

*The Tonto Kid and Slim Akers Go into the Banking  
Business – by the Back Door*



## Wildcat Reward

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**T**HERE were times when Young Pete, known throughout the southwest as The Tonto Kid, felt that if "tonto" meant fool, he was well named. He was called The Tonto Kid

because his early boyhood was spent in the Tonto Valley.

Circumstance rather than his natural proclivities had earned him a hard reputation.

Following the great flood in the Texas Panhandle, a rancher found a wash tub in the fork of a cottonwood. In the wash tub was a baby wrapped in an old army overcoat. Grudgingly the rancher gave the orphan a home, named it Pete. When thirteen, Young Pete was adrift in Arizona, general utility boy for a band of horse and cattle thieves. At sixteen in spite of his sincere attempt to keep out of trouble he was outlaw himself. At twenty he was still outlaw. He had two dependable friends, his six-shooter, and an ex-card man named Slim Akers. For several years Pete and the card man had travelled together, a circumstance which, in spite of both endeavoring to keep within the law, had proved that two can get into considerably more trouble than one.

Recently the authorities had made it so hot for Young Pete and his partner that they had decided to leave not alone the country, but the continent. The Argentine was their objective, cash their chief necessity, Galveston the nearest seaport. Camped in the foothills a few miles east of Belgrave, Pete and Slim Akers sat near a dead breakfast fire contemplating their worldly possessions—a silver watch, a jack knife, a pack of cards, ten dollars in cash, and tobacco and cigarette papers. Two six shooters, a handful of cartridges, their horses, saddles, ropes, a slicker that leaked, and a couple of morrals, both empty, completed their tally. Grinning Slim dipped into his pocket and solemnly laid three matches on the ground. “That’s all.”

Young Pete’s dark eyes snapped. “We need a thousand to get out of the country right.”

“Or wrong.” Slim nodded.

“There’s a bank in Belgrave.”

Slim’s eyebrows went up. “Also a cemetery. Old Abe Farley watches that bank like a hungry lion watching a stray calf. Only Abe has swallowed the bank already. Takes your money and loans it to himself. His boy, Ed, is vice president and cashier. His other boy, Joe, is bookkeeper, floor sweeper, messenger boy and teller. Also runs the feed store. The family own Belgrave. It ought to be called Farley, and Belgrave one of the suburbs.”

Young Pete frowned. “Every time I try to turn up the straight, somebody cuts my trail lookin’ for trouble. This journey I aim to have the game as well as the name. I’m goin’ to bust Abe

Farley’s bank wide open and help myself.”

Slim Akers’ big ears moved as he grinned. “After all these years?”

“You go to hell! I never pulled that kind of a job, or bumped off anyone that didn’t invite it. Never even held up a train, or busted a Wells Fargo box, although I been tangled up in plenty of such doin’s.”

“And so badly tangled it was hard to tell which was the fly and which was the spider. So you’re going to ease Farley out of a thousand or so? Well, Farley has robbed folks a plenty. I don’t seriously object to redistributing some of his wealth.”

“Then it’s a go?”

“When wasn’t it?” Slim rose and stretched. “As they don’t know me in Belgrave, maybe I’d better ride down and look around.”

Young Pete thought that a good idea. He would loaf in the foothills until evening, when he would ride to town and meet his partner. If things looked favorable for a holdup, they would tackle the job next morning as soon as the bank was open. Breaking into and robbing the bank at night was out of the question. They had no tools, or any means of blowing the safe.

**L**EISURELY Slim rode down the foothill trail leading to the desert. Young Pete staked his horse to fresh grazing, curled a smoke and lay watching the clouds drift across the June sky. He liked Arizona. But he was through. His name as a gunman had made him a target for every ambitious peace officer in the Southwest. He had tried to go straight. Even his appeal to the governor for a pardon had failed. “Nothin’ else’ll satisfy ‘em but to hang my scalp on the fence,” he muttered. “But just between you and me,” he glanced at the picketed horse, “I aim to keep on wearin’ that scalp, so my brain won’t get wet when it rains. As for Abe Farley and his bank—I’ll be doin’ the county a favor easin’ him of some of his cash. Now I wonder if stealin’ from a thief is actually stealin’?”

Riding slowly across the desert level, Slim Akers was asking himself the same question. Abe Farley, as everyone knew, began his financial career by helping himself to as many unbranded head of cattle as he could without getting caught at it. Ten years after he had recorded his own

brand he was one of the biggest owners in the state. He began to loan money to homesteaders. When a homesteader failed to make his payments, Farley closed down. In another ten years he had accumulated enough to operate a bank, which, with his two sons as right and left hand, he ran for the strict benefit of the Farleys. Speculating heavily in mining stocks the Farleys had so far overreached themselves that they were on the verge of bankruptcy. Somehow their financial condition got to the ears of the governor, a political opponent of Farley's. The state inspector was due almost any day. Farley's books showed a heavy cash balance, but it was mostly ink. To account for the lack of actual cash—other people's cash—he evolved a simple plan. He would rob his own bank. The safe and the building would be left in such condition as would indicate an outside job.

With the ten dollars in his jeans, Slim rode into Belgrave, put up his horse and invested in a hair cut and a clean shirt. As he ambled about town sizing up the chances for a getaway after the robbery, he met banker Abe Farley in the hotel bar. Introducing himself, Slim bought a drink and stated that he was a cattleman from Tecolote, that his name was Cartwright, and that he wanted to borrow a thousand dollars on his brand. Much to his surprise Slim was invited to dine with Banker Farley at the hotel that evening, when they would discuss the loan. Although this did not fit in with Slim's scheme to get into the banker's private office that afternoon and size up things, he accepted the invitation to dine.

**T**O PASS the intervening time Slim bought into a game of poker in progress in Stud Henshaw's saloon. Deliberately clumsy until the three he sat with were convinced he was a come on, Slim finally induced his opponents to part with something like a hundred and thirty dollars. Declining a fervid invitation to continue the game, Slim pleaded an important engagement, suggesting, however, that they meet the following day and continue the festivities. A hundred and thirty dollars was mere chicken feed to Slim, yet it gave him a certain feeling of solidity. Now he, instead of Mr. Farley, would pay for the dinner that evening—impress the banker with his eagerness to borrow the thousand, meanwhile

learning all he could about local conditions and the habits of the Farley family.

Seven o'clock that evening Banker Farley and the affable Slim Akers, fugitive at large, were dining together in the Belgrave hotel. "This little spread," declared Slim as they began the meal, "ought to be on me." Abe Farley raised a fat, red hand. "I invited you here, didn't I?"

"But you're giving me your time, your valuable time," insisted Slim.

"Mebby your time is worth something, too."

"You bet it is! You'd never guess what a little time means to me, sometimes."



Mr. Farley allowed himself the pleasure of guessing what time would mean to this lean-faced, dark-eyed, big-eared young cowman if he could get him just where he wanted him. But the banker's poker face told no stories. As for lending him a thousand dollars, that was a joke. But because of his plan to involve Slim in the proposed robbery, he laughed at Slim's remarks and ate voraciously. To impress Slim and lead him on, the banker declared that things were a little tight, just now, that he would like to accommodate him, but wanted to discuss the loan with his sons. Gazing pointedly at Farley's waistline Slim admitted that things were a little tight, belts for instance. Sometimes it paid to loosen up a little. Farley laughed. "Tell you what I'll do, Mr. Cartwright." (Cartwright being Slim's name at the time). "It's irregular, but as you are in a hurry to get back, I'll make an exception. You bring your papers to the bank about nine this evening."

"Do I get the loan?" Slim seemed especially eager.

"A thousand, wasn't it?"

"A thousand. Ninety days. Give you my note. And when you can find time I want you to come over to the Tecolote and I'll show you the prettiest little spread this side of Nogales. Homesteaded it myself. 'Course I run most of my stuff on the open range, and nobody says anything. But you've punched cows. You understand."

Farley nodded. "East of Tecolote, you said?"

"About eleven miles. On the old Tempe mine road. You ought to remember that country."

"Well, I'll meet you at the bank about nine."

Starting for home, Farley ran into his son Joe. "Looking for you," said Joe. "Ed's got everything fixed. If we're going to blow the safe we got to get a move on. Take a hell of a time to drill it, and get everything set."

"It never pays to hurry, Joe. Did you notice that young puncher I was talking to at the hotel bar this afternoon?"

"You mean that waddie with the big ears?"

"Yes. I've got it all ribbed up. He'll be at the bank about nine tonight, alone. He wants to borrow a thousand. Reason for my opening up so late, he's in a hurry to get back home. But he'll stay in the bank. We'll see to that. Just one thing. He's an easy talker, but he's got a mighty keen eye. You want to knock him out cold, and quick."

"That is," said Joe Farley, "we heard the ruckus, caught him in the bank and knocked him out. The other fellow got away with the cash."

"There ain't no other fellow. But that's our story."

**Y**OUNG PETE had just ridden into a jacal on the edge of town, put his horse in the corral and a dollar in the Mexican's hand, when he saw two men on foot making for the desert. There was not much moon, yet he was able to distinguish the two figures as men better dressed than the average citizens of the district. "Ain't those hombres got any horses?" he asked.

"Yes," declared the Mexican. "Señor Abe and his sons own some fine horses."

Pete made no comment.

"Two, three, times at night," said the Mexican, "they go by my place like now. Pretty soon they come back. Perhaps it is that they like to walk in the desert."

"Like hell they do!" muttered Pete. The Mexican squatted down and curled a cigarette.

Pete squatted beside him. With his black hair, his dark eyes and swarthy face, as well as his familiarity with Spanish, Pete might have been a Mexican himself. They talked weather, grazing and local conditions. Pete gained considerable news of the town. Within a half hour two dim figures came back up the road, one of them carrying a sack. Wondering what sort of errand took Banker Farley and his son out into the desert after dark, Pete decided to go out and watch for Slim. Presently that sprightly individual came riding down the road whistling a little tune which told Pete that the coast was clear. For the Mexican's benefit Pete let his partner ride on, past the jacal. When Slim was well toward town, Pete rose and strolling out, overtook him.

Slim's news about dining with the president of the Belgrave bank was no special surprise to Pete. His partner was capable of inveigling the governor of the state into a dinner engagement if he set out to do it. That Slim was to meet Farley at the bank that evening was, however, a different matter. "That bird," said Pete, "wouldn't lend you a can of beans if you was starvin' to death. He's up to some deviltry."

"So am I," declared Slim cheerfully.

"What I mean—" Pete mentioned the Farleys' recent trip into the desert—"they're ribbin' up something that won't do your health any good, invitin' you to walk into the bank at nine in the evenin'. It ain't the kind of billiards Farley plays, unless he aims to use you for the cue ball."

"He'll find me the liveliest little cue ball he ever took a poke at. So they fetched a sack back with 'em? Good! It's up to us to leave 'em holdin' it."

Pete shrugged. "Anyhow, I didn't figure to do the job until tomorrow. We ain't got anything to blow the safe with. I aimed to walk in about ten in the mornin', and stick 'em up proper. There'd be cash in the till, then, and mebbly the safe would be open."

"Sure! But your uncle Slim is going to keep his appointment with the big bank man. I want to see what makes the wheels go round."

**T**HE partners decided to leave their horses at the hitch rail in the alley back of the square, Young Pete to remain there until Slim had entered

the bank with Farley, who would undoubtedly invite him into the private office to discuss the loan. It was nearly nine o'clock, when Slim walked round the corner of the alley, and moved slowly toward the bank. Farley had not arrived. Not to appear too eager Slim paused in the stairway entrance to a rooming house and stood looking out across the empty square. A bit of gravel had worked down into his boot. He sat down on the stairway and was tugging at his boot when he heard the banker's voice. Slim drew back in the shadows and listened. "Don't see him around anywhere," said the elder Farley, as he and his son Joe stopped near the rooming house entrance. Slim heard the other voice. "Suppose he goes for his gun before I get a crack at him?"

"Then I'll just naturally plug him. Caught him robbing the bank, and had to kill him."

Slim's big ears moved slightly as his eyebrows went up. "Can it be that the gentleman refers to me? How inhospitable!" The card man's face wore an amused grin. Evidently Farley's companion had planned to take a crack at somebody and if that didn't prove conclusive, Mr. Abe Farley was to put the finishing touch to that somebody's career. Slim was puzzled. How did the Farleys know what his intentions were? And why, if they suspected him, did they invite him to the bank that evening? Suddenly it occurred to Slim that the Farleys were trying to hang a bank robbery onto somebody. Even as this idea came to Slim the elder Farley said in a low voice, "We'll take only currency and gold and silver. You'd better take the sack to the feed store and drop it in the second bin and cover it with barley. Nobody'd ever think of looking for it there."

Slim's eye brightened. So the Farleys were robbing their own bank and caching the proceeds in their own feed store—keeping it all in the family. Then why not let them go ahead with their plan? It would be considerably easier for Young Pete and himself to lift the sack from a feed bin than hold up the Farleys. Slim wished he might have a talk with his partner. By this time Pete would have arrived at the alley with his horse. Following the sound of footsteps moving down the street, Slim peered cautiously from the stairway entrance. The Farleys were just turning into the bank. The gravel in his boot forgotten, Slim walked swiftly out, intending to keep on past

the bank, meet Young Pete and inform him of the new aspect of things, when Abe Farley, apparently on watch in the bank doorway, recognized him. "Hello there! Hope I didn't keep you waiting."

Slim stopped. "Don't mention it, Mr. Farley. Just got here this minute."

Farley turned and called to his son Joe who came out, and was introduced. "I'll go ahead and light up," said Joe Farley. The banker gestured to Slim to enter. As Slim stepped inside the lights went out, something struck him on the back of the head and he felt the earth dropping from beneath his feet.

**H**AVING fetched and tied his horse, Young Pete moved up the alley to where he could watch the bank windows. When the lights came on he strolled up the cross street toward the bank. He took his time so that Slim might have a chance to size up the layout. In a few seconds the lights of the bank went out. "That would be Slim getting busy," thought Pete. He was just about to turn the corner when two men came out of the bank, one of them carrying a small sack. They hastened on up the street. Wondering what had happened, Pete rounded the corner. He was surprised to see the door of the bank standing open. The interior was dark and silent.

Aware that he might be walking into a trap, nevertheless Young Pete stepped swiftly through the open doorway, calling Slim in a low voice. Working his way toward the rear of the bank, he stumbled over something which groaned. He identified his partner by running his hand over his face. Pete's first impulse was to drag Slim out of there without losing a minute. But The Tonto Kid didn't intend that the Farleys should get away with their scheme without paying a long price. Chancing it that he might have to shoot his way out, he made for the rear of the bank, located the safe, found by feeling that it was open. Pausing and listening, he struck a match. As it flamed and went out, he saw the empty safe drawers on the floor and papers scattered about in disorder. He turned as Slim groaned again. "Coming, old Timer," he said.

Pete discovered that his partner's hands and feet were tied. The Farleys had got a jump ahead of Slim, knocked him out and left him to be

discovered and jailed. Pete was half dragging half carrying Slim to the street when he heard an outcry and the sound of someone coming at a run. With no time to get to the horses he dragged Slim into the stairway entrance to the rooming house. Two men hastened past. Making a quick decision, Young Pete carried his helpless partner to the landing above. An oil lamp burned dimly on a small table. No one was about. Pete tried a door, found it unlocked and the room unoccupied. Depositing Slim on the bed, Pete noticed a peculiar lump in his partner's upper shirt pocket. The lump, Pete discovered was a hundred odd dollars in bills. These he tucked in his own jeans, and stepping out locked the door. From the street below came the sound of voices and hurrying feet. The door at the end of the hallway opened and a woman wrapped in a tattered dressing gown asked Pete what he wanted.

"Got it," declared Pete. "Room No. 2. No one was in there, so I packed my friend in and also locked him in. He's awful drunk."

"It's three dollars a night for drunks."

Cheerfully Pete gave the landlady five dollars. "If it's all right with you," he said smiling, "I'd like to keep him there till he sobers up. What I mean, I don't want any of his friends to know he's here. He'd just naturally go on another bust. His wife and kids are comin' to town tomorrow. I don't want him lookin' like a railroad accident."

The landlady fondled the five dollar bill. "He's dead and buried as far as I'm concerned. What's the row downstairs?"

"Heard somebody say Farley's bank had been held up."

"Farley's, eh?" The frowsy landlady's face grew hard. "Well, for one, I'm glad of it. The Farleys have done the robbing long enough. Now take my place here——" Pete listened patiently to a tale of banker versus client, finally excusing himself he hastened down stairs.

**T**HERE was more noise than crowd. Most folks were at home at that hour. From a bystander Pete learned that the Farleys, Abe and his two sons, were in the bank. The local constable was guarding the doorway. Lingered long enough not to attract attention when he left, Young Pete slipped away and made for the alley. As yet no posse had been formed. Pete rode to the

Mexican's, leading Slim's horse. Leaving the two horses, and another dollar, Young Pete hastened back to town. A posse was now forming. Blustering among the curious who still hung about the bank, Abe Farley declared he would pay one thousand dollars for the apprehension of the robbers. Slim's description was by now common property. Apparently the man caught robbing the bank had an accomplice. The robber had been left tied hand and foot. He had disappeared. A thousand dollars to the man who caught him.

Young Pete listened, identifying, through a talkative member of the crowd, Abe Farley and his two sons. Finally the bank door was locked. Two or three townsmen still stood on the corner discussing the robbery. Young Pete loafed in the rooming house entrance listening to the talk.

"Well," said Abe Farley, "I guess that's about all we can do now. I'm going to turn in." Ed and Joe Farley said they would accompany him to his home. As the three started to cross the square, Pete was struck with an idea. The elder Farley's house was a huge brick structure located on the corner of the main thoroughfare and the first cross street west of the plaza. Hastening down the south side of the square, Young Pete arrived at the cross street, turned up it and arrived at the Farley mansion half a minute or so before the Farleys appeared, walking slowly and talking in low tones. Pete shinned up the acacia near the gateway a few seconds before the Farleys arrived. "I'll sleep at the feed store tonight," declared Joe Farley. "I know everything is all right, but we'll take no chances."

"Good idea," grunted his father. He turned to his son Ed. "You better send a wire to Sheriff Simms, on your way home. It won't do any harm to go on record as having done all we could to apprehend the robbers."

"That's a good one!" Joe Farley laughed. "Well, so long till the storm blows over."

"I'd give considerable to know what became of that big eared cowpuncher," said Abe Farley.

Young Pete in the acacia above agreed that banker Farley would, and at no distant date.

"Beats me," said Ed Farley. "Guess I'll drift along and send that wire."

**B**ANKER FARLEY was just about to unlock his front door when he heard a light footstep

behind him. He turned to encounter a medium sized, rather slender young cowpuncher, whose hat brim was pushed back, and whose hand held a six-shooter. "We'll talk a little first," said Young Pete. "Put those keys back in your pocket. You won't need 'em where we're goin'."

At first Abe Farley thought it was Slim who had accosted him. Slim and Young Pete were about of a size and looked considerably alike. Their voices, however, were altogether dissimilar. The man with the gun neither acted nor talked like the other. "Just what do you want?" Farley was watching for a chance to get to his own gun which he carried in a shoulder holster.

"I want your gun. Like this." Pete's hand moved swiftly. The banker, who wisely had his own hands in the air, felt a tug, and his shoulder holster was empty. "Now go ahead and light a cigar and we'll take a walk, Mr. Farley. Don't make any funny moves, or both your lights will go out."



Abe Farley knew when a man meant business. He had also begun to suspect that he wasn't entirely through with the cowpuncher his son had knocked out. He was pretty sure of it when Pete said, "Your boy Joe usually sleep at the feed store?"

"Sometimes."

The young stranger's six shooter had disappeared and he was curling a cigarette as they walked toward the gateway. "If we meet anybody," said Pete, "we won't stop. We'll keep right on talking, friendly like, and busy. It will be better that way." Pete was now, apparently, in an altogether different mood. They took the south side of the plaza, turned at the bank and arriving at the rooming house entrance climbed the stairs.

"Just step ahead and stop at room 2," commanded Pete. "Here's the key. Unlock it."

"Damned if I will!"

"You better change your mind, and get goin'."

Blustering, Farley unlocked the door. On the bed sat Slim, his face chalk white, a towel tied round his head. A lamp was burning on the dresser. On the floor stood a water pitcher. At sight of the banker, Slim's face lighted up. "Strange, but I was just thinking about you, Mr. Farley. Won't you have a seat?"

For the first time the banker was able to see Young Pete clearly. He knew now that he was dealing with The Tonto Kid. "What's your price?" he asked, his lips white.

"We'll settle that later. I recollect you said somethin' about payin' one thousand to the men who landed the hold-ups. Well, I landed one of 'em, and pretty quick I'm goin' to land the other."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean you. Joe Farley is the other."

"You're crazy."

**P**ETE grinned. "So is my partner. Now you know what you're up against." Pete turned to Slim. "Can you ride?"

"If you'll call a hack."

"You're comin' out of it, all right." Pete handed his gun to Slim and told him to entertain Mr. Farley, while Pete tore the bed sheets into strips and tied the banker securely to the chair he sat in. Then he gagged him and lowered the chair so that Farley lay like a turkey ready for the oven. Slim was still shaky, but able to move about. "If you're looking for something," he told Pete, "you'll find it in the second bin of Farley's Feed Store, covered with barley."

Pete grinned. "So that's why Joe Farley is sleepin' in the store tonight? Too bad, but we'll have to wake him up."

"He won't be awake long," said Slim, feeling of the lump on his head.

Joe Farley lay on a bunk in the room back of the feed store, nervously aware that in the barley bin lay the little sack containing all the cash left after their recent speculations; a total of something like five thousand dollars. True, there were mortgages due and their cattle were intact, but it would take a long time for the family to

again build up anything like the fortune they had once accumulated. The man on whom they had planned to hang the robbery was missing. This was bad. If the authorities ever discovered the Farleys robbing their own bank it would put an end to banking operations. Disgusted with the thought that he had slaved for years as errand boy and general utility hand for his father, Joe Farley decided to do a little private robbing himself. He would plant the five thousand out in the desert, break in the rear door to the feed store as evidence that someone had robbed the place, and then go home and turn in, stating to his wife that he had changed his mind about sleeping in the store. Ed and his father would jump him for having left the store, but they would hardly dare mention the cash except privately. Later, Joe Farley planned to leave the state, cut loose from the family that had bossed him since he was born.

**Y**OUNG PETE and his partner were just entering the alley back of the feed store when they heard a splintering crash. They stopped. Presently a figure emerged from the rear of the store and hastened up the alley. "Keep your eye on him," said Pete. "I'm going to look see what's inside."

It did not take Young Pete long to discover that the barley bin contained no sack of money. Barley was scattered about the floor. The door had been broken in. The blankets were thrown back from the bunk at the rear of the store. Pete felt the blankets. They were still warm.

Meanwhile, grunting and groaning, Slim trailed the figure that had recently disappeared up the alley. But the man was too swift for him, disappearing up a side street before Slim reached the corner. Slim stood looking out into the plaza. Following the sound of hoof beats a rider made straight for the east road leading to the desert. "Maybe," muttered Slim, "and maybe not." He met Pete coming out of the store and reported his failure to keep track of the man who had recently hastened up the alley.

"Here too," said Pete. "Barley bin has been scooped. I reckon we fumbled this job."

"Somebody fumbled a hundred from my jeans," complained Slim. "Otherwise, I'd say let's hit the trail out of town."

"I'm takin' care of your cash. You ain't

responsible. You say you seen a fella high-tailin' it for the desert?"

Slim nodded.

"Then I'm makin' a bet with myself. Come on."

To Slim's surprise Pete led the way to the rooming house. "Changed my mind about robbin' anybody. Goin' to turn old man Farley loose."

"You're just as crazy as ever."

"Goin' to turn us loose, too. Got a wonderful idea."

**B**ANKER FARLEY was more surprised than pleased when Young Pete untied him and told him to put on his hat. "You're goin' for a little walk," he told the banker. "Out in the dry spot. Don't mumble. You're used to walkin', you and your boy Joe. Evenin's. Down through Mexican town in the moonlight. Me and my partner'll see that nothin' bites you."

"For God sake, don't murder me!"

"Murder you. Shucks! It won't kill you to walk off some of that paunch."

Farley protested, but he walked. Just beyond the edge of town Pete stopped while they waited for the dawn. When the first gray light spread across the sand he pointed to fresh horse tracks heading east and told the banker to take the lead. Fearing to do otherwise, Farley plodded ahead till the tracks turned almost a right angle, leading toward Gopher Canyon. Farley began to slow up. Finally he stopped. Far down the southern desert a horseman was moving toward them. Straining to watch the distant figure, Farley's mouth tightened. He had recognized the horse, a high stepper owned by his son Joe. Slim smiled. "It does seem to be getting thicker, doesn't it?" he said affably. "I wondered what Pete was up to."

The distant horseman had halted, apparently waiting to see what the three men were about to do. Pete grinned. "Mr. Farley, the barley bin in your feed store is empty. Barley all over the floor. Back door busted in."

"To say nothing of my feelings," added Slim. "Sharper than a serpent's tooth."

"What in hell you talkin' about?" said Pete.

"Why, Joe Farley. Thankless child. Done his papa a mean trick."

"Nobody," muttered Farley, "knew it was there but Joe."



"And nobody but Joe knows where it is now," said Pete quickly. "Listen, Mr. Farley. If he comes a shootin', somebody's goin' to get hurt. It's up to you."

"I'll talk to him," said Farley.

"Later." Pete rode toward the distant figure. Slim shrugged. "It'll be just too bad if your boy Joe starts anything."

**S**LIM'S remark was prophetic. Young Pete had come within a scant fifty yards of Joe Farley when the latter drew a gun, and without the slightest warning, fired. The shot whipped past Pete's head. It had scarcely hit the sand down the desert behind him, when The Tonto Kid cut loose. Simultaneously Joe Farley's horse, a nervous animal, jerked its head up. The shot, which otherwise would have dropped Farley from the saddle, took the horse square between the eyes. "Too bad," muttered Pete as the horse crumpled and fell. Farley kicked free and rose to his knees. Pete's rowels were in his horse's ribs a second after he fired. Farley was pawing the sand searching for his gun as Pete loped up. "Sorry about that horse," said Pete eyeing the sleek, well built animal. "What I mean, I'm dam' sorry it wasn't you. Get up on your feet and quit actin' funny."

"I second that motion." Slim, as usual, was on the job, leaving banker Farley to plod heavily toward the group about the dead horse. The banker's mood had changed. His face was a purplish red and his eyes glittered. "Joe," he said, holding his son with his eye, "what in hell have you been up to?"

"That's my business. Who are your friends?"

"Friends!" snorted Farley. "Look here, Joe. Who robbed the feed store?"

"Same folks who robbed the bank," volunteered Slim. "Don't look so hard at us, Mister Joe. Pete and I are as innocent as angels."

"No we ain't. It wasn't our fault," Pete turned to the banker, "that you and your family got a jump ahead of us holdin' up the bank. We aimed to clean you, proper. You saved us that job, but you got a job comin'."

"Who are you?" demanded Joe Farley.

"Pete. Reckon that'll do for now."

"You're talking to The Tonto Kid," said the elder Farley. "And I'm here to tell you that he's a

better man than you are."

Joe Farley glowered at the three who had caught him almost red handed in robbing his own family. "Well," he said finally, "what you going to do about it?"

"Find it," chirped Slim. "We need it, or some of it. Depends on how Pete's feeling."

"Back track," said Pete, gesturing toward Joe Farley. "And move quick. I'm starvin' for breakfast, and dead for sleep."

"Which means," Slim yawned, "the Kid ain't too particular about what he does. Neither am I. Dig up, or I'm damned if I won't bust you wide open myself."

"It won't be hard to find. Tracks are fresh," said Pete.

"Yes." Slim nodded. "But I need a chaperon, this morning. Better come along, Joe. My head hurts. You better come along."

**T**HE procession started. Joe Farley in the lead, his father behind him, and followed by Pete and Slim. Zig-zagging down into Gopher Canyon, they halted amid the boulders of the dry river bed. Joe Farley grinned sourly. "You're such a smart outfit, find it yourself."

The sack of gold and currency might have been in any of a hundred places in that rough, rock strewn canyon floor. Abe Farley sat on a rock and mopped his sweating face. His son Joe stood staring at Pete and his partner. It was Slim who circled the spot where the tracks of Joe Farley's horse ceased. Presently he stopped and studied the position of a fair sized boulder. He stopped and began to scrape the sand from around its edges. He smiled. His hand was moist. There was subterranean water in the canyon. He looked up at Joe Farley, a rugged, thick-bodied man, not unlike his father. Young Pete and Abe Farley were puzzled. Slim glanced from Joe Farley to the boulder. "You ought to been a blacksmith. Your touch ain't delicate enough for a good banker." And with a heave and a grunt Slim, slender as he was, heaved the boulder to one side, scooped the wet sand from beneath it, and finally disclosed a stout little canvas sack hard and heavy. "Here's your money," he said, handing the sack to Abe Farley. "Ain't you even going to say thanks?"

"You mean——?" stammered banker Farley.

"It's your dough." Pete nodded.

Slowly Abe Farley untied the mouth of the sack and slowly he counted out ten one hundred dollar bills. Without a word he handed the money to Young Pete. And without a word, Pete took it. Slim, however, insisted that they have change, then and there, for one of the big bills. A few minutes later they were on their way back to town, the Farleys plodding ahead, Slim and Pete a few yards in the rear.

Just before they entered Belgrave Pete called a halt. "We're a queer lookin' outfit. Folks might ask questions. So, Mr. Farley, to make it right, you and your boy Joe are going to eat breakfast with us. Then we're goin' to buy some chuck and ride out of town, quiet. What's more, you and Joe are goin' with us as far as Deep Wells. If that don't suit you, you better talk now."

Mr. Farley had nothing to say. The Tonto Kid seemed in a pleasant mood, yet the banker knew better than to take any chances.

**S**OMETHING like two hours later they arrived at Deep Wells, Farley and his son on foot. The banker was all but exhausted. Yet he showed considerable spirit as he said, glaring at his son. "If I had had these two punchers for partners, instead of you and Ed, I wouldn't be in this jackpot. The Kid held me up, all right, got the thousand. Claims it as a reward for turning us up. But you notice he got it. I reckon he gets most anything he goes after."

"We're headin' east," said Pete. "What I mean, don't you send anybody after us."

"You can bet on that," declared the elder Farley. "And if Joe so much as opens his mouth I'll give him the beating of his life."

Camped many miles east of Tecolote, Young Pete and his partner tossed up to see who would stand guard while the other slept. Pete won the toss. He spread his saddle blanket, stuck his head in his saddle and apparently went to sleep. A few minutes later, however, he raised himself on his elbow. "Say, you big-eared, purse-mouthed coyote, just how did you spot the rock in Gopher Canyon?"

"Go to sleep, you tom cat! Maybe you have noticed that my hands are what you like to call soft. Well, I noticed that the sand round the edges of that boulder was just a little more moist than the sand in the canyon bottom. If we'd hit there two hours later the sun would have dried it, and we'd have been out of luck."

"Oh, I don't know. I figure I could have made Farley talk. But I don't get you."

"Course you don't, you wobble-eyed tarantula. The moist sand was on top. Joey dug it out to make a place for the sack when he rolled the rock back and smoothed the sand all around. But he couldn't smooth the moisture out of it. Keep on living and you'll learn something, someday."

Young Pete answered with a deep snore.