

# BERING GOLD

by Aubrey Boyd

WIRECASTER FORM

## Sixteenth Installment

"In Nevada, the woman in the saloon told me my fingering wasn't so good; took the guitar and showed me. That interested me a lot. I ask her to have supper with me.

"She had sung in the camps in the Seventies, when mining was a big game on both sides of the Sierras. In Placerville, on the California side, she had met a young adventurer named Dalton. She took him at first to be a prospector, and he did prospect to some extent. But a little later, when she became his sweet-heart, she learned that he often took the road with a route agent she called Reeves. They worked the mountain passes, holding up pack trains and wagon shipments of gold till the country got too hot for them, and they disappeared.

"So May's love affair didn't last long. I gathered it was she who did most of the loving. Dalton was a swaggering young rascal, with a lot of life and good looks, and no heart to speak of. It was that, I think that attracted her. She was used to being courted.

"After Dalton left her she had a baby girl. Whether it was his or not, she didn't know for certain. She'd known him that short a time. It interfered with her work, so she sent it away to be cared for, shut it out of her life and forgot about it, as she tried to forget about Dalton.

"Then she met a rancher named Owens, who was taking up a grazing claim on the Nevada side, south of the Carson Valley. So she married Owens, and went with him to Nevada, to settle down and be a faithful wife.

"Her marriage to Owens was unhappy. He was ungenerous and unloving—almost a miser. The ranch was a day's journey from any neighbor. No one, hardly, came near it. He was jealous of that old life of hers—had suspected, when he married her, what it had been. He worked the

ranch himself, so there was no one to talk to but him, and he didn't talk.

"One night in summer, when Owens had watered the stock and she was watching him for the smytheth time draw a lamp alongside the table, fix the wick and read some month-old newspapers, she heard a faint tapping on the door. She opened it, and there stood a visitor. For her!

"A little visitor about three years old, and small for her age, with a cute, solemn baby face, and wat eyes blinking in the lamplight, looking lost.

"Nice man said you know where is my Daddy?"

"The woman gave a smothered cry and gathered the child hungrily in her arms, not asking why nor how it had come there.

"Owens lit a lantern to go out and see who had brought the little one to the door. The rider was out of earshot now, but on the porch was a sack of gold and a note saying, 'This baby wandered off a train during a hold-up. Keep her till the posse comes looking for her. The gold is from the robbed train, and is yours if you want pay for your trouble.'

"That was all. The rest they tried to piece together from what they could make of the child's talk.

"For hours Owens pored over that note and over the gold, handling it, counting it. . . . And the woman was yearning over the treasure in her arms. Suppose, by some great fall of chance, it was never claimed?

"Neither of them slept that night, and the next day they waited and watched the trails. The same hope was in their minds, though their reasons for hoping were far apart.

"Several days passed with no sign of the posse. Finally Owens made a trip to the nearest freight station to get the news. In his absence, the woman started making a little suit of overalls for the girl.

"Toward sundown she went into the barn to look for eggs for the baby's supper. While she was groping for nests in the hay, she caught hold of a man's boot. She didn't scream. The first thought that flashed through her mind was that this was the man who'd brought the child and the gold.

"But the man sat up and smiled at her, and then her knees almost gave away. It was Dalton—whom she'd never expected to see again. He'd probably learned she was married to the rancher, and had counted on her helping him. If it came to that.

"It was his turn to be surprised when she spoke about the child and the gold. He hadn't had anything to do with leaving them there. But after thinking it over, he told her how it must have happened.

"He and the man he called Reeves had been waiting by a lonely stretch of railway track in the desert to stop a pay train, when a stranger on a bay horse rode by the place they were hiding. He looked like a good gun hand, and they cut him in. During the hold-up the child strayed off the train. When it pulled out and they found her, Reeves wanted to leave her there. They slit on that: the man with the bay horse picked her up and rode south alone, with his share of the loot. Dalton believed he had happened on Owens' ranch by letting his horse hunt water.

"The other two struck west for the mountains. Dalton's horse had gone lame, and Reeves took all the gold on his mount to lighten its weight. But it still lagged and when the posse caught their trail, Reeves was far ahead and kept going. Dalton left the lamed horse on some rocky ground, so he would seem to have gone on with Reeves, riding double, foot after several days trailing on foot by a round-about way, came to Owens' ranch.

"As to the child, Dalton thought it was a bad break to find her there, but he encouraged May's desire to keep her—since giving her up would ruin his hideout. So the baby had its hair cut, as well as being put in overalls.

"Just after May had done this rash thing, Owens came in that night with the news. The posse seemed to have lost the trail of all three of the fugitives, but the father of the missing child had been killed in the hold-up, and—worse than that—was a United States marshal.

"The man in the barn had plenty of time to take stock of Owens' character and of his own position. As the pursuit died away and no word came from Reeves, Dalton realized that his partner had deserted him. He had also done some thinking about the way the posse had been

Dalton proposed staying at the ranch as a hired man until the trail was cold, and calling himself the father of the little 'boy.' The very daring of this scheme would protect them.

"Though the police had given up hope of finding the lost child, there was no slacking in the hunt for the three road agents involved in the killing of the federal marshal, and Dalton knew that there would be none.

"Deciding to leave the country, he demanded a grubstake from Owens, to take him prospecting in the north. The rancher grudging the money, but was anxious to get rid of him.

"Owens' jealousy got worse after the man was gone. In his brooding rages, he spoke of Dalton's willingness to appear as the child's father as if that were a deeper sign of understanding between them. His fury drove him to charges that may have bordered on a truth he didn't know.

"He gave her such a terrible time that finally she left him and her adopted baby, and went back to her old life, where I found her in the days of it.

"Some years later I came into Carson City, just before the rumor broke about the big gold strike in the north. And there the thing happened that begins to tie this up with—"

Fallon, twisting in his chair, caught her eyes now, squarely.

"You don't dare—" he blurted out with a dark menace.

"Do you dare threaten a witness in Her Majesty's court?" Judge Douglas demanded.

Muttering something, Fallon bit his tongue and waited.

"I was crossing a planked sidewalk," continued Rose, "when I almost bumped into a man stepping down from the porch of the Nevada hotel. His face came back to me over a long gap of time as well as distance. He'd changed some. I passed him blank.

"We met again in a place where I sang, and he invited me to drink something. I did because it was rather funny to talk to a man who'd tricked me with April Fool candy the way he'd done and not be remembered.

"So I said, 'Your face looks kind of familiar. Haven't I seen it tacked up in the postoffice or somewhere?'

"He almost jumped. I hadn't had a notice how near the truth a reward poster might be. When I smiled, he gave a laugh that sounded flat.

"You've got the start on me, baby," he said, patting my hand. 'The nearest I ever come to imagining you was a fool kid I met once in Frisco. You're pretty wise and you've been around. Maybe as a woman, you can answer a question that got me curious once. It just came into my mind. Do you believe a girl could be brought up as a boy without anyone on the outside guessin' it?'

"It depends on the girl and the surroundings," I said, still not suspecting anything in particular. "I think it could happen, but I wouldn't bet on a particular case without seeing the boy you suppose to be a girl."

"Well, you'll never see him," Fallon said, a little too offhand. "It just came into my mind."

"He started his meaningless love-making again and I left him.

"What he'd said chimed with something else in my memory. Though I didn't recall right at first what it was, I kept looking as I played the camp for a boy who might not be so boyish except for the clothes. The only one I noticed was a boy with gold hair. He didn't look girlish—wore his clothes, I mean, as if he had a right to them. But it struck me that I could have dressed him up as a stunning girl, and it was a crime to see hair like his wasted on a boy. He was with an older, whiskey-faced man I'd never seen in the camps before, and whose name I learned to be Owens. The man was buying an outfit to go to Alaska.

"Owens are uncommon, but it was the name of the rancher May had married, and with that I remembered, in a shock of understanding, that the child left at the ranch house had blonde hair and had been dressed as a boy.

"Dalton had gone north. Owens had staked him. A man like May's Owens wouldn't make that trip without a solid lead to go on. I remembered his passion for gold. Dalton must have made a strike and sent for him.

"Certain this was the same man, I wondered how much Fallon had guessed. Maybe he just suspected a girl in boy's clothes and was curious. She was young and innocent, and he liked them that way. Her name, 'Pete,' was as boy-like as possible, but since it didn't fit her appearance, it was a kind of giveaway."

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The shuffling voice of the river rippled through the silence as Rose paused. Spoons leaned on the bar of the prisoners' dock. Intently watching her across the red-coated shoulder of the police guard. Fallon half reclined in his chair, in a smouldering silence—the sheathed fire of one who holds a final answer in reserve.

## State Will Rent Books Next Year

### North Carolina Pioneer in Rental Book Plan, Superintendent Declares

The general assembly paved the way for a state-wide system of school book rentals which, unless some other state gets one going first, will be a pioneer in the field in the nation, states Clyde A. Erwin, state superintendent of public instruction.

The new law provides that a commission of five members, with the superintendent of public instruction as ex-officio chairman, shall be created to be known as the "state textbook purchase and rental commission." The attorney general, director of purchase and contract and two persons to be appointed by the governor will round out the commission.

"That same night, the big Yukon news came down on the wires from Seattle. Prospectors who had been waiting and ready were pulling stakes for San Francisco and the first steamers. Owens beat the gun by starting ahead of them and showed that he'd had a definite lead on something.

"I caught a train for Seattle, and overtook Fallon's steamer there. He was wary enough to keep Owens out of my way. Pete avoided me of her own accord. My talking to Fallon may have given her the idea I was a friend of his, and she mistrusted him by instinct.

"Fallon started the rancher Owens drinking and gambling—a first sign that he had guessed true about the gold. That it was true, I made sure in a more direct way.

Wade rose to object.

"Your honor," he said, "I have listened to the witness' vivid story without offering an objection till now. I feel it my duty, as counsel for the Crown, to object to it as theoretical and move that it be thrown out."

Judge Dugas looked reflectively at Rose. "How did you prove, Miss Valery, that there was a gold mine at stake?"

(Concluded Next Week)

**Infantile Paralysis Results in 2 Deaths**

Raleigh, May 23—The second death from infantile paralysis in as many days in eastern North Carolina was reported today as one new case brought the total recorded by the state board of health for May to 13.

Charley Johnson, three-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Johnson, of Cleveland township, Johnston county, died today of the disease. Hugh Lowe, Jr., of Clinton, died yesterday in a Wilmington hospital from its effects.

A census shows that Baltimore has approximately one grocery store to each 249 people.

## BURLINGTON YOUTH IS FATALLY BURNED

Burlington, May 24—Richard Homer Andrews, Jr., 17 son of Postmaster and Mrs. R. H. Andrews, Fountain Street, died at a local hospital this morning the result of burns received from the explosion of alcohol in the Main street drug store late yesterday afternoon.

The accident occurred when Andrews poured alcohol from a gallon can into a small sterno cup to replenish fuel he believed to have been exhausted. He was in the act of operating a small steam engine. A flicker in the small cup jumped to the larger container which exploded and showered the victim with burning liquid.

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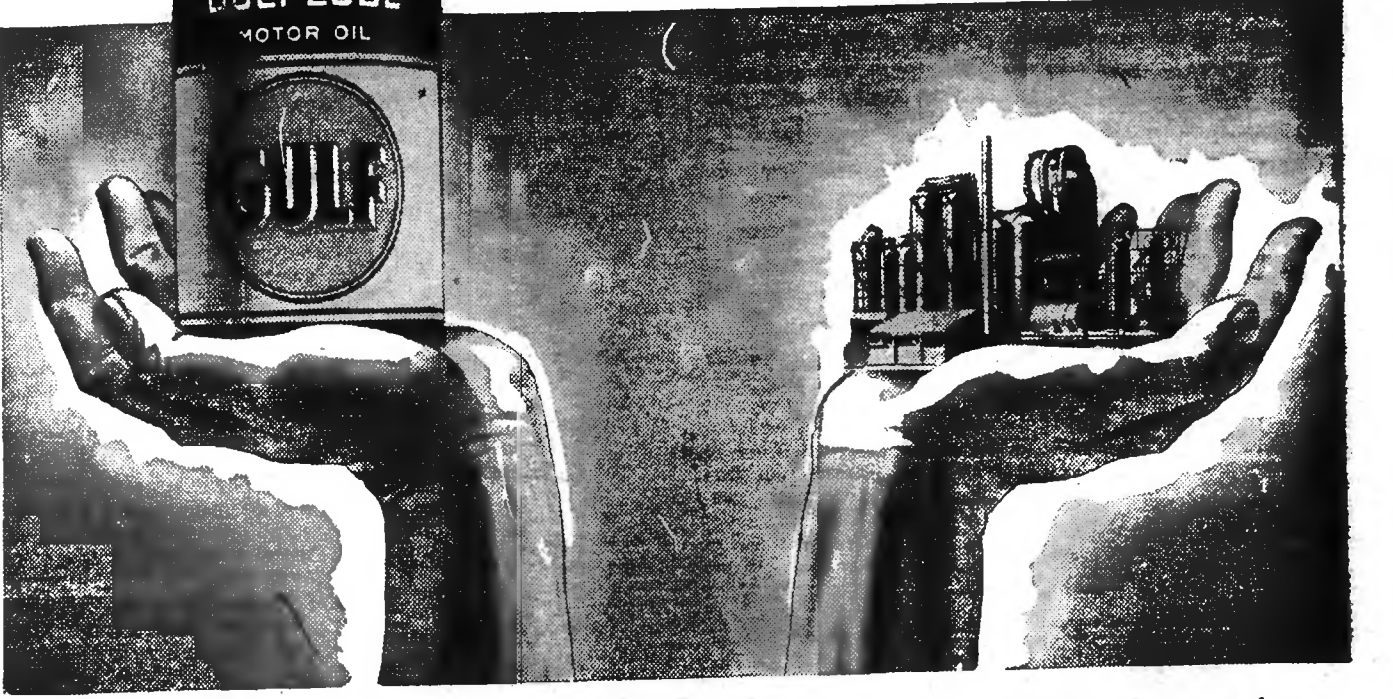
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**HIT-AND-RUN VICTIM**  
High Point, May 23—Wade Callicutt, small son of Mr. and Mrs. E. S. Callicutt, sustained a concussion of the brain, a fractured thumb and other injuries tonight at 8 o'clock when struck by a hit-and-run driver on South Main street.

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