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Desert Gold

By ZANE GREY

Author of Riders of the Purple Sage,

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"I LOVE NELL"

SYNOPSIS.-Seeking gold in the desert, "Cameron," solitary pros-pector, forms a partnership with an unknown man whom he later learns is Jonas Warren, father of a girl whom Cameron wronged, but later married, back in Illinois. Cameron's explanations appease Warren, and the two proceed to-gether. Taking refuge from a sandstorm in a cave, Cameron dis-covers gold, but too late; both men are dying. Cameron leaves evidence, in the cave, of their discovery of gold, and personal documents. Richard Gale, adventurer, in Casita, Mexican border town. meets George Thorne, lieutenant in the Ninth cavalry, old college friend. Thorne tells Gale he is there to save Mercedes Castaneda. Spanish girl, his afflanced wife, from Rojas, Mexican bandit. Gale "roughhouses" Rojas and his gang, with the help of two American cowboys, and he, Mercedes and Thorne escape. A bugic call from the fort orders Thorne to his regiment. He leaves Mercedes under Gale's protection. The pair, aided by the cowboys, Charile Ladd and Jim Lash, arrive in safety at a ranch known as Forlorn River, across the border. The fugitives are at Tom Belding's home. Belding is immigration inspector. Living with him are his wife and step-daughter, Nell Burton. Gale, with Ladd and Lash, take service with Ladd and Lash, take service with Belding as rangers, Gale telling Belding the cause of his being a wanderer, a misunderstanding with his father concerning the son's business abilities. Mercedes gets word to Thorne of her safety. Dick also writes to his parents, informing them of his whereabouts. Nell's personality, and her kindness, attract Gale. Riding the range, Gale falls in with a party of three Mexican raiders encamped at a water hole. Watching his opportunity to oust them, he sees two Indians ride into the camp. One of them, a Yaqui, is evidently badly wounded, and the Mexicans seek to kill him in a cruel way. Dick drives them off, conveying the wounded Yaqui to Belding's ranch. The Indian becomes Dick's ardent admirer. Gale's admiration for Nell increases, Belding's horses, the pride of his life, are run off by the Mexicans. Gale, with Ladd, Lash and the Yaqui, pursue the raiding party, finally cornering them.

CHAPTER VIII.-Continued.

The other rangers sawed the reins of plunging steeds and whirled to escape the unseen battery. Gale slipped a fresh clip into the magazine of his rifle. He restrained himself from useless firing and gave eager eye to the duel below. Ladd began to shoot while Sol was running. The .405 rang out sharply-then again. The heavy bullets streaked the dust all the way across the valley. The raiders spurred madly in pursuit, loading and firing. They shot ten times while Ladd shot once, and all in vain; and on Ladd's sixth shot a raider toppled backward, threw his carbine and fell with his foot catching in a stirrup. The frightened horse plunged away, dragging him in a path of dust.

Ladd had emptied a magazine, and now Blanco Sol quickened and lengthened his running stride. He ran away from his pursuers. Then it was that the ranger's ruse was divined by the raiders. They hauled sharply up and seemed to be conferring. But that was a fatal mistake. Blanco Sol was seen to break his gait and slow down in several jumps, then square away and stand stockstill. Ladd fired at the closely grouped raiders. An instant passed. Then Gale heard the spat of a bullet out in front, saw a puff of dust, then heard the lead strike the rocks and go whining away. And it was after this that one of the raiders fell prone from his saddle. The steeljacketed .405 had gone through him on its uninterrupted way to hum past Gale's position.

The remaining two raiders frantically spurred their horses and fled up the valley. Ladd sent Sol after them. The raiders split, one making for the eastern outlet, the other circling back of the mesquites. Ladd kept on after the latter. Then puffs of white smoke and rifle shots faintly crackling told of Jim Lash's hand in the game. However, he succeeded only in driving the raller back into the valley. But Ladd had turned the other horseman, and now. It appeared the two raiders were between Lash above on the stony slope and Ladd below on the level. There was desperate riding on part of the raiders to keep from being hemmed in closer. Only one of them got away, and he came riding for life down under the eastern wall. Blanco Sol settled into his graceful, beautiful swing. He gained steadlly, though he was far from extending himself.

Some few hundred rods to the left of Gale the raider put his horse to the athered slope. He began to climb, Zigzag they went up and up, and when Ladd reached the edge of the slope hey were high along the cracked an stered rampart. Once—twice Ladd refed it. Gale divined that the ager's restraint was not on account the Mexican, but for that valiant faithful horse. Up and up he at and the yellow dust clouds eye as avalanche rolled rattling and the given the state of the s

yond belief that a horse, burdened or | taneda. Nell lay in the hammock unburdened, could find footing and hold it upon that wall of narrow ledges and inverted, slanting gullies. But he climbed on, sure-footed as a mountain goat, and, surmounting the last rough steps, he stood a moment silhouetted against the white sky. Then he disappeared. Ladd sat

astride Blanco Sol gazing upward.

How the cowboy must have honored

that raider's brave steed! Gale, who had been too dumb to shout the admiration he felt, suddenly leaped up, and his voice came with a shriek;

"Look out, Laddy!" A big horse, like a white streak, was bearing down to the right of the ranger. Blanco Diablo! A matchless rider swung with the horse's motion. Gale was stunned. Then he remembered the first raider, the one Lash had shot at and driven away from the outlet. This fellow had made for the mesquite and had put a saddle on Belding's favorite. In the heat of the excitement, while Ladd had been intent upon the climbing horse, this last raider had come down with the speed of the wind straight for the western outlet. Perhaps, very probably, he did not know Gale was there to block it; and certainly he hoped to pass Ladd and Blanco Sol.

A touch of the spur made Sol lunge forward to head off the raider. Diablo was in his stride, but the distance and angle favored Sol. The raider had no carbine. He held aloft a gun ready to level it and fire. He sat the saddle as if it were a stationary seat. Gale saw Ladd lean down and drop the .405 in the sand. He would take no chances of wounding Belding's bestloved horse.

Then Gale sat transfixed with suspended breath watching the horses thundering toward him. Blanco Diablo was speeding low, fleet as an antelope, fierce and terrible in his devilish action, a horse for war and blood and death. He seemed unbeatable. Yet to see the magnificently running Blanco Sol was but to court a doubt. Plain it was the raider could not make the opening ahead of Ladd. He saw it and swerved to the left, emptying his six-shooter as he turned.

Blanco Sol thundered across. Then the race became straight away up the valley. It was a fleet, beautiful, magnificent race. Gale thrilled and exulted and yelled as his horse settled into a steadily swifter run and began to gain.

The gap between Diablo and Sol narrowed yard by yard. All the devil that was in Blanco Diablo had its running on the downward stretch. The strange, cruel urge of bit and spur. the crazed rider who stuck like a burr upon him, the shots and smoke added terror to his natural violent temper. Mrs. Belding. Her voice was steady, He ran himself off his feet. But he could not elude that relentless horse behind him.

Then, like one white flash following another, the two horses gleamed down



Only One of Them Got Away, and He Came Riding for Life Down Under

the bank of a wash and disappeared in clouds of dust.

Gale watched with strained and smarting eyes. The thick throb in his ears was pierced by faint sounds of gunshots. Then he waited in mimost unendurable suspense,

Suddenly something whiter than the background of dust appeared above the low roll of valley floor. Gale leveled his glass. In the clear circle shone Blanco Sol's noble head with its long black bar from ears to nose. Sol's head was dropping now. Another second showed Ladd still in the saddle.

The ranger was leading Blanco Diablo — spent — broken—dragging—

CHAPTER IX

An interrupted Siests. man ever had a more clos beautiful pleader for his o

her hands behind her head, with rosy cheeks and arch eyes. Indeed she looked rebellious.

Wildfire, Etc.

Dick was inclined to be rebellious himself. Belding had kept the rangers in off the line, and therefore Dick had been idle most of the time, and, though he tried hard, he had been unable to stay far from Nell's vicinity. He believed she cared for him; but he could not catch her alone long enough to verify his tormenting hope. He had long before enlisted the loyal Mercedes in his cause; but in spite of this Nell had been more than a match for them both.

Gale pondered over an idea he had long revolved in mind, and which now suddenly gave place to a decision that made his heart swell and his cheek burn. He went in search of Mrs. Belding, and found her busy in the kitchen.

The relation between Gale and Mrs. Belding had subtly and incomprehensively changed. He understood her less than when at first he divined an antagonism in her. If such a thing were possible she had retained the antagonism while seeming to yield to some influence that must have been fondness for him. Gale had come to care greatly for Nell's mother. Not only was she the comfort and strength of her home, but also of the inhabitants of Forlorn River. Indian, Mexican, American were all the same to her in trouble or illness; and then she was nurse, doctor, peacemaker, helper. She was good and noble, and there was not a child or grownup in Foriorn River who did not love and bless her. But Mrs. Belding did not seem happy. She seldom smiled, and never laughed. There was always a soft, sad, hurt look in her eyes. Gale often wondered if there had been other tragedy in her life than the supposed loss of her father in the desert.

Mrs. Belding heard Dick's step as he entered the kitchen, and, looking up, greeted him.

"Mother," began Dick, earnestly. Belding called her that, and so did Ladd and Lash, but it was the first time for Dick: "Mother-I want to speak to you."

The only indication Mrs. Belding gave of being startled was in her eyes, which darkened, shadowed with multiplying thought.

"I love Nell," went on Dick, simply, "and I want you to let me ask her to be my wife."

Mrs. Belding's face blanched to a deathly white. Gale, thinking with surprise and concern that she was going to faint, moved quickly toward her, took her arm. "Forgive me. I was blunt. . .

But I thought you knew."

"I've known for a long time," replied and there was no evidence of agitation except in her pallor. "Then youyou haven't spoken to Nell?"

Dick laughed. "I've been trying to get a chance to tell her. I haven't had it yet. But she knows. I hope, I almost believe Nell cares a little for

"I've known that, too, for a long time," said Mrs. Belding, low almost. as a whisper.

"You know!" cried Dick, with a glow and rush of feeling. "Mother! You'll give her to me?" She drew him to the light and

looked with strange, piercing intent-ness into his face. Gale had never dreamed a woman's eyes could hold such a world of thought and feeling. It seemed all the sweetness of life was there, and all the pain.

"Dick Gale, you want my Nell? You love her just as she is-her sweetness-her goodness? Just herself, body and soul? . . . There's nothing could change you-nothing?"

"Dear Mrs. Belding, I love Nell for herself. If she loves me I'll be the happlest of men. There's absolutely nothing that could make any difference in me."

"But your people? Oh, Dick, you come of a proud family. I can tell. You've become a ranger. You love the adventure—the wild life. That won't last. Perhaps you'll settle down to ranching. I know you love the West, But, Dick, there's your family-"

"If you want to know anything about my family, I'll tell you," interrupted Dick, with strong feeling. "I've no secrets about them or myself. My future and happiness are Nell's to make. No one else shall count with

"Then, Dick-you may have her.

God-bless-you-both."

Mrs. Belding's strained face underent a swift and mobile relaxation. idenly she was weeping in strangely mingled happiness and bit-

terness.

"Why, mother!" Gale could say no more. He put his arm around her. In another moment she had gained command over herself, and, kiasing him, she pushed him out of the door, "There! Go tell her, Dick.

And have some spunk shout it !"

Gale went thoughtfully back to his room. Then remembering the hope list. Belding had given him, Dies lost his gravity in a flash, and something

He simply could not keep his step turned from the patio, Every path led there. His blood was throbbing. his hopes mounting, his spirit soaring "Now for some spunk!" he said, under his breath."

Plainly he meant his merry whistle and his buoyant step to interrupt this first languorous stage of the slesta which the girls always took during the hot hours. But neither girl heard him. Mercedes lay under the palo verde, her beautiful head dark and still upon a cushion. Nell-was asleep in the hammock. Her sweet, red lips, with the soft, perfect curve, had al-ways fascinated Dick, and now drew him irresistibly. He had always been consumed with a desire to kiss her, and now he was overwhelmed with his opportunity. It would be a terrible thing to do, but if she did not waken at once- No, he would fight the temptation. That would be more than spunk. It would— She stirred—he feared she would awaken.

He had dropped back erect when she opened her eyes. They were sleepy, yet surprised until she saw him. Then she was wide awake in a second, bewildered, uncertain.

"Why-you here?" she asked, slowly. "Large as life!" replied Dick, with unusual gayety.

"How long have you been here?" "Just got here this fraction of a sec ond," he replied, lying shamelessly.

"I thought-I was-dreaming," she said, and evidently the sound of her voice reassured her.

"Yes, you looked as if you were having pleasant dreams," replied Dick. 'So sorry to wake you. I can't see



Nell Was Now Deep in Her Siesta She Was Inert, Relaxed, Untroubled

how I came to do it, I was so quiet. Mercedes didn't wake. Well, I'll go and let you have your siesta and dreams."

But he did not move to go. Nell regarded him with curious, speculative eyes. "Isn't it a lovely day?" queried Dick.

"Yesterday was finer, but you didn't notice it." "Oh, yesterday was somewhere back in the past-the inconsequential

past." Nell's sleepy eyes opened a little wider. She did not know what to make of this changed young man.

Dick felt gleeful and tried hard to keep the fact from becoming manifest. "What's the inconsequential past? You seem remarkably happy today." "I certainly am happy. Adlos.

Pleasant dreams." Dick turned away then and left the patio by the opening into the yard. Nell was really sleepy, and when she had fallen asleep again he would return. He walked around for a while, Presently, as if magnet-drawn, he retraced his steps to the patio and entered noiselessly.

Nell was now deep in her siesta. She was inert, relaxed, untroubled by dreams. Her hair was damp on her

Again Nell stirred, and gradually awakened. Her eyes unclosed, humid, shadowy, unconscious. They rested upon Dick for a moment before they became clear and comprehensive. He stood back fully ten feet from her, and to all outside appearances regarded her calmly.

"I've interrupted your slesta again," he said. "Please forgive me. I'll take myself off." He wandered away, and when it

became impossible for him to stay away any longer he returned to the

The instant his giance rested upon Nell's face he divined she was feigning sleep. Dick dropped upon his knees and bent over her. He wanted more than anything he had ever wanted in his life to see if she would keep up that pretense of sleep and let him kiss her. She must have felt his breath, for her hair waved off her brow. Her cheeks were now white. Her breast swelled and sank. He der brenst weiter ent down closer closer. But he nust have been maddeningly slow, for as he bent still closer Nell's eyes ened, and he caught a swift purple are of eyes as she whirled her head, hen, with a little cry, she rose and

CHAPTER X

Thorne's commission expired the end of January, and if he could not get his discharge immediately, he

surely could obtain leave of absence. Therefore, Gale waited, not without growing anxiety, and did his best to cheer Mercedes. The first of February came bringing news of rebel activities and bandit operations in and around Casita, but not a word from the cavalryman.

A dozen times Gale declared he would ride in to Casita and find out why they did not hear from Thorne: however, older and wiser heads prevalled over his impetuosity. Belding and the rangers and the Yaqui held a consultation. Not only had the Indian become a faithful servant to Gale, but he was also of value to Belding. Yaqui had all the craft of his class, and superior intelligence. His knowledge of Mexicans was second only to his hate of them. And Yaqui, who had been scouting on all the trails, gave information that made Belding decide to wait some days before sending anyone to Casita.

It was upon Gale's coming from this conference that he encountered Nell. Since the interrupted siesta episode she had been more than ordinarily elusive, and about all he had received from her was a tantalizing smile from a distance. He got the impression now, however, that she had awaited him. When he drew close to her he was certain of it, and he experienced more than surprise.

"Dick," she began, hurriedly. , "Mercedes is dying by inches. Can't you see what alls her? It's more than love or fear. It's uncertainty-suspense. Oh, can't we find out for her?"

"Nell, I feel as badly as you about her. I wanted to ride to Casita. Belding shut me up quick, the last time." Neil came close to Gale, clasped his arm. There was no color in her face.

Her eyes held a dark, eager excite-"Dick, will you allp off without Dad's consent? Risk it! Go to Casita and find out what's happened to Thorne-at least if he ever started

for Forlorn River?" "No, Nell, I won't do that." She drew away from him with passionate suddenness.

"Are you afraid?" This certainly was not the Nell Burton that Gale knew.

"No, I'm not afraid," Gale replied, a little nettled. "Will you go-for my sake?" Like lightning her mood changed and she was close to him again, hands on his, her face white, her whole presence

sweetly alluring. "Nell, I won't disobey Belding," protested Gale. "I won't break my

"Dick, it'll not be so bad as that. But—what if it is? . . . Go, Dick, if not for poor Mercedes' sake, then for mine-to please me. I'll-I'll . . you won't lose anything by going. I think I know how Mercedes feels. Just a word from Thorne or about him would save her. Take Blanco Sol and go, Dick. . What rebel outfit could ever ride you down on that horse? Why, Dick, if I was up on Sol I wouldn't

be afraid of the whole rebel army." Gale could only stare at this transformed girl. "Dick, listen! . . . If you go-

if you fetch some word of Thorne to comfort Mercedes, you-well, you will have your reward. Dick, will you go." "No-no!" cried Gale, in violence, struggling with himself. "Nell Burton, I'll tell you this. To have the reward I want would mean pretty near heaven for me. But not even for that will I break my word to your

father." She seemed the incarnation of girl-

ish scorn and willful passion. "Gracias, senor," she replied, mockingly. "Adlos." Then she flashed out

of his sight. Gale went to his room at once, disturbed and thrilling, and did not soon

The following morning at the breakfast table Nell was not present. "She's in one of her tantrums lately," said Belding. "Wouldn't speak to me this morning. Let her alone, mother. She's spoiled enough, without running after her. She's always hungry. She'll be on hand presently, don't mistake

recover from that encounter.

Notwithstanding Belding's conviction, which Gale shared, Nell did not appear at all during the hour. Perhaps half an hour afterward, as Gale was leaving his room, he saw the Yaqui running up the path from the fields. Gale wondered what was the matter. Yaqui ran straight to Beiding, who was at work at his bench under the wagon abed. In less than a moment Belding was bellowing for his rangers. Gale got to him first, but Ladd and Lash were not far be

"Right out then Nell awore she'd go after Thorne."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Charms of Music "Sarantha, what's the chune the or-hestry's playin' now?" asked the old armer, who was attending a concert for the first time in his life

Sarantha, his wife, looked long and arnestly at her program, "It's by a fellow called Chopin," she

"Well, maybe," was the reply. "Bu sounds a deal more like sawin'."-ondon Answers.

"I'm improving in Grawing, mother," aid the little girl. "Are you, dear? that's good!" "Yes, I drawed a cake a my slate and Bennie gossed in was an oyster. He knew it was some

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An Understanding of Holly. A mother and her two sons, age five and three, were shopping. Entering a downtown store the children became very quiet, and Dick took hold of his brother's hand, admonishing him not to make any noise "in here as some one must be dead." They had noticed the holly wreaths tied with ribbons that were a part of the Christmas decoration in the store.

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Lenin's Remorse. Samuel Gompers sald at a labor

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Mummy Understand

"Mummy, why do gentlemen take typewriters to the theater?" asked Sammy, gazing at his father's machine.

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