared at her, he glared at the Kid. He said, "*Se-*

ñor Gardinia, we await, and we are busy."

The Sabinas Kid laughed. He said, "I too am busy, little man of the tremendous paunch! *Vamos, pronto!* I come when my business is ended!" And before Valdez' horrified eyes he drew Diamantita back into his arms and proceeded with the pleasant business of kissing her thoroughly and well!

TWENTY minutes later, in the private office, observed by two pair of inquiring eyes, the Sabinas Kid finished reading the letter. The letter was signed by a great man of Mexico, and it bore not only an official signature but an official seal. He said, "Let me see if I have this straight. For the past three months a gang of counterfeiters have been gypping the *Loteria Nacional*, the national lottery. I do not understand how this could be done."

The slim man with the cadaverous features, who had been introduced to him as *Coronel Roque Reyno*, gestured impatiently. "Through the use of clever plates, *hombre*, and clever timing, and clever distribution! A man of infinite talent has made the plates, has collected similar papers and inks as those used by the government. Suppose, let us say, these tickets are run off, leaving the number itself blank. Suppose—and this is the only way we can figure it—that through the use of radio, perhaps one of what the *gringoes* call "ham operators" that winning numbers are flashed on the air as soon as they are drawn."

"Cabron!" said Diamantita. "Unfaithful dog—I should cut your throat!"



The Sabinas Kid nodded, his eyes shining.

"Already," went on Roque Reyno, "these blank tickets have been distributed to many parts of Mexico. Evidently the holders, those in this so terrible band of thieves, have been provided with numbering machines which print a similar number, that is a similar type and size, used by the government. The

number is inserted quickly! When the winning numbers are officially announced, the member of the counterfeiting gang goes to the bank and collects!"

The Sabinas Kid nodded. "And there are a hundred ways he could find if that number had been paid at the particular bank where he called! Why, if the plates and printing and numbering were good, the scheme is wonderful—providing of course they were content with the smaller prizes!"

"And that," put in Señor Valdez, "is what they have been doing. Smaller, yes, some ten thousand pesos being the largest counterfeit ticket as yet turned in. But, my friend, when you consider how many banks in the Republic of Mexico pay off on lottery tickets!" He made a gesture with his fat hands, made a resounding poof with his fat lips.

The Kid took the letter in his hands again. He read aloud. "—and because we know your knowledge of the *Mexicano* underworld cannot be rivaled, we are willing to grant you complete amnesty for your past misdeeds if you will help us bring these miscreants to justice. On the day that you give our representative, *Coronel* Roque Reyno the plates themselves—as well as some proof that this gang is broken up—we are prepared to hand to you, your full and complete pardon for all crimes against the government. During the interim, you are not to be bothered by police or *Federales*. *Coronel* Reyno has your permit to come and to go as you please. He also has your pardon—to be handed to you when the thing is broken."

He folded the letter and laid it carefully on the desk. He leaned back and closed his eyes, murmured, "To be un hunted! To enter a city as I please, to stay as long as I please, drink where I would, sing where I please—and as many *señoritas* as I please!"

Valdez curled his lip. "You agree, then, *Señor* Gardinia?"

The eyes snapped open. "Of a certainty, no! Why should I? I do those things now! Go and come when I please! Do as I please! Who touches me?" He glared at the *coronel*, as if challenging him, his gloves now in his left hand, his right hand close to the butt of his gold mounted gun.

ROQUE REYNO smiled. It was like the grin of a death's head. He said softly, "*Señor* Kid, I think I understand. You are a lone wolf, you have no more use for criminals than I have. But," the thin shoulders shrugged, "Official freedom means nothing to the wolf who evades traps derisively." The Kid grinned. Like a wolf. "So, knowing that, unofficially, I am prepared to do this." He extracted an immense wallet. "Here," he said, laying a folded paper on the desk, "is the pardon you disdain. Here is something you may better understand." Slowly, one at a time, he laid a pile of bills atop the pardon. "Fifty thousand *pesos*, *señor*. Suppose we leave these with *Señor* Valdez, to be turned over to you when you give satisfactory proof that your job is finished."

The Kid leaned across the desk and extracted a cigarette from the banker's humidor. He lit it, trickled smoke through his nostrils.

"And my safe conduct, *señor*, for the next few days."

Reyno tossed a paper across the desk. Without reading it, the Kid thrust it into his pocket. Reyno said, "We have reason to believe that somewhere in this very town the printing is being done. You will have no trouble—"

"And your credentials, *Señor El Coronel?*" There was a cold menace in the Kid's voice, but Reyno did not lose his smile. The wallet came out.

"You will understand, *amigo*, that my value as an undercover man is lost once my identity is positively known? Here are my papers, let them be between you and me and *Señor Valdez*."

The Sabinas Kid glanced through the commission, the appointment as a government agent. He said, as if unwillingly, "Enough, I suppose, *Coronel Reyno*, yet there is no description. There is not even mention of your ear!"

Reyno flushed, his skinny fingers flew to his right ear. The ear was lobeless, seemed to be whittled down, disappearing into a broad white scar that ran as far as the corner of his thin mouth. "An honorable wound of battle, *señor!*" His eyes blazed.

The Kid grinned. He shrugged. "*No importa*," he said carelessly. "Perhaps it is only that I am a connoisseur of ears that I noticed."

The light on the annunciator flashed on Valdez' desk. He flipped the button, said, "Yes, yes?"

An excited voice came back, "*Señor Valdez*, there is one here with the ticket on yesterday's

drawing numbered 174390! And already we have paid the ticket, or a similar one, not fifteen minutes before. What do I do?"

The Sabinas Kid rocked with laughter. He said, "And the forgeries are so good that you cannot be positive whether this is the real or the false!"

Valdez glared at him. "Twenty thousand pesos," he said grimly.

The Kid snapped, "Tell your cashier to stall the ticket holder. I want to have a look." He was out the door before the fat banker could turn to the annunciator! Diamantita leaped to her feet, her eyes suddenly hot. He blew her a kiss as he swept by her, went into the marble corridor, opened the door and peered out. The clerk was explaining volubly to a woman that due to certain formalities it would be a few, oh a very few moments before the ticket would be honored. If the *señorita* would but be patient!

The *señorita* evidently did not like to be patient, but she shrugged philosophically. As she turned and sauntered away from the window, the Kid's brows knit. There was something—? He opened the door wider. She neared the window. The bright sun shown through that window with the power of many candles. The *señorita* wore a simple white dress that proved no obstacle to the rays of the sun whatsoever. It might well have been cellophane. The Kid smiled; he appreciated femininity, when represented by a small waist, lyre like lips, tapering thighs and breathlessly shaped legs ending in spike heels. Even if the heels were a bit shabby and the dress that

covered the figure a bit shoddy. She turned in semi-profile, so that the Sabinas Kid caught the honey color of her hair, the determined chin, the full lower lip. He knew her!

A MOMENT later he was at the check table that stood in the center of the room, writing rapidly on a deposit slip. When she turned from the window and neared the table, he looked up, looked her directly in the face. For a moment he thought she was going to speak. Then she read aright the look of warning on his face, and though it could not stop the flush that spread over her own features, she did not speak. She paused, looked impatiently at the teller's window, then glanced down at the deposit slip.

It said, "Have you forgotten me? Please, *corazon*, do not give me away. Meet me two hours hence, wherever you say, wherever it is safe for me."

He turned his back deliberately. Abstractedly she fumbled with a pen, did a few curleycues, as a waiting and impatient person might, then rapidly scrawled an address. She whirled, casting the pen aside, hurried to the window. The Sabinas Kid folded the paper and thrust it into a pocket, moved out of the lobby, barely hearing the clerk's obsequious apologies for the delay in cashing the ticket and his equally obsequious promise that the money would soon be forthcoming.

In the office Valdez snapped, "Well, you have seen this counterfeiter? You have advice, yes?"

The Kid did not even answer him. Instead he looked at Reyno.

"My pardon, *señor*?" The cadaverous one indicated the paper and the pile of pesos. "And you have given Valdez the instructions, that I am to have the pesos and the pardon the moment I deliver proof to him that I have broken up these miscreants, the moment I bring to him the so clever plates?" Reyno nodded.

Señor Valdez snapped, "Enough! Now about the one who waits?" But the Sabinas Kid would not be interrupted.

"I am to be in complete charge?" he insisted.

Again *Coronel Reyno* nodded.

"But," said the Sabinas Kid regretfully, "how do I know that *Señor Valdez* is to be trusted?" The fat man swelled like an angry toad. The Kid raised his hand, beamed. "That is sufficient! You will burst your paunch, little fat man. And even bankers have ears, so you will be honest!" The banker blanched. Few in northern Mexico but knew the dreaded mark of the Sabinas Kid! The earless corpse!

"You will pay the lady now at your window," instructed the Kid. "And you will send a *mozo* to care well for my horse. It is likely that I shall take a cab, which you must call at once! Now wait five minutes, then pay the ticket, and watch for me to report shortly."

"But how do we know we are paying a counterfeit or a genuine ticket?" wailed Valdez. "The first of this number might be the genuine! It might be the—"

But the Kid, with a grin and a wave of his hand, was gone. He paused in the anteroom. *Diamantita* eyed him with flashing eyes

As Jenice came in, Diamantita landed on the floor with a thud.



and pouting lips. "I saw, *perfidio!* That blonde one in there! You, pretending, yet you make the note for her, no doubt you make the assignation! The colorless, skinny bag of flour! I clow out her false and fickle eyes!"

The Kid laughed. He liked the tiger in woman. She stood facing him with her fingers curved like talons, her eyes flashing, her pointed breasts rising and falling deeply, her skirt clinging to the fullness of her hips. "Diamantita," he sighed, "I go! Duty calls. But tonight, little gem of I hope not too much purity, you will meet me at nine o'clock, at the *Club Retiro!*" His fingers slid beneath her arms, he lifted her from her feet, brought her close to him. She closed her eyes, her red lips parted. And he set her down again, waved a hand and went through the door, leaving her staring angrily after him.

THROUGH the lobby of the *Banco Nacional* went the Sabinas Kid, paying no attention to the nervous blonde in the revealing white dress. He stood on the steps of the bank, a magnificent figure, twirling his pointed mustaches. Across in the plaza, the director of traffic — still unreinforced — was cooling his hotness — resulting from five quick shots of *tequila* — in the fountain. He swung back behind the stone, the liquor giving him a false courage. His fat fingers fumbled at his gun.

The Kid twisted and lighted a cigarette, waited impatiently. A taxi whirled around the corner on two wheels, the door flung open. Still the Kid waited. The door opened behind him. *Coronel Rey-*

no stood there, smiling. He did not speak, he did not look at the Kid. Suddenly, "*Ten cuidado!* Look out!" Reyno's left hand almost pushed the Kid down the steps, his right hand appeared miraculously with a gun. At the same instant a shot rang out, from the plaza fountain, the lead ricocheted off a pillar and screamed its way up the street. The director of traffic, misguided one, had tried to earn himself one hundred thousand pesos.

Now like a frightened rabbit he scurried across that crowded plaza. The Sabinas Kid and *Coronel Reyno* watched him go, each helpless in spite of the gun each held. For the plaza was too crowded to risk a shot.

The Sabinas Kid's eyes glowed. He said, "I thank you, *señor*. The Kid does not forget."

"*Es nada,*" said Reyno shortly. At that moment the blonde, who had collected 20,000 pesos on ticket 174390 hurried out of the bank. Glancing neither to right nor left she turned up the *Avenida Cinco De Mayo*, her trim hips swaying as her heels hit hard on the cobblestone pavement.

The Sabinas Kid got into the cab. "Slowly, *amigo,*" he grinned at the driver. "We follow the *gringo señorita*, and at a safe distance. From time to time we will circle a block. No?"

"*Si,*" growled the driver, and wheeled his cab.

The American *señorita* seemed to have much shopping to do. She stopped at a food store, at a clothing store, at a meat shop, emerging from each with packages. By now the Kid seemed to have lost much interest in her. Instead he watched

the driver. "*Hombre*," he said at last, "how is it that your face is not that of the picture on the driver's license?"

The man grinned. His face was round and dark, deeply pock-marked with blue, as if a gun had exploded too near to it. "I drive for my friend, *señor*," he explained, "my friend who is ill." The Kid was leaning far forward. Suddenly the cab came to an abrupt halt, stopped by a pompous traffic policeman. The Kid seemed to shoot forward in his seat, throwing out his hand to restrain himself. The hand missed the back of the partition, shot through the opening, grazed the driver's head, knocking off his cap. By the time he had picked up the cap and turned to curse the Sabinas Kid, the Kid was back in his seat, offering a thousand apologies. As the traffic director signaled to come on the Kid drew a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his hand. The blue powder marks on the driver's face were grease paint!

The *señorita* eventually turned into the rattle trap Hotel Lavaca. The Kid gave her time to disappear, went into the desk, hurriedly wrote, "Janice Blue" on an empty envelope and waited while the oily clerk thrust it into the proper box. Janice Blue was in Room 204.

THE next stop was a haberdasher's, for the Kid realized he looked much too conspicuous in his *charro* costume. He went into the store, and there in the shadowy interior, whirled to watch his driver. Now the Kid had explained that he would be inside perhaps all of twenty minutes. So hardly had he

entered when the driver left his seat and hurried to the corner cigarstore. Moments later he emerged from a phonebooth to find the Kid leaning nonchalantly against the counter smoking. The driver's face blanched.

The Kid smiled. "*Amigo*," he said softly, "you know who I am, no?"

The driver nodded. "Come," said the Kid. "There is a *cantina* on the corner that has a rear room. We shall go there and reason, you and I. Spies I do not like!"

The driver's face blanched. He saw the long brown fingers hovering close to the gun butt. "No, no," he whispered. "I will tell you! It was the man at the bank, Reyno! He have me come in the cab to take you where you would go!"

Anger swelled in the Kid's breast. Reyno! After he had given him a safe conduct! After he had promised him cooperation, every means! But there was no need to vent his resentment on this poor underpaid spy of a fellow. He dismissed him with a curt nod.

He spent the intervening hour and a half busily. He bought a complete outfit of clothing, being sure that the coat was amply big to conceal the gold mounted revolver beneath his arm. He walked to the center of the town, where the towering Federal Building overlooked the central plaza. There he spoke boldly to the lieutenant at the gate. He even invited him across the street for a little *aguardiente*—which turned out to be quite a lot, rather than a little.

"Roque Reyno?" laughed the lieutenant. "Of course! He and I

have been like this!" He crossed his forefinger and second finger, lifted his refilled glass. "So you know him, too! Let us then, *amigo*, drink to Roque!"

The Kid laughed, lifted his glass. Afterward he said musingly, "I have not seen him for years, old Roque. I suppose he has lost weight by now! And for the head of a cow I cannot remember his nickname!"

Again the glasses were filled. The jovial lieutenant said, "Lost weight? That fat boar? Never will he lose weight! And as for his nickname, how could you forget? *Zurdo!* He of the left hand!"

WHEN the Sabinas Kid walked into the designated meeting place, a barman polished the bar before him, said, without looking at him, "The *señorita* waits, *señor*. The third door on the left." The Kid left a five *pesos* note on the bar, walked warily down the smelly hall to the third door on the right. His hand was on his gun as he noiselessly twisted the knob, stepped out of line and flung the door wide. Years of being sought sharpened his senses, he took no chances.

Nor was the room empty. The shutters were closed, a candle flickered on the table. And in that dim light he saw Janice Blue. She arose to meet him, her eyes shining, her hands outstretched. She whispered, "Pepe! Pepe! To see you again!"

Now, once, not so long ago, the Sabinas Kid had run away from this woman, not so much for his own sake as for hers. That was in Mazatlan, on the west coast. He

had been able to do a service for her and for her father, a dissolute English remittance man, Jeffrey Blue. And intimacy had grown, not alone from the gratitude she felt, but because both were magnificent specimens of their own races. The Kid, a hunted man, with a price on his head, knew a marriage with this English girl would be a hell on earth for her, though she was willing to follow him wherever he might go. Except for one thing. Her father.

Jeffrey Blue at one time had been an artist of promise. An unfortunate love affair, after the death of his wife, combined with other serious blows, had turned him into an incurable dipsomaniac. When sober, Jeffrey Blue was the exiled Englishman, kind to his daughter, thoughtful, polite, repentant. When drunken, he was literally a conscienceless fiend. He had been known to sell the shirt off his back for a *litre* of *tequila!* And knowing this, Janice Blue, even though she loved the Sabinas Kid, could not go with him when he fled from Mazatlan with the *federales* at his heels.

"Pepe! Pepe!" she whispered again. He met her in the middle of the room, met her with arms that swept about the soft contours of her lush body, flattened those same contours against his own muscles. Her arms were about him, she strained to him until she felt the mad pounding of her heart echoing against his, beat for beat. His lips on hers . . . his hands. . .

She pulled away. "We mustn't," she said. He shrugged, rang the bell that summoned the waiter and ordered *habanera*.

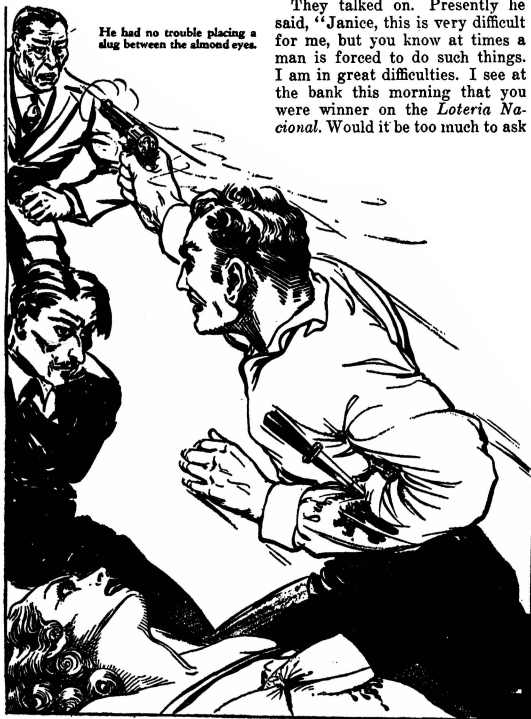
They sat together on the divan speaking of old times in Mazatlan, careful not to touch on their once flaming love.

"And your father?" he eventu-

ally asked in a casual tone. He felt her soft body tense beside him, sensed the lie before it was uttered.

"My father," she whispered, "is in the states. I join him there presently."

They talked on. Presently he said, "Janice, this is very difficult for me, but you know at times a man is forced to do such things. I am in great difficulties. I see at the bank this morning that you were winner on the *Loteria Nacional*. Would it be too much to ask



He had no trouble placing a slug between the almond eyes.

the loan of five thousand pesos for a few days?"

She looked at him in astonishment. The Sabinas Kid borrowing money? The Sabinas Kid, who used that gold mounted gun to obtain what he would have? His face, however, was innocent.

She said, "Why, Pepe, I am sorry! I owed that money, truly I did. I have paid it out, already!"

He knew that for a lie, too. Her eyes would not meet his. He gathered her into his arms, and she forgot everything else. . . .

LATER, he drank, and looked down at her. He reached for her bare white arm, his forefinger touched the angry black and blue bruises. In spite of her resistance he turned her, touched similar bruises on her velvety shoulder blades.

"Your father," he challenged. "You claim he is in the states. These are his marks—or the marks of another man!"

She began to sob, to weep so convulsively that her breasts trembled and rode and fell spasmodically. "There is no other man," she said softly. But he could not touch her again. When she stood at the door, she was again Janice Blue, proud and defiant. "All right, Pepe," she said, "you caught me in a lie. Perhaps I had reason to lie. I love my father."

"And your father," he said softly, "is in great trouble. Is it not so? You are afraid for him!"

"So afraid," she answered, "that I will not even let you see him!"

Then she was gone.

At the bar, where he paused for

another drink, a small hand whirled him about. "Cabron!" said Diamantita, her eyes flashing. "I should cut your throat, you unfaithful dog!"

The Sabinas Kid laughed, picked her up bodily and carried her into the same room he had vacated. "I suppose," he laughed, looking down at her, arms akimbo, "that *El Coronel* sent you too?"

She looked puzzled, reached into her blouse and extracted the deposit slip he had written his note upon at the Banco Nacional. "This," she said, "I took from your pocket at the *banco* when you bade me goodbye! Unfaithful one!"

He stopped her indignant words with a kiss. Presently she said, "Oh, I made it my business to find out about that one, that sack of flour. She has a man! She lives at the Hotel Lavaca, and she is seen in the cafes with Ramon Torres, that aviator who was thrown from the army for gambling! She is his woman, I tell you!"

The thought ran through his mind—had Janice been lying about those bruises? Was her father really in the states? Could another man—?

"But you, little gem, you are no other man's girl," he breathed. Tenderly he slid the blouse from her shoulder, leaned and kissed it. He sank down on the same divan, pulled Diamantita down beside him. To hell with Janice! She drew away from him long enough to murmur, "Señor Valdez, he has given me the afternoon off, *corazon!*" Then nothing else mattered. . . .

AROUND three that afternoon Janice Blue alit from a car before the same *cantina*. Pausing not at the bar, except to note that the man she sought was not there, she hurried down the squalid hall, threw open the door and paused on the threshold, her body stiffening.

The Sabinas Kid lolled at ease on the divan, the girl he called Diamantita on his lap. Her dress was well up in her lap, revealing silken knees and jewelled garters. It was hot in the room and her discarded blouse hung over the back of a chair. Seeing Janice, the Kid sprang to his feet. Diamantita lit on the floor with a resounding thud. Janice, scorn and nausea on her face, started back down the corridor. The Kid seized his hat and coat, sprang through the door in pursuit.

It took him a full five minutes of firm argument to get her troubles. "It is my father," she finally wept. "They have him! They must have him! Ramon and I have searched every *cantina* in town for him! He took the money from me, the lottery money, and now he is gone! I tell you *they* have him and you must help me, for they will torture him to death!"

Ramon, she had said. Ramon Torres? And when they reached the Hotel Lavaca, he knew it was so. The aviator awaited them in Room 204! Scarcely did he glance at the Kid. Instead he seized her hands, drew her to him and tried to comfort her. "Do not fear, little one, do not fear," he soothed her. "We'll find him! I tell you we should have flown away days ago, when we first arrived, but we were

moneyless, I know. But do not worry. We will find these men and make a deal!"

The Sabinas Kid felt out of place. True, this man had been dishonorably discharged from the army, but who is there without fault? The girl was the daughter of a notorious man; she, too, had lived hard. And somehow the Kid knew that what she felt for him was something entirely different from that emotion that flooded her being when young Ramon Torres held her in his arms! He shrugged. There were always, he told himself philosophically, the Diamantitas! "And now," he told them finally, "if you can break off enough to tell me how I may be of use—?"

IT TOOK, perhaps, ten minutes to get the story. Jeffrey Blue, had been an etcher and engraver of marvelous ability before drink threw him. Jeffrey Blue had made the plates for the counterfeit lottery tickets! He had kept that knowledge from his daughter as long as possible, but at last she had become suspicious of his source of money. And in a drunken moment he had told her what he had done.

She knew then that she must somehow get him out of Mexico. She knew the gang, once they were through with him, once the big cleanup was made, would assassinate him. Young Ramon Torres, the fier, had been flying the counterfeits all over Mexico for the gang. The girl, casting scruples aside, had deliberately set out to make the susceptible young Latin her slave. And had succeeded beyond her furthest hopes.

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Once An Outlaw

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"For Pepe," she said, putting her arm about the aviator, "we are honestly in love, Ramon and I! For me he has sacrificed everything, his future with this gang! For—he stole the plates and gave them to me! We flew here from Torreon, bringing my father, hoping to trade those plates for our safe conduct across the border! This we could not do, the government would not compromise! Now the gang has located us. They have gotten my poor father, they will torture him, and he does not even know where the plates are!"

"And the ticket you cashed this morning at the bank?"

"We needed money," she said, her head high, her breasts rising and falling proudly. "We meant to make a run for it tonight. With a letter press we made the one ticket, we tuned in a radio to the

proper station and got the coded winners. That gave us time to prepare the ticket, Pepe. Will you help us get my father?"

"You know where to go!"

Ramon Torres answered stiffly, "The gang has a headquarters here. We can only go there and offer to make a deal. To trade the plates back to them for the safety of Jeffrey Blue."

Now the Sabinas Kid knew this was like to sticking their heads in the mouth of the lion. He also knew that he could not get his pardon—which, in spite of his scorn he really wanted—without possessing those plates himself! He shrugged, and to shrug in such a manner meant yes, with the Sabinas Kid.

THE house sat well back on the mountain towering to the east of *Ciudad Morales*. Boldly the

three, the Kid, Janice Blue and Ramon Torres wheeled their shabby roadster into the patio. From the time they alit they knew they were covered by guns, knew that watchful eyes were upon them. Nevertheless they rang the bell, were admitted by an evil faced *mozo*, who escorted them into an inner room and left them.

Impatiently they awaited. Presently a bland Oriental voice said, "Señorita Blue, Señores Torres and Gardinia, or should I say the Sabinas Kid? It is well that you have come. We expected you, as a matter of fact. Now you will lay any weapons you might possess on the table, then stand against the wall. You are covered by a machine gun."

The Kid grinned, followed Torres to the table, carefully laid his gold-mounted gun beside the automatic of the aviator.

"Señorita," commanded the voice that seemed to issue from nowhere at all?

Unwillingly, she too advanced. Her fingers plucked at the hem of her skirt, the skirt lifted higher, over her silken knee, high up on her thigh. A small .25 was strapped there. This joined the others on the table.

The silent *mozo* came in and removed the weapons. As he left, an opposite door opened to admit a small, weazened Chinaman, clad in western clothing. He bowed ceremoniously.

Torres said, sullenly, "Chin Lee!"

"Chin Lee," agreed the Oriental. "And you, of course, are the traitor Ramon Torres." Torres

flushed angrily. Chin Lee went on, unperturbed. "We were fortunate enough to chance upon your father in a *cantina* not long ago, *señorita*. Evidently he eluded your watch. We thought you would come willingly to trade for his safety."

"Is he all right?" she asked breathlessly. "What have you done to him? Believe me, he doesn't know where those plates are."

"He is quite all right—and quite happy. If you will follow me?"

They followed him, the three of them, down a stone corridor, where he threw open a barred door. The Sabinas Kid was startled at the gaunt appearance of Jeffrey Blue, who lay as a dead man on the bed. Except that it is not the usual thing for dead men to snore.

"He is quite happy," said the Chinaman, "quite drunk. Now we go into the next room. He will not be disturbed, for his last drink was deeply doped."

In the next room he faced the three of them. "And now we deal, no? Your father for those plates."

Torres said, "What guarantee do we have that we will be allowed to leave? Maybe you'll take the plates and somehow kill us all anyway."

"A chance you must assume," the Oriental assured them.

The Sabinas Kid snapped his fingers. He sneered openly at the Chinaman. "Chin Lee, or whatever you call yourself, I do not like the Chinese at all. To me they are store keepers, runners of opium houses. These people know nothing. And I, who know all, refuse to deal with a yellow man."

CHIN LEE'S eyes were venomous. Before he could answer, the Kid went on, "What do I care for Blue's life? You know very well life means nothing to me. But I know where those plates are. These people do not even know that already I have stolen them. Now will you summon the man who calls himself *Coronel* Roque Reyno. With him only will I deal."

Chin Lee simply stared at him. The Kid laughed in his face. "This hoax has gone far enough," he snapped. "No doubt the real Reyno started from Mexico City on this mission. But you and your gang intercepted him. Reyno was a *zurdo*, a left handed man. Your faked *Coronel* is right handed, for I saw him shoot. Also the real Reyno was immensely fat and jovial! You killed him, this man of the bad ear took his place. You enlisted my aid to find the Blues and Torres, and even while your man was propositioning me at the *Banco Nacional*, the luck of the Sabinas Kid held good! Janice walked in to cash a ticket." He rocked with laughter. "I wonder what your men thought of it."

The man with the carved ear stepped into the room, bearing a heavy automatic in his hand. He smiled, like a death's head. "You are astute, *Señor* Kid," he smiled. "You must remember, however, that I was in the Valdez office, I did not see the sweet Janice enter so boldly to cash her ticket. We stood, you and I, on the *banco* steps, together, and I fired at the policeman who desired your life. It was only afterward that I saw her, and realized that we did not have need of your talents in locat-

ing the Blue family. Now, of course we realize that we do not need you, as I said before. Yes, you are astute. I killed Roque Reyno and took his papers. You know that. Which means, you know too much!"

"I know too much about your plates," said the Kid bluntly, still bluffing. "I—"

"Look out," screamed Janice. The Kid whirled, saw the contorted face of the man who had driven him in a taxi, yet in spite of dodging, the heavy blow from the loaded quirt butt caught him. He fought for consciousness and found it was no use. Blackness descended upon him.

HIS head was a raging cauldron of pain when he awakened. Hands, shaking hands, were rubbing his wrists, a quivering voice was saying, "Awake, Kid, awake! You must!" He opened his eyes to peer into the bleary blue eyes of Jeffrey Blue. He sat up.

Blue said, "Damn them! They thought they had me doped. Drunken, yes, but I didn't take the dope! For the love of God, tell them where those damnable plates are hidden. Listen, and have mercy!"

A scream, undeniably issuing from the lips of Janice Blue filled the room. They heard her scream, "No! No! I tell you I don't know where they are!"

And Torres' frantic voice, "Tell them, my dear! You took them from me! It isn't worth it! Tell them!"

"I don't know!" It faded again into a scream of agony.

Jeffrey Blue drew himself up.

He muttered, "For me, a drunken, no good father she suffers that!" He straightened his bent body, his body warped by vice. "You, Kid, you feel all right?"

The Kid nodded.

"You are afraid to battle three men, providing you have a gun?"

"Certainly not. Nor thirty!"

Straight to the door walked Jeffrey Blue. He hammered upon it. He called, "This farce has gone far enough. I alone know where those plates are. Open the door and let me out, I'll talk."

The Sabinas Kid moved to the side of the door, out of sight. Slowly it swung open. The man of the crippled ear stood there, gun in hand. "Come out, Blue, with your hands raised. God help you if you don't k—!"

Blue launched himself through the air. The gun boomed. You could actually hear the impact of the bullet on flesh, yet he kept going. Both his hands gripped the gun. It boomed again, knocked him to his knees, and still he clung.

The Sabinas Kid leaped forward. His right fist staggered the man who called himself Reyno. His hands grasped the gun, wrenched it away from the fighters, he fired across the room at his ex-taxi driver. The man went down. He leaned to clip the false Reyno across the pate and keep him on the floor. Something flew through the air from the hand of the Oriental. A knife buried itself in the flesh of the Kid's left arm. Very calmly, paying no attention to the wound, he raised the gun. While it was not his own gold mounted weapon, he had no trouble at all in placing

a slug directly between those brown almond eyes.

He drew the knife from his arm, cut Torres loose from the chair where he was bound. Janice Blue was spreadeagled on a cot, most of her clothes torn from her, and circling her breasts, as if drawn by a pen dipped in red ink, were the marks of the Chinaman's knife.

As he cut her loose and she flew to her father, Torres by her side, a great clattering was heard in the hallway. The Kid raised the gun. A voice called, "It is the law! We enter!"

And with the law was Diamantita! Eyes ablaze she walked to the Kid. "You! You great lout, to leave me for that passionless bag of flour! But I follow you, and it is well for you that I did! This is a bad house, and this I knew! It was I, Diamantita who save your life! I call the *guardias!*"

A hand plucked at the Kid's sleeve. He left a blazing eyed Diamantita where she was, withdrew to listen to Janice's sobbing talk. "*Madre de Dios,*" he said, "and if you knew all the time where these plates were, why did you suffer torture?"

She seemed amazed at the question. "Why," she faltered, "I had brought you along for emergencies. You always get out of difficulties, do you not? You are Jose Maria Gardinia Guedea, the Sabinas Kid!"

"The greatest fool in the world," he said bitterly.

SENOR VALDEZ of the Banco Nacional hated to pay over fifty thousand pesos. True enough the agreement was fulfilled, the plates

lay on the desk before him. The police had verified the fact that one Pablo Gonzales, alias Coronel Roque Reyno had talked, and implicated the entire ring. Grudgingly he said, "Here is your money, *señor*, here is your pardon. I have the plates, and what is this?"

"A souvenir," said the Kid, unwrapping the package.

Never had the Banker Valdez received such a package. For it contained an ear, a human ear! And the lobe was completely sliced off. The ear of the false Reyno!

"To remember me by," said the Kid softly. "And now, as for this!" He took the pardon and threw it in the wastepaper basket. "*Señor*, you are a banker, safe and secure. But me, the Sabinas Kid, I cannot visualize life with no spice, life with no one after me! Tell the government I disdain their pardon. Tell them tonight I meet Diamantita, Diamantita and life!"

Through the open window came the roar of an airplane, dipping down in farewell toward the bank. That, the Kid knew, was Janice Blue and Ramon Torres headed for the *Estados Unidos*.

The banker said coldly, "A fine gesture, *amigo*. But useless. You

know that I merely have to notify Mexico City and the pardon goes on record, whether you keep your copy or not!"

The Kid threw back his head and laughed. "Tonight, life and Diamantita! And something else, *Señor* Banker!" The gold mounted gun flashed from the holster. "I do not think I have enough money, so from you, I shall take, let us say, 100,000 pesos for your fat life!"

In five short minutes he had it. *Señor* Banker Valdez sat bound and gagged in an easy chair placed in a closet. "Tomorrow," said the Kid mockingly, "I will be back in my beloved hills, richer by far, and with another adventure behind me. Tomorrow, your employees will find you. If you care to recommend my complete pardon after this—!" He kissed his fingers, tossed the kiss into the air.

The door closed on the fearful Valdez. But through it he heard the Kid singing, something about life being a big and passionate woman named Diamantita, who should be taken regularly, but not too regularly to make her lose her savor.

Valdez was angry. But Valdez was resigned.