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ROBBERS'
ROOST

by
Zane Grey

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THE STORY

CHAPTER I.—Jim Wall, young cow-
puncher from Wyoming, in the early
days of the cattle industry, makes a
new field in Utah. He meets Hank
Hays, who admits to being a robber,
and tells Wall he is working for an
Englishman named Herrick, who has
located a big ranch in the mountains.
Herrick has employed a small army of
rustlers and gun-fighters, and Hays
and others are plotting to steal their
employer's cattle and money. Hays
wants Wall to throw in with the
rustlers.

CHAPTER II.—At the little settle-
ment of Green River, Hays gets into
an argument with a gambler called
Stud, over a poker game. Wall saves
Hank's life by bluffing the gambler out
of shooting. With Hays and two other
rustlers, Happy Jack and Lincoln, Jim
Wall starts out for Herrick's ranch.
In camp, the first night out, Jim re-
grets the step he has taken, but it is
too late to turn back.

CHAPTER III.—The four men arrive
at the ranch. Herrick announces that
his sister, Helen, is coming to the
ranch. Hays unfolds his plan for get-
ting possession of the 15,000 head of
live stock on the Herrick ranch. Jim
and his lieutenants ride away to drive
off the first bunch of cattle. Jim re-
mains behind to shoot it out, if neces-
sary, with Heeseeman, Hays' rival
among the cattle rustlers. Jim sees a
dust cloud, which he is certain de-
notes the arrival of Heeseeman and his
gang. He stands with rifle ready.

CHAPTER IV.—Heeseeman tells Wall
that Hays was once his (Heeseeman's)
partner and double-crossed him. Her-
rick delegates Jim to go to Grand
Junction to meet Miss Herrick. Jim
gets Barnes, a young cowboy with
him, to tell her that he (Jim) is a
desperado of the worst type. Barnes
does so, but the girl treats the in-
formation lightly.

CHAPTER V.—On his arrival at the
ranch, with Helen, Jim is confronted
by Hays, who betrays unusual inter-
est in the coming of Miss Herrick.
Herrick delegates Jim to go to Grand
Junction to meet Miss Herrick. Jim
gets Barnes, a young cowboy with
him, to tell her that he (Jim) is a
desperado of the worst type. Barnes
does so, but the girl treats the in-
formation lightly.

CHAPTER VI.—The cattle drives to
Grand Junction are started. Jim Wall
finds himself falling in love with Helen.
He coaches her in riding western
style, and finally kisses her. She is
furious and dismisses him, but re-
lates and asks him not to leave the ranch.
Hays' men return from the drive with
the stolen cattle. The leader has sold
the cattle and brought back the money.
A quick getaway is imperative. Hays
tells his men to go on ahead, that he
will join them at a certain canyon.
Herrick and his gang arrive at the canyon
and to their amazement and Jim's dismay,
Hays and a lieutenant are sighted with
Helen Herrick—a captive.

CHAPTER VII.—The gang is about
to break with Hays over the abduction,
but he explains that he robbed
Herrick and stole Helen for ransom.
Realizing that Helen will be worse off
if she falls into Heeseeman's clutches,
Jim Wall rides on with Hank and his
men. Heeseeman's riders are discovered
in pursuit. After a running battle in
which Lettmer, one of Hays' men, is
wounded, Hays leads the gang into a
canyon retreat, difficult of access and
easy to defend.—The Robbers' Roost.

CHAPTER VIII.—After camp has
been made, Jim seeks out Smoky Slo-
cum, and secures his promise to aid
in case Helen is threatened with harm
by the villainous Hays. Jim hears a
wild cry in the night. Before he dies,
Lettmer, who was wounded in the fight
with Heeseeman, tells Jim and Smoky
that Hays has held out some of the
money he stole from Herrick.

"How'd she get that gun?"
"Wal, she snatched it quicker'n
lightning, that's how. An' when she
cocked it with both hands it went off
bang! The bullet went between
Hank's legs. Ticked him. You can
see the hole in his pants. Scared? My
cawd, you never see a man so scared.
That girl, cool as a cucumber, cocked
the gun again, an' held Hays up—then
all of us.

"We was sittin' at the table. She
made us all stand, hands high, an'
then she performed that little trick
with Hank's gun agin my gizzard. Jim,
I hope to die if I didn't go cold an'
stiff. But I promised on my word of
honor—as a robber—that I'd tie Hank
up, an' make the other fellers play
square. It was so funny, too, that I
near bust. Hays, soon as he was
helpless, got over his scare, an' then
was he mad! I reckon no one on this
earth saw a madder man. He cusso-
so terrible that she made me gasp."

"Well, I'll be—blowed!" gasped Jim.
"No wonder. We was wuss. We'd
had breakfast, an' Hank was tryin' to
face us fellers. I'll say he came
clean, Jim. He divided all the money
he got from Herrick an' his sister, an'
the gold things an' diamonds. Fel-
lers," he said, "I could be an' say I
meant to give this to you later. But
I'm not built that way. I double-
crossed you all—first time in my life.
I meant to keep it all, an' the ransom,
for the girl. But now there won't be
no ransom, for I'm not goin' to give
her up. She's mine, an' I can do as
I want, an' if any of you don't like it
you can make your kick now."
"Wal, we was so plumb flabbergasted
that we didn't see the girl, who came
close on the sun side of Happy's shel-
ter. She heard the whole d—n show,
. . . Jim, I wish you could have seen
her when she stepped up to Hank. I
don't know what did it—mebbe her
eyes—but he shore wilted. It was then
she snatched his gun."
"So that's the deal?" ejaculated Jim.
"Whatever you goin' to do?"
"Don't ask me. I gave my word an'

I'll keep it. For that matter the rest
of our outfit air fer the girl, ransom
or no ransom."

Suddenly Jim awoke out of his
stupefaction to remember the approach
of Heeseeman.

"Smoky, I know what you're all go-
ing to do, and that's fight," he flashed,
curtly. "Heeseeman's outfit is coming.
I sighted them perhaps three miles.
Traveling slow, but sure. We've no
time to pack an' get away. We've got
to find the best place to stand an'
fight, an' pack our stuff into it
 pronto."

"Heeseeman?" cried Smoky, coolly.
"So it's come. I reckoned on that.
Git busy, men."

Jim strode under the shelter to face
Miss Herrick. She had heard, for she
was white.

"We're all but surprised by Heese-
man's outfit," he said, abruptly. "We
must fight. You will be worse off if
you fall into their hands. I'm sorry
I must release Hays. We need him."

"Too late!" she exclaimed.

"Tack your things quickly and hurry
over to the cave on this side." Then
Jim picked up Hays' gun from the
table and ran out. First he removed
the gag, then in terse terms he stated
the situation. Next he released the
robber from his painful fix and handed
him the gun.

"Heeseeman, huh! Wal, so be it!"
Hays said, facing Jim with an air of
finality that intimated relief.

"How far are they away?" he
asked.

"Two miles."

"We've got half an hour—mebbe.
Did you think to look for the horses?"

"Eight horses in the valley. Others
not in sight."

"Fine scout you air. How come you
didn't spy them soon enough for us
to rustle out of hyar?"

"I couldn't have seen them half a
mile sooner," snapped Jim. "They
came out from behind a bank."

"Hell's fire! Tell that to me? You
was sleepin'."

"You're a liar," flashed Jim, leap-
ing clear of the others. "Open your
trap to me again like that!"

"Say, it's you who'll shut his trap,"
replied Hays, stridently. "Or you'll
git a dose of the medicine I gave Brad
Lincoln."

"Not from you—you yellow dog of a
woman thief!"

Smoky Slocum ran out in time to
get in front of Jim.

"Hyar! Hyar!" he called, pierc-
ingly. "Is this a time for us to fight
each other? Cool down, Jim. Make
allowances for Hays. He's wuss'n drunk."

"I don't care a d—n if there's ten
outfits on our trail. He can't talk to
me that way. . . . And, Smoky, I
reckon you're presuming on friend-
ship."

"Shore I am," returned Slocum, hur-
riedly. "I'll not do it again, Jim, Hays
is what you called him. But leave your
dispute till we settle with Heeseeman."

"All right. You're talking sense," re-
plied Jim. He had been quick to grasp
the opening made by Hays. "There
must be ten riders in Heeseeman's out-
fit."

"Wal, that suits me," rejoined the
robber, harshly.

"Now think fast," snapped Smoky.
Hays pulled himself together. "Mac,
you an' Jeff run to fetch what hosses
you can find quick. . . . Jack, you an'
Smoky an' Wall hustle the grub, cook
kit, packs an' beds into that cave
across the wash. I'll git up high an'
watch. When I yell, dig for cover."

"You ain't to fight or run?" queried
Smoky.

"We might git packed tight, if some-
thin' holds them up. But we can't
leave the way we come in. Dirty Devil
too high. Heeseeman has stumbled on
the next best way. If we had plenty
of time. . . . But rustle, everybody."

Mac and Jeff were already in lum-
bering flight up the oval. And Happy
Jack, not concerned enough to stop his
whistling, was sacking his utensils.
Hays made for the notch in the bluff
west of the cabin. Jim sprang into
action, while Smoky dashed off toward
the cottonwood grove.

Upon Jim's first return trip from
the cave he encountered the girl bur-
dened with her effects.

"Helen, I'll carry that. Hurry.
We've no time to lose."

At the back of the cave there was
a crack deep enough to protect Helen.
He directed her to hide inside and
await developments.

Jim ran on toward the camp, re-
solving to withhold a shell in his rifle
and to keep a sharp watch on Hays.

The next quarter of an hour was
filled with strenuous and unceasing ac-
tion. Their united efforts collected all
the supplies, utensils, saddles and
packs, and several of the beds in the
three-cornered cave back and to one
side of the shack. A huge slab of stone
lay across the top of this triangular
notch in the cliff. The wall had been
hollowed by the action of water. A
small stream flowed out from the base
of the wall.

It was the best place for defense
in the oval, and Jim believed Hays'
outfit could hold it indefinitely, though
they couldn't serve the horses. If it
came to a siege they could be re-
leased.

CHAPTER X

Smoky came panting in with Hays'
pack, and started off again.

"That's enough, Smoky," called Jim.
Slocum returned. "Nothin' left—
'cept Hank's bed," he panted. "I—
couldn't—locate that."

"Listen!"

"What do you hear?"

"Hosses."

"Jim, keep your eye peeled on the
cliff," said Smoky, and stole forward
under cover of the bluff.

The fight was on. One of Hays' men
—Bridges—let out a hoarse bawl and
swayed over, almost losing his bal-
ance. Jim looked no more at him, but
concentrated his gaze on the rim. An-
other puff of white! Something dark—



Jim's Rifle, Already Raised,
Swerved a Trifle—Cracked. The
Hat Went Flying.

a man's slouch hat—bobbed up. Jim's
rifle, already raised, swerved a trifle—
cracked. The hat went flying.

The horses came over the bench,
frightened, but not stampeding. Hays
drove them into the corral. This
was around the corner from the range
of the sharpshooter of the rim.
Bridges, reeling on the horse, followed
Mac, who ran out of the corral to
catch him as he fell. Then, as they
came along close to the wall, Hays
arrived from the other direction.

"Heeseeman—with his outfit—nine in
all," he heaved. "They're scatterin' to
surround the roost. . . . But they can't
cross—below us—an' across there it's
—out of range. . . . We're all right."

A bullet thudded into the wall, fol-
lowed by the report of a rifle.

"Duck back! That was from some-
where else," shouted Hays.

They dove twenty feet farther back.
Here they were apparently safe, ex-
cept from the grassy ridge of the oval
in front, which it was unlikely any
sharpshooters could reach in daylight.

After a careful study Jim crept into
the brush, stirred by a renewal of
firing from the west rim. Wisps of
white cloud, thinning on the light
wind, located the positions of the
shooters. First Jim peered through
the growth of brush directly in front.

Almost at once he caught a move-
ment of a dark object through a cre-
vice in the rim. The distance was great
for accurate shooting at so small a
target. But with a rest he drew a
course, steady aim and fired once.

The object flopped over. A shrill
cry, unmistakable to any man used to
gunplay, rent the air. Jim knew he
had reached one of the Heeseeman
gang, to disable him, if no more. Next
instant a raking fire swept the brush
on both sides of Jim. He dropped
down into the cave.

Smoky stood there, in the act of
climbing.

"They near got me," rang out Jim.
"I hit one of them way over where
they shot at Bridges. There's a bunch
of them hid on that cliff to the right
of the outlet, you know, where Jeff
went up to scout."

"Jim, they got us located," replied
Slocum, gravely.

"Sure. But so long as they can't
line on us in here—"

"They can move all around. An'
pretty soon Heeseeman will finger that
men behind the high center in front
can shoot straight in hyar."

"They're below the ridge now. Look
sharp, Smoky, or they might get a
couple of shots in first."

"Wal, if they do I hope both bullets
lodge in Hank's gizzard."

"My sentiments exactly. . . . Smoky,
I saw something shiny. Tip of a rifle.
Right—to the right. . . . Ah!"

"Take the first feller, Jim. . . . One
—two—three."

The rifles cracked in unison. Jim's
mark sprang convulsively up, and
plunged down to roll and wave out
of sight. The man Smoky had shot at
sank flat and lay still. Next moment
a volley banged from the cliff and a
storm of bullets swept hissing and
sprang uncomfortably close.

Jim slid and leaped to the floor of
the cave below. Smoky, by lying
down, lowered the rifles to him, and
then came scrambling after.

Hays had slouched back to them,
followed by Happy.

"Jack, gimme Jeff's gun an' belt,"
Hays said, and receiving them, he
buckled them over his own. Next he
opened his pack to take out a box of
rifle shells, which he broke open to
drop the contents in his coat pocket
on the left side. After that he opened
his shirt to strip off a broad, black
money belt. This was what had made
him bulge so and give the impression
of stoutness, when in fact he was
lean. He hung this belt over a project-
ing point of wall.

"In case I don't git back," he added.
"An' there's a bundle of chicken-feed
change in my pack."

There was something gloomy and
splendid about him then. Fear of God,
or man, or death was not in him.
Rifle in hand he crept to the corner
on the left and boldly exposed him-
self, drawing a volley of shots from
two quarters. Then he disappeared.

"What's Hays' idea?" asked Jim.

"He must know a way to sneak
around on them."

A metallic, spanging sound accom-
panied rather than followed by a shot,
then a sudden thud right at hand
choked further speech. Happy Jack
had been cut short in one of his low
whistles. He swayed a second upright,
then uttering an awful groan, he fell.

Smoky leaped to him, bent over.

"Dead! Hit in the temple. Where'd
that bullet come from?"

"It glanced from a rock. I know the
sound."

"Jim, the only safe place from that
—is hyar, huggin' this corner," de-
clared Smoky. "An' there ain't room
enough for the two of us."

"Keep it, Smoky. I'm not going to
get hit. This is my day. I feel some-
thing in my bones, but it's not death."

"Huh. I feel somethin' too—clear to
my marrow—an' it's sickish an' cold
. . . Jim, I'll sneak out an' crawl back
of them. That's my idea. I don't have
wrong ideas at this stage of a fight."

That was the last he spoke to Jim.
Muttering to himself he laid a huge
roll of bills under the belt Hays had
deposited on the little shelf of rock.
Then he vanished.

Scarcely had he gotten out of sight
when Jim thought of the field glass.
Smoky should have taken it. Jim
risked going back to his pack to se-
cure it, and had the fun of dodging
another bullet.

What had become of Hays? Wait-
ing alone among these deflecting bul-
lets wore on Jim's mood. He decided
to peep out of the hole again. To this
end he climbed to the shelf, rifle in
hand and the glass slung around his
neck.

He could command every point with
the aid of the field glass, without ex-
posing his head.

An instant later a far-off shot
thrilled Jim. That might be Smoky.
Suddenly a dark form staggered up,
flinging arms aloft, silhouetted black
against the sky. That must be the
sharpshooter. Smoky had reached him.
Headlong he pitched off the cliff,
to plunge sheer into the wash below.
Smoky had at least carried out his
idea.

Suddenly Jim espied Hays boldly
mounting the slope. But it appeared
that he had not been discovered yet.
Those on top were facing the unseen
peril to the west.

Jim marveled at the purpose of the
robber chief. Still another shot from
Smoky—the last! But Hays had
reached high enough to see over.
Leveling the rifle he took deliberate
aim. Then he fired.

"Heeseeman!" hissed Jim, as sure as
if he himself had held that gun.

Hays, working the lever of his rifle,
bounced back and aside. Shots
boomed. One knocked him to his
knees, but he lunged up to fire again.
Again he was hit, or the rifle was,
for it broke from his hands. Drawing
his two revolvers he leveled them,
and as he fired one, then the other,
he backed against the last broken sec-
tion of the wall. Jim saw the red
dust spatter from the rock above.

The shots thinned out and ceased.
Hays was turning to the left, his re-
maining gun lowered. He was aiming
down the slope on the other side. He
fired again—then no more. Those who
were left of Heeseeman's outfit had
taken flight. Hays watched them,
strode to the side of the big rock, and
kept on watching them.

Soon he turned back and, sheathing
one gun, took to reloading the other.
It was at this moment that Jim rela-
quished the field glass to take up his
rifle. With naked eyes through the
aperture in the brush, he could see
Hays finish loading his gun.

This moment, to Jim's avid mind,
was the one in which to kill the rob-
ber. He drew a bead on Hays' breast.
But he could not press the trigger,
lowering the hammer. Jim watched
Hays stride up among the rocks, to
disappear.

Jim leaped up out of the hole to
have a better look. Far beyond the
red ridge he discerned men running
along the white wash. There were
three of them, scattered. A fourth ap-
peared from behind a bank, and he
was crippled. He waved frantically to
the comrades who had left him to fare
for himself. They were headed for
the cove where the horses still stood.
And their precipitate flight attested
to the end of that battle and as surely,
to the last of Heeseeman's outfit.

CHAPTER XI

Jim picked up the field glass and
slung it on his elbow, essayed a
descent into the cave. On the shelf
he hesitated and sat a moment locked
in thought. A second time he started
down only to halt straddling the
notch. The battle had worked out
fairly and fatally. Would he see
Smoky again? Yet nothing had
changed the issue. The end was not
yet. With his blood surging back to
his heart, Jim leaped down to meet
the robber chief.

"Where's Smoky?" called Jim, his
lynx eyes on Hays' right hand.

"Cashed in," boomed Hays, fastening
great hollow eyes of pale fire upon
Jim. "He had cover. He plugged I
don't know how many. But Morley's
outfit had thrown in with Heeseeman.
An' when that gambler Stud broke an'
ran Smoky had to head him off. They
killed each other."

"Who got away? I saw four men;
one crippled."

"Morley an' Montana fer two. I
didn't recognize the others. They shore
run, throwin' rifles away."

"They were making for their horses,
tied half a mile back. Where'll they
go, Hays?"

"Fer more men. Morley is most as
stubborn as Heeseeman. An' once he's
seen this roost of ours—he'll want it,
an' to wipe out what's left of us."

"Heeseeman?"

"Wal, he didn't run, Jim. Haw!

Haw! He's dead!"

The chief strode to the mouth of
the cave and stared around. Jim re-
mained at the spot he had selected,
to one side, between the robber and
Helen's covert.

"Jack an' Mac, too?" he ejaculated
in amazement. "How come? No more
of that outfit sneaked down in hyar."

"Mac stuck his noodle too far out
of that hole in the cave. And Happy
Jack stopped a glancing bullet. There's
just two of us left, Hays. By the
way—you going to bury your dead?"

"No. If I do anything at all it'll be
fer my gurl. Them stiff's ain't a pretty
sight."

If Jim Wall needed any galvanizing
shock to nerve him to the deed he
had resolved upon, that single pos-
sive word was enough.

"I'll bury them later," he said.

"Good. I'm all in. I climbed more'n
a mile to git to them fellers. Hays
sat down heavily, and ran his right
hand inside his shirt to feel of the
bulge on his shoulder. Jim saw him
wince. Blood had soaked through his
shirt.

"You got hit, I see."

"Flesh wound. Nothin' to fuss over
this minnit. An' I've got a crease on



"Flesh Wound. Nothin' to Fuss
Over This Minnit."

my head. That hurts like sixty. Half
an inch lower an'—"

"I'd have been left lord of Robbers'
Roost?"

"You shore would, Jim. Lousy with
money, an' a gurl to look after. But
it jest didn't happen that way."

"No; it didn't. But it will!"

That cool statement pierced the rob-
ber's lethargic mind. Up went his
shaggy head and the pale eyes,
opaque, like burned-out furnaces, took
on a tiny, curious gleam. When his
hand came slowly down from inside
his shirt the fingers were stained red.

"What kind of a crack was that?"
he demanded, puzzled.

"Hays, you forget."

"You're sore that I didn't divvy
square?"

"Hays, I take it you double-crossed
me same as you did them."

"Uh-huh. Wal, you got me in a cor-
ner. I reckon, that's only two of us
left. I'd be crazy to quarrel. . . . Would
a third of my money square me?"

"No."

"It wouldn't. Wal, you air aimin' at
a bargain. Say half then?"

"No."

A tremor ran over the robber's
frame. That was a release of swift
passion—hot blood that leaped again.
But he controlled himself.

"Air you tryin' to pick a fight with
me?"

At this Jim laughed.

"Cause if you air, I jest won't fight.
I'd be senseless. You an' me can git
along. I like you. We'll