

DESERT GOLD

by **ZANE GREY**
Author of *Riders of the Purple Sage*,
Wildfire, Etc.



Illustrations by **Irwin Myers**

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(PROLOGUE Continued.)

As thought and feeling multiplied, Cameron was overwhelmed. Beyond belief, indeed, was it that out of the millions of men in the world two who had never seen each other could have been driven into the desert by memory of the same woman. It brought the past so close. It showed Cameron how inevitably all his spiritual life was governed by what had happened long ago. That which made life significant to him was a wandering in silent places where no eye could see him with his secret. Some fateful chance had thrown him with the father of the girl he had wrecked. It was incomprehensible; it was terrible. It was the one thing of all possible happenings in the world of chance that both father and lover would have found unendurable.

Something within him cried out to him to reveal his identity. Warren would kill him; but it was not fear of death that put Cameron on the rack. He had faced death too often to be afraid. It was the thought of adding torture to this long-suffering man. All at once Cameron swore that he would not augment Warren's trouble, or let him stain his hands with blood. He would tell the truth of Nell's sad story and his own, and make what amends he could.

Then Cameron's thought shifted from father to daughter. She was somewhere beyond the dim horizon line. In those past lonely hours by the campfire his fancy had tortured him with pictures of Nell. But his remorseful and cruel fancy had led to him. Nell had struggled upward out of menacing depths. She had reconstructed a broken life. And now she was fighting for the name and happiness of her child, Little Nell! Cameron experienced a shuddering ripple in all his being—the physical rack of an emotion born of a new and strange consciousness. He felt that it had been given him to help Warren with his burden.

He returned to camp trying to evolve a plan. All night he lay awake thinking.

In the morning, when Warren brought the burros to camp and began preparations for the usual packing, Cameron broke silence.

"Father, your story last night made me think. I want to tell you something about myself. In my younger days—it seems long now, yet it's not so many years—I was wild. I wronged the sweetest and loveliest girl I ever knew. I went away not dreaming that any disgrace might come to her. Along about that time I fell into terrible moods—I changed—I learned I really loved her. Then came a letter I should have gotten months before. It told of her trouble—impertuned me to hurry to save her. Half frantic with shame and fear, I got a marriage certificate and rushed back to her town. She was gone—had been gone for weeks, and her disgrace was known. Friends warned me to keep out of reach of her father. I trailed her—found her. I married her. But too late! She would not live with me. She left me—I followed her west, but never found her."

Warren leaned forward a little and looked into Cameron's eyes, as if searching there for the repentance that might make him less deserving of a man's scorn.

Cameron met the gaze unflinchingly, and again began to speak:

"You know, of course, how men out here sometimes lose old names, old identities. It won't surprise you much to learn my name isn't really Cameron, as I once told you."

Warren stiffened upright. It seemed that there might have been a blank, a suspension, between his grave interest and some strange mood to come. Cameron felt his heart bulge and contract in his breast; all his body grew cold; and it took tremendous effort for him to make his lips form words.

"Warren, I'm the man you're hunting. I'm Burton. I was Nell's lover!" The old man rose and towered over Cameron, and then plunged down upon him, and clutched his throat with terrible, stiff hands. The harsh contact, the pain awakened

Cameron to his peril before it was too late. Desperate fighting saved him from being hurled to the ground and stamped and crushed. Warren seemed a maddened giant. There was a reeling, swaying, wrestling struggle before the elder man began to weaken. Then Cameron, buffeted, bloody, half-stunned, panted for speech.

"Warren—hold on! Give me a minute. I married Nell. Didn't you know that? . . . I saved the child!" Cameron felt the shock that vibrated through Warren. He repeated the words again and again. As if compelled by some resistless power, War-

ren released Cameron, and, staggering back, stood with uplifted, shaking hands. In his face was a horrible darkness.

"Warren! Wait—listen!" panted Cameron. "I've got that marriage



"Warren—Hold On! Give Me a Minute—I Married Nell—Didn't You Know That?"

certificate—I've had it by me all these years. I kept it—to prove to myself I did right."

The old man uttered a broken cry. 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 campfire, 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 exaltation. He had lightened his comrade's burden. Wonderfully it came to him that he had also lightened his own. From that hour it was no torment to think of Nell.

IV

There came a morning when the sun shone angry and red through a dull, smoky haze.

"We're 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 and patiently waited. The long hours dragged, and the storm increased in fury. Cameron and Warren wet scarfs with water from their canteens, and bound them round their faces, and then covered their heads. The steady, hollow bellow of flying sand went on. It flew so thickly that enough sifted down under the shelving rock to weight 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 packs. 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 shovel 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 sore, 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 out, 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 tolled 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 tolled, 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 pieces of broken ledge, and they showed gold.

"Warren! Look! See it! Feel it! Gold!"

But Warren was too blind to see. "Go—go!" he whispered.

Cameron gazed down the gray reaches of that forlorn valley, and something within him that was neither intelligence nor emotion—something inscrutably strange—impelled him to promise.

Then Cameron built up stone mounds to mark his gold strike. That done, he tarried beside the unconscious Warren. Moments passed—grew into hours. Cameron still had strength left to make an effort to get out of the desert. But that same inscrutable something which had ordered his strange, involuntary promise to Warren held him beside his fallen comrade. As the long hours wore on he felt creep over him the comforting sense that he need not forever fight sleep. Absolute silence claimed the desert. It was mute. Then that inscrutable something breathed to him, telling him when he was alone. He need not have looked at the dark, still face beside him.

Another face haunted Cameron's—a woman's face. It was there in the white moonlit shadows; it drifted in the darkness beyond; it softened, changed to that of a young girl, sweet, with the same dark, haunting eyes of



"Warren! Look! See it! Feel it! Gold!"

ner mother. Cameron prayed to that nameless thing within him, the spirit of something deep and mystical as life. He prayed for mercy to a woman—for happiness to her child. Both mother and daughter were close to him then. Time and distance were annihilated. He had faith—he saw into the future. The fateful threads of the past, so inextricably woven with his error, wound out their tragic length here in this forlorn desert.

Cameron then took a little tin box from his pocket, and, opening it, removed a folded certificate. He had kept a pen, and now he wrote something upon the paper, and in lieu of ink he wrote with blood. The moon afforded him enough light to see; and having replaced the paper, he laid the little box upon a shelf of rock. It would remain there unaffected by dust, moisture, heat, time. How long had those painted images been there clear and sharp on the dry stone walls? Years would pass. Cameron seemed to see them, too; and likewise destiny leading a child down into this forlorn waste, where she would find love and fortune, and the grave of her father.

Cameron covered the dark, still face of his comrade from the light of the waning moon.

That action was the severing of his hold on realities. They fell away from him in final separation. Vaguely, dreamily he seemed to behold his soul. Night merged into gray day; and night came again, weird and dark. Then up out of the vast void of the desert, from the silence and illumination, trooped his phantoms of peace. Majestically they formed around him, marshaling and mustering in ceremonious state, and moved to lay upon him their passionless serenity.

End of Prologue

Sources of Folk Songs.

Because of the autonomy of its language and the beauty of its natural associations, Italy is preeminently the land of poetical and musical compositions, says Knout S. Ponnonio in *Christian Science Monitor*. To write and sing songs appropriate to every event is among the instincts of the masses.

Two forms of folk songs are to be distinguished: One spontaneous and plebeian in origin, the other more literary and less spontaneous. The first can be traced in Italy to the very source of the language, the second is not older than three or four centuries.

Sicily is considered the source from which all poetry, natural or cultivated, sprang and passed into the rest of Italy. Its songs, through assimilation, became essentially and commonly Italian, although to become such they had to lose their original dialectical form.

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NOTICE OF EQUALIZATION

Notice is hereby given that the City Council of the city of North Platte, Nebraska, will set as a board of Equalization of the cost of construction of sewer against abutting property owners in Sewer District Number one of said city on the 21st day of November, 1922.

Any person having objections to said equalization of the cost of construction of sewer in said district will appear and file same on said date.

Witness my hand and seal this 10th day of November, 1922.

E. O. ELDER, City Clerk.

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Estate No. 1912 of John Lee Moran, deceased in the County Court of Lincoln County, Nebraska.

The State of Nebraska, ss: Creditors of said estate will take notice that the time limited for presentation and filing of claims against said estate is February 21, 1923, and for settlement of said estate is October 17, 1923; that I will sit at the county court room in said County on November 21, 1922, at 10 o'clock a. m., and on February 19, 1923, at 10 o'clock a. m., to receive, examine, hear, allow or adjust all claims and objections duly filed.

Wm. H. C. WOODHURST, County Judge.

examine, hear, allow or adjust all claims and objections duly filed.

Dated October 17, 1922.

Wm. H. C. WOODHURST, County Judge.

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

J. C. Hoffman, Attorney

Estate No. 1916 of William S. Deguy deceased in the County Court of Lincoln County, Nebraska.

The State of Nebraska, ss: Creditors of said estate will take notice that the time limited for presentation and filing of claims against said estate is March 12th, 1923, and for settlement of said estate is November 7th, 1923; that I will sit at the county court room in said County on December 12th, 1922, at 10 o'clock a. m., and on March 12th, 1923, at 10 o'clock a. m., to receive, examine, hear, allow, or adjust all claims and objections duly filed.

Dated November 7th, 1922.

Wm. H. C. WOODHURST, County Judge.

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Boeler, Crosby and Baskins, Attys.

Estate No. 1913 of Robert A. McKnight deceased in the county court of Lincoln county, Nebraska.

The State of Nebraska, ss: Creditors of said estate will take notice that the time limited for presentation and filing of claims against said estate is March 8th, 1923, and for settlement of said estate is November 3, 1923; that I will sit at the county court room in said county on December 8, 1922, at 10 o'clock a. m. and on March 8, 1923, at 10 o'clock a. m. to receive, examine, hear, allow or adjust all claims and objections duly filed.

Dated November 3, 1922.

Wm. H. C. WOODHURST, County Judge.

NOTICE OF FINAL REPORT

Estate No. 1886 of Bernard Winkewer, deceased in the County Court of Lincoln County, Nebraska.

The State of Nebraska, to all persons interested in said Estate take notice that the Administrator has filed a final account and report of his administration and a petition for final settlement and discharge as such administrator which have been set for hearing before said court on December 1st, 1922, at 10 o'clock a. m., when you may appear and contest the same.

Dated October 31, 1922.

Wm. H. C. WOODHURST, County Judge.

NOTICE FOR PUBLICATION

Department of the Interior

U. S. Land Office at Lincoln, Nebr., October 17, 1922.

Notice is hereby given that John O. Lindenmuth, of Wellfleet, Nebraska, who on November 27, 1917, made homestead entry, Broken Bow No. 011980, Lincoln, No. 02920, for W 1/4 NE 1/4, E 1/4 NW 1/4 and SE 1/4, Section 8 Township 10, North of Range 20, west of 6th Principal Meridian, has filed notice of intention to make final three year proof, to establish claim to the land above described, before W. H. C. Woodhurst, United States Commissioner, at North Platte, Nebraska, on the 27th day of November, 1922.

Claimant names as witnesses:

E. W. Gerkin, Jack Ziegler, J. K. Browning and Earl Greenwood, all of Wellfleet, Nebraska.

J. E. HAYS, Register.

SHERIFF'S SALE

By virtue of an order of sale issued from the District Court of Lincoln County, Nebr., upon a decree of foreclosure rendered in said Court wherein David H. Corbett is plaintiff, and W. L. Frisco, et al are defendants, and to me directed, I will on the 9th day of December, 1922, at 2 o'clock P. M., at the east front door of the Court House in North Platte, Lincoln County, Nebraska sell at Public Auction to the highest bidder for cash, to satisfy said decree, interest and costs, the following described property, to-wit:

West half of the southwest quarter (W 1/2 of SW 1/4) of section thirty-five (35) of township eleven (11) north of range thirty-one (31) west of the 6th P. M. Lincoln County, Nebraska.

Dated North Platte, Nebr., Nov. 4, 1922.

A. J. SALISBURY, Sheriff.

NOTICE TO BIDDERS

Notice is hereby given that sealed bids will be received by the City Council of the city of North Platte, Nebraska, on sewer lateral district No. 2 and Sewer lateral district No. 3, consisting of blocks 13 and 20 of South Park Addition to the City of North Platte, also beginning at the main sewer on "E" street where the same intersects the center line of the alley in blocks 13 and 20 of Residence Park Subdivision produced, thence south on the center line of said alley of said blocks 13 and 20 to the south side of block 13 and 20 to the south there to terminate; and also to consist of blocks 1 and 2 of Walmemath Addition to the city of North Platte, Nebraska, and blocks 4 and 5 of the H & S Addition to the city of North Platte, Nebraska, commencing at the main sewer on East "E" street where the same intersects the center line of the alley in blocks 1 and 2 of Walmemath's Subdivision produced, thence south on the center line of alley in said blocks 1 and 2 of Walmemath's Subdivision also blocks 4 and 5 of the H & S addition, to the city of North Platte, Nebraska, there to terminate.

Said bids will be received up to and including the 21st day of November, 1922 at eight o'clock p. m. of said day.

Plans and specifications may be had from the City Engineer of said city by any one wishing to bid.

The Mayor and Council reserve the right to reject any and all bids.

Witness my hand this 10th day of November, 1922.

O. E. ELDER, City Clerk.

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