

DESERT GOLD

By ZANE GREY

Author of

The Riders of the Purple Sage,
Wildfire, Etc.

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"GOLD!"

SYNOPSIS.—Seeking gold in the desert, "Cameron," solitary prospector, 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 prospect in the many hardships of the desert. After the two are reduced to the limit of endurance, in a dying moment they seek refuge in a prehistoric cave occupied by a prehistoric people of the Southwest.

III—Continued.

Cameron stole off among the rocks. How long he absented himself or what he did he had no idea. When he returned Warren was sitting before the canteen, and once more he appeared composed. He spoke, and his voice had a deeper note; but otherwise he seemed as usual.

They packed the burros and faced the north together.

Cameron experienced a singular excitement. He had lightened his compass burden. Wonderfully it came to him that he had also lightened his own. From that hour it was not torment to think of Nell.

IV

It came a morning when the sun was angry and red through a billowing haze.

"Watch in for sandstorms," said Cameron.

They had scarcely covered a mile when a desert-wide moaning, yellow wall of flying sand swooped down upon them. Seeking shelter in the lee of a rock, they covered their heads.

They waited. The long hours passed, and the storm increased in fury. Cameron and Warren wet their faces with water from their canteens, and then covered their heads. The steady, hollow hellow of flying sand against the sheltering rock to which they clung was so thick that enough light came from the shivering rock to weigh the blankets and almost bury the men. They were frequently compelled to shake off the sand to keep from being borne to the ground. And it was necessary to keep digging out the rocks. They lost the count of time. They dared not sleep, for that would have meant being buried alive.

The storm finally blew itself out. It left the prospectors heavy and stupid for want of sleep. Their burros had wandered away, or had been buried in the sand. Far as eye could reach the desert had marvelously changed: it was now a rippling sea of sand dunes. Away to the north rose the peak that was their only guiding mark. They headed toward it, carrying a stool and part of their packs.

At noon the peak vanished in the shimmering glare of the desert. The prospectors pushed on, guided by the sun. In every wash they tried for water. With the forked peach branch in his hands Warren always succeeded in locating water. They dug, but it lay too deep. At length, spent and aching, they fell and slept through that night and part of the next day. Then they succeeded in getting water, and quenched their thirst, and filled the canteens, and cooked a meal.

The burning day found them in an interminably wide plain, where there was no shelter from the fierce sun. Mountain peaks loomed on all sides, some near, others distant; and one, a blue spur, splitting the glaring sky far to the north, Cameron thought he recognized as a landmark. The ascent toward it was heart-breaking, not in steepness, but in its league-and-league-long monotonous rise. Cameron knew there was only one hope—to make the water hold out and never stop to rest. Warren began to weaken. Often he had to halt.

Cameron measured the water in his canteen by its weight. Evaporation by heat consumed as much as he drank. During one of the rests, when he had wetted his parched mouth and throat, he found opportunity to pour a little water from his canteen into Warren's.

At first Cameron had curbed his restless activity to accommodate the pace of his elder comrade. But now he felt that he was losing something of his instinctive and passionate zeal to get out of the desert. The thought of water came to occupy his mind. He began to imagine that his last little store of water did not appreciably diminish. He knew he was not quite right in his mind regarding water; nevertheless, he felt this to be more of fact than fancy, and he began to ponder.

When next they rested he pretended to be in a kind of stupor; but he covertly watched Warren. The man appeared far gone, yet he had cunning. He cautiously took up Cameron's canteen and poured water into it from his own.

This troubled Cameron. He reflected, and concluded that he had been unwise not to expect this very thing. Then, as his comrade dropped into weary rest, he lifted both canteens. If there were any water in Warren's, it was only very little. Both men had been enduring the terrible desert thirst, concealing it, each giving his water to the other, and the sacrifice had been useless.

Instead of ministering to the parched throats of one or both, the water had evaporated. When Cameron made sure of this, he took one more drink, the last, and poured the

little water left into Warren's canteen. He threw his own away.

Soon afterward Warren discovered the loss.

"Where's your canteen?" he asked.

"The heat was getting my water, so I drank what was left."

"My son!" said Warren.

The day opened for them in a red and green hell of rock and cactus. Like a flame the sun scorched and peeled their faces. Warren went blind from the glare, and Cameron had to lead him. At last Warren plunged down, exhausted, in the shade of a ledge.

Cameron rested and waited, hopeless, with not, weary eyes gazing down from their height where he sat. Movement on the part of Warren attracted his attention. Evidently the old prospector had recovered his sight and some of his strength. For he had arisen, and now began to walk along the arroyo bed with his forked peach branch held before him. He had clung to that precious bit of wood. Warren, however, stepped in a deep pit, and, cutting his canteen in half, began to use one side of it as a scoop. He scooped out a wide hollow, so wide that Cameron was certain he had gone crazy. Cameron gently urged him to stop, and then forcibly tried to make him. But these efforts were futile. Warren worked with slow, ceaseless, methodical movement. He toiled for what seemed hours. Cameron, seeing the darkening, dampening sand, realized a wonderful possibility of water, and he plunged into the pit with the other half of the canteen. Then both men toiled, round and round the wide hole, down deeper and deeper. The sand grew moist, then wet. At the bottom of the deep pit the sand coarsened, gave place to gravel. Finally water welled in, a stronger volume than Cameron ever remembered finding in the desert.

The finding of water revived Cameron's flagging hopes. But they were short-lived. Warren had spent himself utterly.

"I'm done. Don't linger," he whispered. "My son, go—go!"

Then he fell. Cameron dragged him out of the sand pit to a sheltered place under the ledge. While sitting beside the falling man Cameron discovered painted images on the wall. Often in the desert he had found these evidences of a prehistoric people. Then, from long habit, he picked up a piece of rock and examined it. Its weight made him closely scrutinize it. The color was a peculiar black. He scraped through the black rust, to find a piece of gold. Around him lay scattered heaps of black pebbles and bits of black, weathered rock and

CHAPTER I

Old Friends.

Richard Gale reflected that his sojourn in the West had been what his disgusted father had predicted—idling here and dreaming there, with no objective point or purpose.

It was reflection such as this, only more serious and perhaps somewhat desperate, that had brought Gale down to the border. For some time the newspapers had been printing news of the Mexican revolution, guerrilla warfare, United States cavalry patrolling the international line, American cowboys fighting with the rebels, and wild stories of bold raiders and bandits. Regarding these rumors Gale was skeptical. But as opportunity, and adventure, too, had apparently given him a wide berth in Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, he had struck southwest for the Arizona border, where he hoped to see some stirring life.

It was after dark one evening in early October when Richard arrived in Casita. There was a jostling, jabbering, sombreroed crowd of Mexicans around the railroad station. He felt as if he were in a foreign country. After a while he saw several men of his nationality, one of whom he engaged to carry his luggage to a hotel. Of the many people encountered by Gale most were Mexicans. His guide explained that the smaller half of Casita lay in Arizona, the other half in Mexico, and of several thousand inhabitants the majority belonged on the southern side of the street, which was the boundary line. He also said that rebels had entered the town that day, causing a good deal of excitement.

Gale was almost at the end of his financial resources, which fact occasioned him to turn away from a pretentious hotel and ask his guide for a cheaper lodging house. When this was found, a sight of the loungers in the office, and also a desire for comfort, persuaded Gale to change his traveling clothes for rough outing garb and boots.

"Well, I'm almost broke," he soliloquized, thoughtfully. "The governor said I wouldn't make any money. He's right—so far. And he said I'd be coming home beaten. There he's wrong. I've got a hunch that something 'll happen to me in this Greaser town."

He went out into the wide, white-washed, high-ceiled corridor, and from that into an immense room which, but for pool tables, bar and benches, would have been like a courtyard. Bare-legged, sandal-footed Mexicans in white ruffled shoulders with Mexicans mantled in black and red. There were black-bearded, coarse-visaged Americans, some gambling round the little tables, others drinking. There were khaki-clad cavalrymen strutting in an out.

At one end of the room, somewhat apart from the general melee, was a group of six men round a little table, four of whom were seated, the other two standing. These last two drew a second glance from Gale. The

sharp-featured bronzed faces and piercing eyes, the tall, slender, loosely jointed bodies, the quiet, easy, reckless air that seemed to be a part of the men—these things would plainly have stamped them as cowboys without the buckled sombreros, the colored scarfs the high-topped, high-heeled boots with great silver-roweled spurs.

He satisfied his hunger in a restaurant adjoining, and as he stepped back into the saloon a man wearing a military cape jostled him. Apologies from both were instant. Gale was moving on when the other stopped short as if startled, and, leaning forward, exclaimed:

"Dick Gale? If this isn't great! Don't you know me?"

"I've heard your voice somewhere," replied Gale. "Maybe I'll recognize you if you came out from under that bonnet."

For answer the man, suddenly manifesting thought of himself, hurriedly drew Gale into the restaurant, where he thrust back his hat to disclose a handsome, sunburned face.

"George Thorne! So help me—"

"S-s-s. You needn't yell," interrupted the other, as he met Gale's outstretched hand. There was a close, hard, straining grip. "I must not be recognized here. There are reasons. I'll explain in a minute. Say, but it's fine to see you! Five years, Dick, five years since I saw you run down University field and spread-eagle the whole Wisconsin football team."

"Don't recollect that," replied Dick, laughing. "George, I'll bet you're glad to see me. It seems so long. You went into the army, didn't you?"

"I did. I'm here now with the Ninth cavalry. But—never mind me. What're you doing way down here?"

"On the square, George. I don't know any more why I'm here than—"

"Well, that beats me!" ejaculated Thorne, sitting back in his chair, amazed and concerned in his expression. "What the devil's wrong? Your old man's got too much money for you ever to be up against it. Dick, you couldn't have gone to the bad?"

A tide of emotion surged over Gale. How good it was to meet a friend—someone to whom to talk! He had never appreciated his loneliness until that moment.

"George, how I ever drifted down here I don't know. I didn't exactly quarrel with the governor. But—d—n it. Dad hurt me—shamed me, and I dug out for the West. It was this way. After leaving college I tried to please him by tackling one thing after another that he set me to do. On the square, I had no head for business. I made a mess of everything. The governor got sore. When I quit—when I told him straight out that I was going west to fare for myself, why, it wouldn't have been so tough if he hadn't laughed at me. He said I couldn't earn a dollar—that I'd starve out west, and couldn't get back home unless I sent him for money. He said he didn't believe I could fight—could really make a fight for anything under the sun. Oh—he shot it into me all right."

Dick dropped his head upon his hands, somewhat, ashamed of the smarting dimness in his eyes. "Fight!" cried Thorne, hotly. "What's ailing him? Didn't they call you Biff Gale in college? Dick, you were one of the best men Stagg ever developed."

"The governor didn't count football," said Dick. "He didn't mean that kind of a fight. When I left home I don't think I had an idea what was wrong of me. But, George, I think I know now. I was a rich man's son—spoiled, dependent, absolutely ignorant of the value of money. I haven't yet discovered any earning capacity in me. I seem to be unable to do anything with my hands. That's the trouble. But I'm at the end of my tether now. And I'm going to punch cattle or be a miner, or do some real stunt—like joining the rebels."

"Aha! I thought you'd spring that last one on me," declared Thorne, wagging his head. "Well, you just forget it. Say, old boy, there's something doing in Mexico. The United States in general doesn't realize it. But across that line there are crazy revolutionists, ill-paid soldiers, guerrilla leaders, raiders, robbers, outlaws, bandits galore, starving peons by the thousand, girls and women in terror. Mexico is like some of her volcanoes—ready to erupt fire and hell! Don't snake the awful mistake of joining the rebel forces. If you didn't starve or get shot in ambush, or die of thirst, some Greaser would knife you in the back for your belt buckle or boots. There are a good many Americans with the rebels eastward toward Agua Prieta and Juarez. Orozco is operating in Chihuahua, and I guess he has some idea of warfare. But this is Sonora, a mountainous desert, the home of the slave and the Yaqui. There's unorganized revolt everywhere. We're patrolling the boundary line. We're making a grand bluff. I could tell you of a dozen instances where cavalry should have pursued raiders on the other side of the line. But we won't do it. The officers are a grouchy lot these days. You see, of course, what significance would attach to United States cavalry going into Mexican territory. There would simply be hell. My own colonel is the sorest man on the job. We're all sore. It's like sitting on a powder magazine. We can't keep the rebels and raiders from cross-

ing the line. Yet we don't fight. My commission expires soon. I'll be discharged in three months. You can bet I'm glad for more reasons than I've mentioned."

Thorne was evidently laboring under strong, suppressed excitement. His face showed pale under the tan, and his eyes gleamed with a dark fire. He had seated himself at a table near one of the doorlike windows leading into the street, and every little while he would glance sharply out. Also he kept consulting his watch.

These details gradually grew upon Gale as Thorne talked.

"George, it strikes me that you're upset," said Dick, presently. "I seem to remember you as a cool-headed fellow whom nothing could disturb. Has the army changed you?"

Thorne laughed. It was a laugh with a strange, high note. It was reckless—hinted of exaltation. He peered out one window, then another. His actions were rapid. Returning to the table, he put his hands upon it and leaned over to look closely into Gale's face.

"I'm away from camp without leave," he said.

"Isn't that a serious offense?" asked Dick.

"Serious? For me, if I'm discovered, it means ruin. There are rebels



"Serious? For Me, If I'm Discovered, It Means Ruin—"

in town. Any moment we might have trouble. I ought to be ready for duty—within call. If I'm discovered it means arrest. That means delay—the failure of my plans—ruin."

Thorne bent over closer with his dark eyes searchingly bright.

"What would you say, Dick Gale, if I told you that you're the one man I'd rather have come along than any other at this crisis of my life?"

The earnest gaze, the passionate voice with its deep tremor drew Dick upright, thrilling and eager, conscious of strange, unfamiliar impetuosity.

"Thorne, I should say I was glad to be the fellow," replied Dick.

Their hands locked for the moment, and they sat down again with heads close over the table.

"Listen," began Thorne, in low, swift whisper, "a few days, a week ago—it seems like a year—I was of some assistance to refugees fleeing from Mexico into the States. They were all women, and one of them was dressed as a nun. Quite by accident I saw her face. It was that of a beautiful girl. I observed she kept aloof from the others. I suspected a disguise, and, when opportunity afforded, spoke to her, offered my services. She replied to my poor efforts at Spanish in fluent English. She had fled in terror from her home, some place down in Sinaloa. Rebels are active there. Her father was captured and held for ransom. When the ransom was paid the rebels killed him. The leader of these rebels was a bandit named Rojas. Rojas saw the daughter, made off with her. But she contrived to bribe her guards, and escaped almost immediately before any harm befell her. She hid among friends. Rojas nearly tore down the town in his efforts to find her. Then she disguised herself and traveled by horseback, stage and train to Casita."

"She had no friends here, no money. She knew Rojas was trailing her. This talk I had with her was at the railroad station, where all was bustle and confusion. No one noticed us, so I thought. I advised her to remove the disguise of a nun before she left the waiting-room. And I got a boy to guide her. But he fetched her to this house. I had promised to come in the evening to talk over the situation with her."

"I found her, Dick, and when I saw her—I went stark, staring, raving mad over her. She is the most beautiful, wonderful girl I ever saw. Her name is Mercedes Castaneda, and she belongs to one of the old wealthy Spanish families. She has lived abroad and in Havana. She speaks French as well as English. She is—but I must be brief."

"Dear lady, Rojas will hound you no more tonight, nor for many nights."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

What Wives Know.
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Nashville Lady Attributes Good Health to Cardui—Says She Was Suffering Agony When She Began to Take It.

Nashville, Tenn.—Mrs. Dudley B. Stuart, 519 Ash Street, this city, recently made the following statement: "Before I started taking Cardui, I was sick in bed. I weighed 90 pounds."

"My mother came to see me and told me to get Cardui. My husband went to town and brought home two bottles which I took. At once I began to improve, although up to that time I had taken medicine, but it had not helped me at all. From the first dose of Cardui my appetite began to come back."

"I had been suffering from female trouble... was so weak and in such a run-down condition. That was two years ago... I kept on taking Cardui as a tonic."

"My appetite is good. I certainly owe a lot to this fine medicine. Nothing did me any good until I began to take it. It made me gain 48 pounds. I don't weigh quite so much now on account of the baby nursing, but I feel perfectly well. I am very grateful for what it has done for me, for I was suffering agony when I began to take it."

Writing later of her experience in the use of Cardui, Mrs. Stuart said: "My health is better now than ever and am proud to say Cardui did it."



Poet With Blank Mind.
Poet—I put my whole mind into this poem. Editor—Evidently, I see that it's blank verse.

If You Need a Medicine You Should Have the Best

Have you ever stopped to reason why it is that so many products that are extensively advertised, all at once drop out of sight and are soon forgotten? The reason is plain—the article did not fulfill the promises of the manufacturer. This applies more particularly to a medicine. A medicinal preparation that has real curative value almost sells itself, as like an endless chain system the remedy is recommended by those who have been benefited to those who are in need of it. A prominent druggist says, "Take for example Dr. Kilmer's Swamp-Root, a preparation I have sold for many years and never hesitate to recommend, for in almost every case it shows excellent results, as many of my customers testify. No other kidney remedy has so large a sale."

According to sworn statements and verified testimony of thousands who have used the preparation, the success of Dr. Kilmer's Swamp-Root is due to the fact, so many people claim, that it fulfills almost every wish in overcoming kidney, liver and bladder ailments, corrects urinary troubles and neutralizes the uric acid which causes rheumatism. You may receive a sample bottle of Swamp-Root by parcel post. Address Dr. Kilmer & Co., Binghamton, N. Y., and enclose ten cents; also mention this paper. Large and medium size bottles for sale at all drug stores.—Advertisement.

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