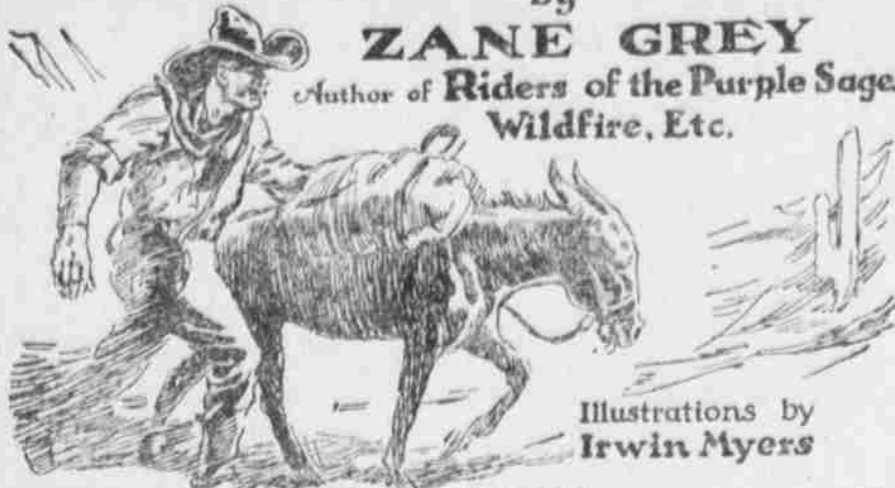


# DESERT GOLD

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



Illustrations by  
**Irwin Myers**

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CHAPTER I—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 Castaneda, Spanish girl, his affianced wife, from Rojas, Mexican bandit.

## CHAPTER II

Mercedes Castaneda. The dark face vanished. Dick Gale heard footsteps and the rattle of spurs. He strode to the window, and was in time to see a Mexican swagger into the front door of the saloon. There were men passing in the street, also several Mexicans lounging against the hitching rail at the curb.

"Did you see him? Where did he go?" whispered Thorne, as he joined Gale. "Those Greasers out there with the cartridge belts crossed over their breasts—they are rebels. I'm afraid Rojas has the house spotted."

"If we could only be sure." "I'm sure, Dick. Let's cross the hall; I want to see how it looks from the other side of the house."

Gale followed Thorne out of the restaurant into the high-ceiled corridor which evidently divided the hotel, opening into the street and running back to a patio. A few dim, yellow lamps flickered. Thorne entered a huge chamber which was even more poorly lighted than the hall. It contained a table littered with papers, a few high-backed chairs, a couple of couches, and was evidently a parlor.

"Mercedes has been meeting me here," said Thorne. "At this hour she comes every moment or so to the head of the stairs there, and if I am here she comes down. Mostly there are people in this room a little later. We go out into the plaza. It faces the dark side of the house, and that's the place I must slip out with her if there's any chance at all to get away."

"They peered out of the open window. In a moment, however, Gale made out a slow-pacing dark form on the path. Farther down there was another. No particular keenness was required to see in these forms a sentinel-like stealthiness."

Gripping Gale's arm, Thorne pulled back from the window.

"You saw them," he whispered. "It's just as I feared. Rojas has the place surrounded. I should have taken Mercedes away. But I had no time—no chance! I'm bound! . . . There's Mercedes now! My G—d! . . . Dick, think, think—think if there's a way to get her out of this trap!"

Gale turned as his friend went down the room. In the dim light at the head of the stairs stood the slim, muffled figure of a woman. When she saw Thorne she flew noiselessly down the stairway to him. He caught her in his arms. Then she spoke softly, brokenly, in a low, swift voice. It was a mingling of incoherent Spanish and English; but to Gale it was mellow, deep, unutterably tender, a voice full of joy, fear, passion, hope and love. Upon Gale it had an unaccountable effect. He found himself thrilling, wondering.

Thorne led the girl to the center of the room, under the light where Gale stood.

"Mercedes—Dick Gale, an old friend—the best friend I ever had." She swept the mantilla back over her head, disclosing a lovely face, strange and striking to Gale in its pride and fire, its intensity.

"Senior Gale—ah! I cannot speak my happiness. His friend!" "Yes, Mercedes; my friend and yours," said Thorne, speaking rapidly. "We'll have need of him. Dear, there's bad news and no time to break it gently. The priest did not come. He must have been detained. And listen—be brave, dear Mercedes—Rojas is here!"

Think of something. We'll slip away. Then he'll take you somewhere. Only—speak to him—show him you won't weaken. Mercedes, this is more than love and happiness for us. It's life or death!

She became quiet, and slowly recovered control of herself. She wheeled to face Gale with proud dark eyes, tragic sweetness of appeal, an exquisite grace.

"Senior, you are an American. You cannot know the Spanish blood—the peon bandit's hate and cruelty. I wish to die before Rojas' hand touches me. If he takes me alive, then the hour, the little day that my life lasts afterward will be torture—torture of hell. If I live two days his brutal men will have me. If I live three, the dogs of his camp . . . Senior, have you a sister whom you love? Help Senior Thorne to save me. He is a soldier. He is bound. He must not betray his honor, his duty, for me. . . . Now, let me waste no more precious time. I am ready. I will be brave."

She came close to Gale, holding out her white hands, a woman all fire and soul and passion. To Gale she was wonderful. His heart leaped. As he bent over her hands and kissed them he seemed to feel himself renewed, remade.

"Seniorita," he said, "I am happy to be your servant. I can conceive of no greater pleasure than giving the service you require."

"And what is that?" inquired Thorne hurriedly.

"That of incapacitating Senior Rojas for tonight, and perhaps several nights to come," replied Gale. "I'll make a row in that saloon. I'll start something. I'll rush Rojas and his crowd. Hi—"

"Lord, no; you mustn't, Dick—you'll be knifed!" cried Thorne.

"I'll take a chance. Maybe I can surprise that slow Greaser bunch and get away before they know what's happened. You be ready watching at the window. When the row starts those fellows out there in the plaza will run into the saloon. Then you slip out, go straight through the plaza down the street. It's a dark street, I remember. I'll catch up with you before you get far."

Thorne gasped, but did not say a word. Mercedes leaned against him, her white hands now at her breast, her great eyes watching Gale as he went out.

In the corridor Gale stopped long enough to pull on a pair of heavy gloves, to muss his hair, and disarrange his collar. Then he stepped into the restaurant, went through, and halted in the door leading into the saloon. No one appeared to notice him. Gale's roving glance soon fixed upon the man he took to be Rojas. The Mexican's face was turned aside. He was in earnest, excited colloquy with a dozen or more comrades, most of whom were sitting round a table. They were listening, talking, drinking. The fact that they wore cartridge belts crossed over their breasts satisfied Gale that these were the rebels. He became conscious of an inward fire that threatened to overrun his coolness. Other emotions hurried his self-control. It seemed as if sight of the man liberated or created a devil in Gale. And at the bottom of his feelings there seemed to be a wonder at

face turned a dirty white; his jaw dropped; he would have shrieked if Gale had not hit him. The blow swept him backward against his men. Then Gale's heavy body, swiftly following with the momentum of that rush, struck the little group of rebels. They went down with the table and chairs in a sliding crash.

Gale, carried by his plunge, went with them. Like a cat he landed on top. As he rose his powerful hands fastened on Rojas. He jerked the little bandit off the tangled pile of struggling, yelling men, and swinging him with terrific force, let go his hold. Rojas slid along the floor, knocking over tables and chairs. Gale bounded back, dragged Rojas up, handling him as if he were a limp sack.

A shot rang out above the yells. Gale heard the jingle of breaking glass. The room darkened perceptibly. He flashed a glance backward. The two cowboys were between him and the crowd of frantic rebels. One cowboy held two guns low down, level in front of him. The other had his gun raised and aimed. On the instant it spouted red and white. With the crack came the crashing of glass, another darkening shade over the room. With a cry Gale slung the bleeding Rojas from him. The bandit struck a table, toppled over it, fell, and lay prone.

little, simulating drunkenness. He fell over the pool tables, jostled Mexicans at the bar, laughed like a madman, and, with his hat slouched down, crowded here and there. Presently his eye caught sight of the group of cowboys whom he had before noticed with such interest.

They were still in a corner somewhat isolated. With fertile mind working, Gale lurched over to them. If he were to get any help from these silent aloof rangers it must be by striking fire from them in one swift stroke. Planting himself squarely before the two tall cowboys who were standing, he looked straight into their lean, bronzed faces. He spared a full moment for that keen, cool gaze before he spoke.

"I'm not drunk. I'm throwing a bluff, and I mean to start a rough house. I'm going to rush that d—d bandit Rojas. It's to save a girl—to give her lover, who is my friend, a chance to escape with her. She's in the house. Rojas is here to get her. When I start a row my friend will try to slip out with her. Every door and window is watched. I've got to raise h—l to draw the guards in. . . . Well, you're my countrymen. We're in Mexico. A beautiful girl's honor and life are at stake. Now, gentlemen, watch me!"

One cowboy's eyes narrowed, blinking a little, and his lean jaw dropped; the other's hard face rippled with a fleeting smile.

Gale backed away, and his pulse leaped when he saw the two cowboys, as if with one purpose, slowly stride after him. Then Gale swerved, staggering along, brushed against the tables, kicked over the empty chairs. The hum of the many voices grew louder, and when Dick lurched against a table, overturning it and spilling glasses into the laps of several Mexicans, there arose a shrill cry. He had succeeded in attracting attention; almost every face turned his way. One of the insulted men, a little tawny fellow, leaped to confront Gale, and in a frenzy screamed a volley of Spanish, of which, Gale distinguished "Gringo!" Dick swung his leg and with a swift side kick knocked the fellow's feet from under him, whirling him down with a thud.

The act was performed so suddenly, so adroitly, it made the Mexican such a weakling, so like a tumbled top, that the shrill jabbering hushed. Gale knew this to be the significant moment.

Wheeling, he rushed at Rojas. It was his old line-breaking plunge. Neither Rojas nor his men had time to move. The black-skinned bandit's



The Black-Skinned Bandit's Face Turned a Dirty White.

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Another shot made the room full of moving shadows, with light only back of the bar. A white-clad figure rushed at Gale. He tripped the man, but had to kick hard to disengage himself from grasping hands. Another figure closed in on Gale. This one was dark, swift. A blade glinted—described a circle aloft. Simultaneously with a

close, red flash the knife wavered; the man widdling it stumbled backward. Then pandemonium broke loose. The din became a roar. Dick heard shots

that sounded like dull spalls. The distance. The lamp behind the bar seemingly split, then sputtered and went out, leaving the room in darkness.

Gale leaped toward the restaurant door, which was outlined faintly by the yellow light within. Right and left he pushed the groping men who jostled with him. He vaulted a pool table, sent tables and chairs flying, and gained the door, to be the first of a wedding mob to squeeze through. One sweep of his arm knocked the restaurant lamp from its stand; and he ran out, leaving darkness behind him. A few bounds took him into the parlor. It was deserted. Thorne had gotten away with Mercedes!

It was then Gale slowed up. For the space of perhaps sixty seconds he had been moving with startling velocity. He peered cautiously out into the plaza. Under a street lamp at the far end of the path he thought he saw two dark figures. He ran faster, and soon reached the street. The uproar back in the hotel began to diminish, or else he was getting out of hearing. The few people he saw close at hand were all coming his way, and only the foremost showed any excitement. Gale walked swiftly, peering ahead for two figures, presently he saw them—one tall, wearing a cape; the other slight, named Thorne, and Mercedes were not far ahead.

He began to overhaul them; and soon, when the last lamp had been passed and the street was dark, he ventured a whistle. Thorne heard it, for he turned, whistled a low reply, and went on. Not for some distance beyond, where the street ended in open country, did they halt to wait. Then he came up with the fugitives.

"Dick! Are you—all right?" panted Thorne, grasping Gale.

"I'm—out of breath—but—O. K.," replied Gale.

"Good! Good!" choked Thorne. "I was scared—helpless. . . . Dick, it worked splendidly. We had no trouble. What on earth did you do?"

"I made the row, all right," said Dick. "While I was rushing Rojas a couple of cowboys shot out the lamp-lights. A Mexican who pulled a knife on me got hurt, I guess. Then I think there was some shooting from the rebels after the room was dark."

Mercedes pressed close to him, touched his hands, looked up into his face with wonderful eyes. He thought he would not soon forget their beauty—the shadow of pain that had been, the hope dawning so fugitively.

"Dear lady," said Gale, with voice not wholly steady. "Rojas himself will bound you no more tonight, nor for many nights."

She seemed to shake, to thrill, to rise with the intelligence. She pressed his hand close over her heaving breast. Gale felt the quick throb of her heart.

"Senior! Senior Dick!" she cried. Then her voice failed. But her hands flew up; quick as a flash she raised her face—kissed him. Then she turned, and with a sob fell into Thorne's arms.

There ensued a silence broken only by Mercedes' sobbing. Gale walked some paces away. If he were not stunned, he certainly was agitated. The strange, sweet fire of that girl's lips remained with him. On the spur of the moment he imagined he had a jealousy of Thorne. But presently this passed. What remained with him was the splendid glow of gladness that had been in service to Thorne.

"Dick, Dick, come here!" called Thorne softly. "Let's pull ourselves together now. We've got a problem yet. What to do? Where to go? How to get any place? We're on good old U. S. ground this minute, but we're not out of danger."

As he paused, evidently hoping for a suggestion from Gale, the silence was broken by the clear, ringing peal of a bugle. Thorne gave a violent start.

the edge of an unknown desert and the edge of a hostile town. He had to choose the desert, because, though he had no doubt that in Casita there were many Americans who might befriend him, he could not chance the risks of seeking them at night.

He felt a slight touch on his arm. Dick looked at her. Mercedes slip a trembling cold little hand into his. The silence, the desert, the unknown dangers of the night affected him, what must they be to this hunted, driven girl? Gale's heart swelled. He was alone with her. He had no weapon, no money, no food, no drink, no covering, nothing except his two hands. He did not know where to find the railroad, or any road or trail, or whether or not there were towns near or far. It was a critical, desperate situation. He thought first of the girl, and grounded in spirit, prayed that it would be given him to save her. When he remembered himself it was with the stunning consciousness that he could conceive of no situation which he would have exchanged for this one—where fortune had set him a perilous task of loyalty to a friend, to a helpless girl.

"Senior, senior!" suddenly whispered Mercedes, clinging to him. "Listen! I hear horses coming!"

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No. 1	4:45 p. m.
No. 3	1:45 a. m.
No. 7	1:25 p. m.
No. 11	2:04 p. m.
No. 13	3:10 a. m.
No. 15	12:40 a. m.
No. 17	6:25 p. m.
No. 19	9:10 a. m.
No. 51	3:50 a. m.
No. 25	7:09 p. m.

Eastbound

No. 2	12:20 p. m.
No. 4	11:00 p. m.
No. 8	12:05 p. m.
No. 10	9:25 p. m.
No. 12	11:30 p. m.
No. 14	6:55 p. m.
No. 16	3:55 a. m.
No. 18	1:15 p. m.
No. 20	7:20 p. m.
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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. Fristo, 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) in 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.

Boeler, Crosby and Baskins, Attys.  
NOTICE TO CREDITORS  
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 5th, 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 2, 1922, at 10 o'clock a. m. and on March 5, 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.

J. G. Hoffman, Attorney  
NOTICE TO CREDITORS  
Estate No. 1916 of William S. Deputy 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 Nov. 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.  
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