

DESERT GOLD

by

ZANE GREY

Author of

Riders of the Purple Sage, Wildfire, Etc.

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FORLORN RIVER

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 together. Taking refuge from a sandstorm in a cave, Cameron discovers gold, but too late; both men are dying. Cameron leaves evidence, in the cave, of his 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, and his fiancée, Spanish girl, his step-cousin, from Rojas, Mexican bandit. Gale, "roughhouse" Rojas and his gang, with the help of two American cowboys, and he, Mercedes and Thorne escape. A bugle call from the fort orders Thorne to his regiment. He leaves Mercedes under Gale's protection.

CHAPTER III

A Flight Into the Desert.

Uneasy and startled, Gale turned his ear to the soft wind. Presently he heard, or imagined he heard, low beats. In a moment he was certain the sounds were the padlike steps of hoofs in yielding sand. The regular tramp was not that of grazing horses.

In the instant, made cautious and stealthy by alarm, Gale drew Mercedes deeper into the gloom of the shrubbery. The sounds of hoofbeats grew louder. Gale made out a dark moving mass against a background of dull gray. There was a line of horses. He could not discern whether or not all the horses carried riders. The murmur of a voice struck his ear—then a low laugh. It made him tingle, for it sounded American. Eagerly he listened.

"It shore was, Laddy, it shore was," came a voice out of the darkness. "Rough house! Laddy, since wire fences drove us out of Texas we ain't seen the like of that. An' we never had such a call."

"Call? It was a burnin' roan," replied another voice. "I felt low down. He vamoose some sudden, an' I hope he an' his friends shook the dust of Casita. That's a rotten town, Jim."

Gale jumped up in joy. What luck! The speakers were none other than the two cowboys whom he had accosted in the Mexican hotel.

"Hold on, fellows," he called, and strode into the road.

The horses snorted and stamped. Then followed swift rustling sounds—a clinking of spurs, then silence. The figures loomed clearer in the gloom. Gale saw five or six horses, two with riders, and one other, at least, carrying a pack. When Gale got within fifteen feet of the group the foremost horseman said:

"I reckon that's close enough, stranger."

Something in the cowboy's hand glistened darkly bright in the starlight.

"You'd recognize me, if it wasn't so dark," replied Gale, halting. "I spoke to you a little while ago—in the saloon back there."

"Come over an' let's see you," said the cowboy, curtly.

Gale advanced till he was close to the saddle and peered into Gale's face. Then, without a word, he sheathed the gun and held out his hand. Gale met a grip of steel that warmed his blood. The other cowboy got off his nervous, spirited horse and threw the bridle. He, too, peered closely into Gale's face.

"My name's Ladd," he said. "Reckon I'm some glad to meet you again."

Gale felt another grip as hard and strong as the other had been. He realized he had found friends who belonged to a class of men whom he had despised of ever knowing.

"Gale—Dick Gale is my name," he began, swiftly. "I dropped into Casita tonight hardly knowing where I was. A boy took me to that hotel. There I met an old friend whom I had not seen for years. He belongs to the cavalry stationed here. He had befriended a Spanish girl—fallen in love with her. Rojas had killed this girl's father—tried to abduct her. . . . You know what took place at the hotel. Gentlemen, if it's ever possible, I'll show you how I appreciate what you did for me there. I got away, found my friend with the girl. We hurried out here beyond the edge of town. Then Thorne had to make a break for camp. We heard bugle calls, shots, and he was away without leave. That left the girl with me. I don't know what to do. Thorne swears Casita is no place for Mercedes at night."

"The girl ain't no peon, no common Greaser!" interrupted Ladd.

"No. Her name is Castaneda. She belongs to an old Spanish family, once rich and influential."

"Reckoned as much," replied the cowboy. "There's more than Rojas' wantin' to kidnap a pretty girl. Shore he does, that every day or so. Must be somethin' political or feelin' against class. Well Casita, ain't no place for your friend's girl at night or day, or any time. Shore, there's Americans who'd take her in an' fight for her, if necessary. But it ain't wise to risk that. Lash, what do you say?"

"It's been gettin' hotter round this Greaser corral for some weeks," re-

plied the other cowboy. "If that two-bit of a garrison surrenders, there's no tellin' what'll happen, an' bein' across the U. S. line a few inches or so don't make no h—l of a difference. My advice is, don't let Miss Castaneda ever set foot in Casita again."

"Looks like you've shore spoke sense," said Ladd. "I reckon, Gale, you an' the girl ought to come with us. We know people who'll take care of the senorita till your friend can come for her."

Dick warmly spoke his gratefulness, and, inexpressibly relieved and happy for Mercedes, he went toward the clump of cactus where he had left her. She stood erect, waiting, and, dark as it was, he could tell she had lost the terror which had so shaken her.

He led her into the road up to the cowboys, who now stood bareheaded in the starlight. They seemed shy, and Lash was silent while Ladd made embarrassed, unintelligible reply to Mercedes' thanks.

There were five horses—two saddled, two packed and the remaining one carried only a blanket. Ladd shortened the stirrups on his mount, and



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helped Mercedes up into the saddle. From the way she settled herself and took the few restive prances of the mettlesome horse Gale judged that she could ride. Lash urged Gale to take his horse. But this Gale refused to do.

"I'll walk," he said. "I'm used to walking. I know cowboys are not."

Once started with protection assured for the girl and a real objective point in view, Gale relaxed from the tense strain he had been laboring under. How glad he would have been to acquaint Thorne with their good fortune! Later, of course, there would be some way to get word to the cavalryman. But till then what tortments his friend would suffer!

It seemed to Dick that a very long time had elapsed since he stepped off the train; and one by one he went over every detail of incident which had occurred between that arrival and the present moment. His meeting with Thorne; the wonderful black eyes of a Spanish girl; her appeal to him; the hate inspired by Rojas, and the rush, the blow, the action; sight of Thorne and Mercedes hurrying safely away; the girl's hands pressing his to her heaving breast; the sweet fire of her kiss; the fact of her being alone with him, dependent upon him—all these things Gale turned over and over in his mind, only to fall of any definite conclusion as to which had affected him so remarkably, or to tell what had really happened to him.

Had he fallen in love with Thorne's sweetheart? The idea came in a flash. Was he, all in an instant, and by one of those incomprehensible reversals of character, jealous of his friend? Dick was almost afraid to look up at Mercedes. Still he forced himself to do so, and as it chanced Mercedes was looking down at him. With a quick, graceful impulsiveness she put her hand upon his shoulder. Like her appearance, the action was new, strange, striking to Gale; but it brought home suddenly to him the nature of gratitude and affection in a girl of her blood. It was sweet and sisterly. He knew then that he had not fallen in love with her. The feeling, that was akin to jealousy seemed to be of the beautiful something for which Mercedes stood in Thorne's life. Gale then grasped the bewildering possibilities, the infinite wonder of what a girl could mean to a man.

The desert began to lighten. Gray openings in the border of shrubby growths changed to paler hue. In the east a white glow grew brighter and brighter, reaching up to a line of cloud, defined sharply below by a rugged notched range.

"Senor, I am cold," said Mercedes.

Dick had been carrying his coat upon his arm. He stopped the horse and raised the coat up, and helped Mercedes put it on.

"I should have thought of you," he said. "But I seemed to feel warm, . . .

The coat's a little large; we might wrap it around you twice."

Mercedes smiled and lightly thanked him in Spanish. He was about to start when he observed that Ladd had halted and was peering ahead in evident caution. Mercedes' horse began to stamp impatiently, raised his ears and head, and acted as if he was about to neigh.

A warning "hist" from Ladd bade Dick put a quieting hand on the horse. Lash came noiselessly forward to join his companion. The two then listened and watched.

Presently Lash went to the rear and Ladd started ahead. The progress now, however, was considerably slower, not owing to a bad road—for that became better—but probably owing to caution exercised by the cowboy guide. At the end of a half hour this marked deliberation changed, and the horses followed Ladd's at a gait that put Gale to his best walking paces.

His steps were halted by Ladd's actions. The cowboy reined in his horse, listened a moment, then swung down out of the saddle. He raised a cautioning hand to the others, then slipped into the gloom and disappeared. Gale marked that the halt had been made in a ridged and cut-up pass between low mesas. To the right, up under the ledges some distance away, stood two square black objects, too uniform, he thought, to be rocks. While he was peering at them, uncertain what to think, the shrill whistle of a horse pealed out, to be followed by the rattling of hoofs on hard stone. Then a dog barked. At the same moment that Ladd hurriedly appeared in the road a light shone out and danced before one of the square black objects.

"Keep close an' don't make no noise," he whispered, and led his horse at right angles off the road.

Gale followed, leading Mercedes' horse. As he turned he observed that Lash also had dismounted.

To keep closely at Ladd's heels without brushing the cactus or stumbling over rocks and depressions was a task Gale found impossible. It was no easy matter to lead a spirited horse through the dark, winding lanes walled by thorns. Dick saw that the travel was fast, but by no means noiseless. The pack animals at times crashed and ripped through the narrow places. It seemed to Gale that anyone within a mile could have heard these sounds.

Presently Ladd led out into a wider lane that appeared to run straight. The cowboy mounted his horse, and this convinced Gale that they had circled back to the road. The march proceeded then once more at a good, steady, silent walk. When Dick consulted his watch he was amazed to see the hour was still early. He asked Mercedes if she was cold, and she answered that she was, speaking especially of her feet, which were growing numb. Then she asked to be helped down to walk awhile. At first she was cold and lame, and accepted the helping hand Dick proffered. After a little, however, she recovered, and went on without assistance. They had reached the summit of what was evidently a high ridge sloped with much greater steepness on the far side. It was only after a few more forward steps, however, that Dick could see down the slope. Then full in view flashed a bright campfire around which clustered a group of dark figures. They were encamped in a wide arroyo, where horses could be seen grazing in black patches of grass between clusters of trees. A second look at the campers told Gale they were Mexicans. At this moment Lash came forward to join Ladd, and the two spent a long, uninterrupted moment studying the arroyo. A hoarse laugh, faint yet distinct, floated upon the cool wind.

"Well, Laddy, what 'r you makin' of that outfit?" inquired Lash, speaking softly.

"Same as any of them raider outfits," replied Ladd. "They're across the line for beef. But they'll run off a good stock. As boss thieves these rebels have got 'em all beat. That outfit is waitin' till it's late. Nothin' to it but head south for the Rio Forlorn. It's on the border line, but it's country where these rebels ain't been yet."

"It's a hike to Beldin's ranch. An' if we get there in daylight some Greaser will see the girl before Beldin can hide her. It'll get talked about. The news'll travel to Casita like sage balls before the wind."

"Shore we don't ride into Rio Forlorn in the daytime. Let's slip the packs, Jim. We can hide them off in the cactus an' come back after them. With the young man ridin' we—"

The whispering was interrupted by a loud ringing neigh that whistled up from the arroyo. One of the horses had scented the travelers on the ridge-top. The indifference of the Mexicans changed to attention.

Ladd and Lash turned back and led the horses into the first opening on the south side of the road. The packs

were slipped, securely tied and hidden in a mesquite clump. Ladd strapped a blanket around one of the horses. His next move was to take off his chaps.

"Gale, you're wearin' boots, an' by liftin' your feet you can beat the cactus," he whispered. "But the—the—Miss Castaneda, she'll be torn all to pieces unless she puts these on. Please tell her—an' hurry."

Dick took the chaps, and, going up to Mercedes, he explained the situation. She laughed, evidently at his embarrassed earnestness, and slipped out of the saddle.

"Senor, chapparejos and I are not strangers," she said.

Deftly and promptly she equipped herself, and then Gale helped her into the saddle, called to her horse, and started off. Lash directed Gale to mount the other saddled horse and go next.

Dick had not ridden a hundred yards behind the trotting leaders before he had sundry painful encounters with reaching cactus arms. The horse missed these by a narrow margin. Dick's knees appeared to be in line, and it became necessary for him to lift them high and let his boots take the onslaught of the spikes.

Ladd pursued a zigzag course southward across the desert, trotting down the aisles, cantering in wide, bare patches, walking through the clumps of cacti. Gale became chilled to the bone, and his clothes were damp and cold. His knees smarted from the wounds of the poisoned thorns, and his right hand was either swollen stiff or too numb to move. Moreover, he was tiring. Mercedes must be made of steel, he thought, to stand all that she had been subjected to and yet, when the stars were paling and dawn perhaps not far away, stay in the saddle.

So Dick Gale rode on, drowsier for each mile, and more and more giving the horse a choice of ground. Once when he, thinking to fight his weariness, raised his head, he saw that one of the horses in the lead was riderless. Ladd was carrying Mercedes.

It seemed that hours passed, though he knew only little time had elapsed, when once more he threw off the spell of weariness. He heard a dog bark. Tall trees lined the open lane down which he was riding. Presently in the gray gloom he saw low, square houses with flat roofs. Ladd rode on for perhaps a quarter of a mile, though it seemed interminably long to Dick. A grove of trees loomed dark in the gray of morning. Ladd entered it and was lost in the shade. Dick rode on among the trees. Presently he heard voices, and soon another house, low



"Senor, Chapparejos and I Are Not Strangers," She Said.

and flat like the others, but so long he could not see the farther end, stood up blacker than the trees. As he dismounted, cramped and sore, he could scarcely stand. Lash came alongside. He spoke, and someone with a big, hearty voice replied to him. Then it seemed to Dick that he was led into blackness like pitch, where, presently, he felt blankets thrown on him, and then his drowsy faculties faded.

CHAPTER IV

Forlorn River.

When Dick opened his eyes a flood of golden sunshine streamed in at the open window under which he lay. His first thought was one of blank wonder as to where in the world he happened to be. The room was large, square, adobe-walled. It was littered with saddles, harness, blankets. The sight of huge dusty spurs, a gun belt with sheath and gun, and a pair of leather chaps bristling with broken cactus thorns recalled to Dick the cowboys, the ride, Mercedes, and the whole strange adventure that had brought him there.

He felt a dead weight of complete lassitude, and he did not want to move. A sudden pain in his hand caused him to hold it up. It was black and blue, swollen to almost twice its normal size, and stiff as a board. The knuckles were skinned and crusted with dry blood. Dick soliloquized that it was the worst-look-

ing hand he had seen since football days, and that it would inconvenience him for some time.

The door at the far end of the room was open. Through it he saw poles of peeled wood upholding a porch roof, a bench, rose bushes in bloom, grass, and beyond these bright-green foliage of trees.

"He shore was sleepin' when I looked in an hour ago," said a voice that Dick recognized as Ladd's.

"Let him sleep," came the reply in deep, good-natured tones. "Mrs. B. says the girl's never moved. Must have been a tough ride for them both. Forty miles through cactus! Laddy I'm right down glad to see you boys, and I'll do all I can for the young couple. But I'm doing some worrying here; don't mistake me."

"About your stock?"

"I've got only a few head of cattle at the oasis now. I'm worrying some, mostly about my horses. The U. S. is doing some worrying, too, don't mistake me. The rebels have worked west and north as far as Casita. Of course, my job is to keep tabs on Chinese and Japs trying to get into the U. S. from Magdalena bay. But I'm supposed to patrol the border line. I'm going to hire some rangers. Now, I'm not so afraid of being shot up, though out in this lonely place there's danger of it; what I'm afraid of most is losing that bunch of horses. You know what those guerrilla Mexicans will do for horses. They're crazy on horse flesh. They know fine horses. So I don't sleep nights any more."

"Reckon me an' Jim might as well tie up with you for a spell, Beldin'. We've been ridin' up an' down Arizona tryin' to keep out of sight of wire fences."

"Laddy, it's open enough around Forlorn River to satisfy even an old-time cowpuncher like you," laughed Beldin'. "I'd take your staying on as some favor, don't mistake me. Perhaps I can persuade the young man Gale to take a job with me."

"That's shore likely. He said he had no money, no friends. An' if a scrapper's all you're lookin' for he'll do," replied Ladd, with a dry chuckle. "Maybe I ought to think twice before taking a stranger into my family," said Beldin', seriously. "Well, I guess he's all right, Laddy, being the cavalryman's friend. No bum or lunker? He must be all right?"

"Bum? Lunker? Say, didn't I tell you I shook hands with this boy an' was plumb glad to meet him?" demanded Laddy, with considerable heat. Manifestly he had been affronted. "Tom Beldin', he's a gentleman, an' he could lick you in—half a second. How about that, Jim?"

"Less time," replied Lash. "Tom, here's my stand. Young Gale can have my hoss, my gun, anythin' of mine."

"Aw, I didn't mean to insult you, boys, don't mistake me," said Beldin'. "Course he's all right."

The object of this conversation lay quiet upon his bed, thrilling and amazed at being so championed by the cowboys, delighted with Beldin's idea of employing him, and much amused with the quaint seriousness of the three.

"How's the young man?" called a woman's voice. It was kind and mellow and earnest.

Gale heard footsteps on flagstones. "He's asleep yet, wife," replied Beldin'. "Guess he was pretty much knocked out. . . . I'll close the door there so we won't wake him."

There were slow, soft steps, then the door softly closed. But the fact scarcely made a perceptible difference in the sound of the voices outside.

"Laddy and Jim are going to stay," went on Beldin'. "It'll be like the old Panhandle days a little. I'm powerful glad to have the boys, Nellie. We'll see some trouble before the revolution is ended. I think I'll make this young man Gale an offer."

"Dad, I shall fall in love with your new ranger. I will—I have—"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Easy Arithmetic.

Everybody knows that learning the tens in the multiplication table is as easy as "pie," and that the fives are not much harder. But slight as is the mental effort required in multiplying any number by five, it may be lessened still more by discarding the multiplier entirely and substituting a divisor instead.

This may sound paradoxical, but by experimenting you will find that dividing by two will bring the same results as multiplying by five, providing you add a cipher to the quotient if the dividend be an even number, or five if it be odd. For instance, if you multiply 2,734 by 5 the product is 13,670. What is still easier, divide 2734 by 2, which is done almost instantaneously. Then tack on your 0, and you have 13,670.

Secret of Diving Birds.

By expelling the air within their bodies, aquatic birds make themselves heavier than water when diving.

Get Ants Out of Ice Chest.

If ants get into ice chest, set a pan of water under each leg and move box away from the wall.

Los Angeles Woman Tells of Wonderful Experience.



MRS. GUSSIE E. HANSEN.

Mrs. Gussie E. Hansen, of 916 West 52nd Street, is now numbered with the multitude of Los Angeles men and women who have realized the wonderful merits of Tanlac. In relating her experiences, Mrs. Hansen said:

"It is wonderful what Tanlac will do for one suffering from stomach trouble, nervousness and run-down condition. I have tried it.

"Before taking the treatment everything I ate disagreed with me so that I actually dreaded to sit down to the table. I suffered from constipation, had awful pains across my back, and was so nervous and run down I was in misery all the time.

"Tanlac was helping so many others I thought it might help me, too, and it certainly has. Why, my appetite is just splendid, and my stomach is in such good order I eat to my heart's content. My back doesn't bother me any more, and I sleep like a child at night. I can't say too much for Tanlac."

Tanlac is for sale by all good druggists—take no substitute. Over 37 million bottles sold.

Flowers in Spring.

Do you know the early flowers? The early or dwarf Trillium, or Wake Robin, pushes its small white bloom through the dead leaves, or even sometimes through the snow—a delightful little flower and all too uncommon, says Nature Magazine of Washington. All of the Trilliums, of which five species more or less are common in the Eastern states, regulate their lives by the rule of three. Hence the name. They have three sepals, three petals, three styles, six stamens, a three-lobed ovary, and the flower stems project from a whorl of three leaves.

CALOMEL IS A DANGEROUS DRUG

Next Dose May Salivate You, Loosen Teeth or Start Rheumatism.

Calomel is mercury; quicksilver. It crashes into your bile like dynamite, cramping and sickening you. Calomel attacks the bones and should never be put into your system.

If you feel bilious, headachy, constipated and all knocked out, just go to your druggist and get a bottle of Dodson's Liver Tonic for a few cents, which is a harmless vegetable substitute for dangerous calomel. Take a spoonful and if it doesn't start your liver and straighten you up better and quicker than nasty calomel and without making you sick, just go back and get your money.

Don't take calomel! It makes you sick the next day; it loses you a day's work. Dodson's Liver Tonic straightens you right up and you feel great. No salts necessary. Give it to the children because it is perfectly harmless and can not salivate.—Advertisement.

Repairing China.

By applying a little carriage varnish carefully with a camel's hair brush to the edges of broken china, the parts being neatly joined together, the fracture will, when thoroughly dry, be hardly perceptible, and the china will stand fire and water.

CATARRH

Catarrh is a local disease greatly influenced by Constitutional conditions. HALL'S CATARRH MEDICINE consists of an Ointment which gives Quick Relief by local application, and the Internal Medicine, a Tonic, which acts through the Blood on the Mucous Surfaces and assists in ridding your System of Catarrh. Sold by druggists for over 40 Years. F. J. Cheney & Co., Toledo, O.

The man who wants the earth is invariably the first to growl about his taxes.

It is joyful to be able to talk only reminiscently of one's poverty.