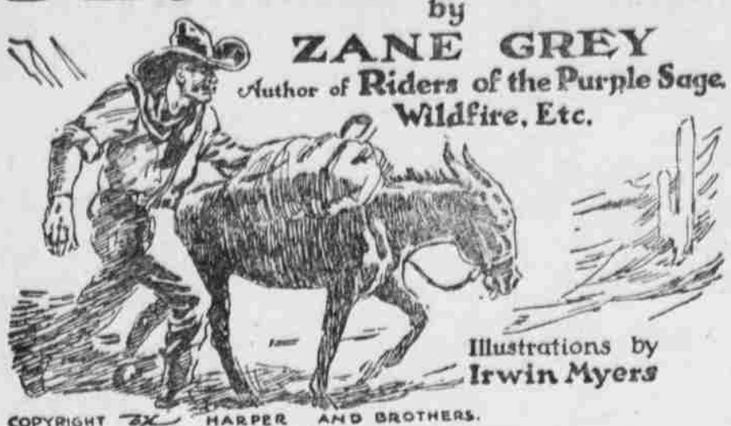
DESERT GOLD

by

ZANE GREY

Author of Riders of the Purple Sage, Wildfire, Etc.



Illustrations by Irwin Myers

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.—Gale "roughhouses" 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.—The pair, aided by the cowboys who had assisted Gale in the escape, Charlie Ladd and Jim Lash, arrive in safety at a ranch known as Forlorn River, well across the border.

CHAPTER IV.—The fugitives are at Tom Belding's home. Belding is immigration inspector. Living with him are his wife and stepdaughter, Nell Burton. Gale, with Ladd and Lash, take service with Belding as rangers, Gale telling Belding the cause of his being a wanderer, a misunderstanding with his father concerning the son's business abilities.

CHAPTER V.—Mercedes gets word to Thorne of her safety. Dick also writes to his parents, informing them of his whereabouts. Nell's personality, and her kindness, attract Gale.

CHAPTER V. (Continued)

Dick's hand. "Had no trouble finding your friend Thorne. Looked like he'd been drunk for a week! Say, he nearly threw a fit. I never saw a fellow so wild with joy. He made sure you and Mercedes were lost in the desert. He wrote two letters, which I brought. Casita is one h—l of a place these days. I tried to get your baggage, and think I made a mistake. We're going to see travel toward Forlorn River. The federal garrison got re-enforcements from somewhere, and is holding out."

"Do you think we'll have trouble here?" asked Dick, excitedly.

"Sure. Some kind of trouble sooner or later," replied Belding, gloomily. "Anyway, my boy, as soon as you can hold a bridle and a gun you'll be on the job, don't mistake me."

"With Laddy and Jim?" asked Dick, trying to be cool.

"Sure. With them and me, and by yourself."

Dick drew a deep breath, and even after Belding had departed he forgot for a moment about the letter in his hand. Then he unfolded the paper and read:

"Dear Dick—You've more than saved my life. To the end of my days you'll be the one man to whom I owe everything. Words fail to express my feelings.

"This must be a brief note. Belding is waiting, and I used up most of the time writing to Mercedes.

"I'm leaving Mercedes in your charge, subect, of course, to advice from Belding. Take care of her, Dick, for my life is wrapped up in her. By all means keep her from being seen by Mexicans. We are sitting tight here—nothing doing.

"If things quiet down before my commission expires, I'll get leave of absence, run out to Forlorn River, marry my beautiful Spanish princess, and take her to a civilized country, where, I opine, every son of a gun who sees her will lose his head, and drive me mad. Dick, harken to these glad words: Rojas is in the hospital. I was interested to inquire. He had a smashed finger, a dislocated collar bone, three broken ribs, and a fearful gash on his face. He'll be in the hospital for a month. Dick, when I meet that pigheaded dad of yours I'm going to give him the surprise of his life.

"Send me a line whenever any one comes in from F. R., and inclose Mercedes' letter in yours. Take care of her, Dick, and may the future hold in store for you some of the sweetness I know now! Faithfully yours,

"THORNE."

While Dick was eating his supper, with appetite rapidly returning to normal, Ladd and Jim came in. Their friendly advances were singularly welcome to Gale, but he was still backward. He allowed himself to show that he was glad to see them, and he listened. It took no keen judge

"Hello, Dick! Good news and bad!" he said, putting the letter in

"Hello, Dick! Good News and Bad!"

of human nature to see that horses constituted Ladd's ruling passion.

"Shore it's a cinch Beldin' is agoin' to lose some of them animals of his," he said. "You can search me if I don't think there'll be more doin' on the border here than along the Rio Grande."

"Look-a-here, Laddy; you cain't believe all you hear," replied Jim, seriously. "I reckon we mightn't have any trouble."

"Back up, Jim. Shore you're standin' on your bridle. There's more doin' than the raidin' of a few hosses. An' Forlorn River is goin' to get hers!"

Another dawn found Gale so much recovered that he arose and looked after himself; not, however, without considerable difficulty and rather disheartening twinges of pain.

Some time during the morning he heard the girls in the patio and called to ask if he might join them. He received one response, a mellow, "Si, senor." It was not as much as he wanted, but considering that it was enough, he went out. In the shade of a beautiful tree, he found the girls, Mercedes sitting in a hammock, Nell upon a blanket.

"What a beautiful tree!" he exclaimed. "I never saw one like that. What is it?"

"Palo verde," replied Nell.

"Senor, palo verde means 'green tree,'" added Mercedes.

Little by little Dick learned details of Nell's varied life. She had lived in many places. As a child she remembered Lawrence, Kansas, where she studied for several years. Then she moved to Stillwater, Oklahoma, from there to Austin, Texas, and on to Waco, where her mother met and married Belding. They lived in New Mexico awhile, in Tucson, Arizona, in Douglas, and finally had come to lonely Forlorn River.

"Mother could never live in one place any length of time," said Nell. "And since we've been in the Southwest she has never ceased trying to find some trace of her father. He was last heard of in Nogales fourteen years ago. She thinks grandfather was lost in the Sonora desert. . . . And every place we go is worse. Oh, I love the desert. But I'd like to go back to Lawrence—or to see Chicago or New York—some of the places Mr. Gale speaks of . . . I remember the college at Lawrence, though I was only twelve. I saw races—and once real football . . . Mr. Gale, of course, you've seen games?"

"Yes, a few," replied Dick; and he laughed a little. It was on his lips then to tell her about some of the famous games in which he had participated. But he refrained from exploiting himself. There was little, however, of the color and sound and cheer, of the violent action and rush and battle incidental to a big college football game that he did not succeed in making Mercedes and Nell feel just as if they had been there. They hung breathless and wide-eyed upon his words.

Some one else was present at the latter part of Dick's narrative. The moment he became aware of Mrs. Belding's presence he remembered fancying he had heard her call, and now he was certain she had done so. Mercedes and Nell, however, had been and still were oblivious to everything except Dick's recital. He saw Mrs. Belding cast a strange, intent glance upon Nell, then turn and go silently through the patio.

Dick was haunted by the strange expression he had caught on Mrs. Belding's face, especially the look in her eyes. It had been one of repressed pain liberated in a flash of certainty. The mother had seen how far he had gone on the road of love. Perhaps she had seen more—even more than he dared hope.

CHAPTER VI

The Yaqui.

Toward evening of a lowering December day, some fifty miles west of Forlorn River, a horseman rode along an old, dimly defined trail.

This lonely horseman bestrode a steed of magnificent build, perfectly white except for a dark bar of color running down the noble head from ears to nose. Sweat-caked dust stained the long flanks. The horse had been running. He was lean, gaunt, worn, a huge machine of muscle and bone, beautiful only in head and mane, a weight-carrier, a horse strong and fierce like the desert that had bred him.

The rider fitted the horse as he fitted the saddle. He was a young man of exceedingly powerful physique, wide-shouldered, long-armed, big-legged. His lean face, where it was not red, blistered and peeling, was the hue of bronze. He had a dark eye, a falcon gaze, roving and keen. His jaw was prominent and set, mastiff-like; his lips were stern. It was youth with its softness not yet quite burned and hardened away that kept the whole cast of his face from being ruthless.

This young man was Dick Gale, but not the listless traveler, nor the lounging wanderer who, two months before, had by chance dropped into Casita. The desert had claimed Gale, and had drawn him into its crucible. The desert had multiplied weeks into years. Heat, thirst, hunger, loneliness, toil, fear, ferocity, pain—he knew them all. He had felt them all—the white sun, with its glazed, coalescing, lurid fire; the caked split lips and rasping, dry-puffed tongue; the sickening ache in the pit of his stomach; the insupportable silence, the empty space, the utter desolation, the contempt of life; the watch and wait, the dread of ambush, the swift flight; the fierce pursuit of men wild as Bedouins and as fleet, the willingness to deal sudden death, the pain of poison thorn, the stinging tear of lead through flesh; and that strange paradox of the burning desert, the cold at night, the piercing icy wind, the dew that penetrated to the marrow, the numbing desert cold of the dawn.

Ladd's prophecy of trouble on the border had been mild compared to what had become the actuality. With rebel occupancy of the garrison at Casita, outlaws, bandits, raiders in rioting bands had spread westward

Many a dark-skinned raider bestrode one of Belding's fast horses; and, indeed, all except his selected white thoroughbreds had been stolen. So the job of the rangers had become more than a patrolling of the boundary line to keep Japanese and Chinese from being smuggled into the United States.

On this December afternoon the three rangers, as often, were separated. Lash was far to the westward of Sonoyta, somewhere along Camino del Diablo, that terrible Devil's road, where many desert wayfarers had perished. Ladd had long been overdue in a prearranged meeting with Gale. The fact that Ladd had not shown up miles west of the Papago well was significant.

Gale dismounted to lead his horse, to go forward more slowly. He had

Gale Dismounted to Lead His Horse, to Go Forward More Slowly.

ridden sixty miles since morning, and he was tired, and a not entirely healed wound in his hip made one leg drag a little. A mile up the arroyo, near its head, lay the Papago well. The need of water for his horse entailed a risk that otherwise he could have avoided. The well was on Mexican soil. Gale distinguished a faint light flickering through the thin, sharp foliage. Campers were at the well, and, whoever they were, no doubt they had prevented Ladd from meeting Gale. Ladd had gone back to the next waterhole, or maybe he was hiding in an arroyo to the eastward, awaiting developments.

Gale turned his horse, not without urge of iron arm and persuasive speech, for the desert steed scented water, and plodded back to the edge of the arroyo, where in a secluded circle of mesquite he halted. The horse snorted his relief at the removal of the heavy, burdened saddle and accoutrements. Gale poured the contents of his larger canteen into his hat and held it to the horse's nose.

"Drink, Sol," he said.

It was but a drop for a thirsty horse. However, Blanco Sol rubbed a wet muzzle against Gale's hand in appreciation. Gale loved the horse, and was loved in return. They had saved each other's lives, and had spent long days and nights of desert solitude together.

The spot of secluded ground was covered with bunches of galleta grass upon which Sol began to graze. Gale made a long halter of his lariat to keep the horse from wandering in search of water. Next Gale kicked off the cumbersome chapparejos, with their flapping, tripping folds of leather over his feet, and drawing a long rifle from his saddle sheath, he slipped away into the shadows. In the soft sand his steps made no sound. The twinkling light vanished occasionally, like a Jack-o'-lantern, and when it did show it seemed still a long way off. Gale was not seeking trouble or inviting danger. Water was the thing that drove him. He must see who these campers were, and then decide how to give Blanco Sol a drink.

Stooping low, with bushy mesquites between him and the fire, Gale advanced. The coyotes were in full cry. Gale heard the tramping, stamping thumps of many hoofs. The sound worried him. Foot by foot he advanced, and finally began to crawl. The nearer he approached the head of the arroyo, where the well was located, the thicker grew the desert vegetation. He secured a favorable position, and then rose to peep from behind his covert.

He saw a bright fire, not a cooking-fire, for that would have been low and red, but a crackling blaze of mesquite. Three men were in sight, all close to the burning sticks. They were Mexicans and of the coarse type of raiders, rebels, bandits that Gale had expected to see. A glint of steel caught his eye. Three short, shiny carbines leaned against a rock. A little to the left, within the circle of light, stood a square house made of adobe bricks. This house was a Papagon Indian habitation, and a month before had been occupied by a family that had been murdered or driven off by a roving band of outlaws. A rude corral showed dimly in the edge of firelight, and from a black mass within came the snort and stamp and whinny of horses.

Gale took in the scene in one quick glance, then sank down at the foot of the mesquite. He had naturally expected to see more men. But the situation was by no means new. This was one, or part of one, of the raider bands harrying the border. They were stealing horses, or driving a herd already stolen. Gale revolved questions in mind. Had this trio of outlaws run across Ladd? It was not likely, for in that event they might not have been so comfortable and carefree in camp. Were they waiting for more members of their gang? That was very probable. With Gale, however, the most important consideration was how to get his horse to water. Sol must have a drink if it cost a fight. There was stern reason for Gale to hurry eastward along the trail. He thought it best to go back to where he had left his horse and not make any decisive move until daylight.

With the same noiseless care he had exercised in the advance, Gale retreated until it was safe for him to rise and walk on down the arroyo. He found Blanco Sol contentedly grazing. Gale carried his saddle, blankets and bags into the lee of a little greasewood-covered mound, from around which the wind had cut the soil; and here, in a wash, he risked building a fire. By this time the wind was piercingly cold. Gale's hands were numb, and he moved them to and fro in the little blaze. Then he made coffee in a cup, cooked some slices of bacon on the end of a stick, and took a couple of hard biscuits from a saddlebag. Of these his meal consisted. After that he removed the halter from Blanco Sol, intending to leave him free to graze for a while.

Then Gale returned to his little fire, replenished it with short sticks of dead greasewood and mesquite, and, wrapping his blanket round his shoulders, he sat down to warm himself and to wait till it was time to bring in the horse and tie him up.

The fire was inadequate, and Gale was cold and wet with dew. Hunger and thirst were with him. His bones ached, and there was a dull, deep-seated pain throbbing in his unhealed wound.

Judged by the great average of ideals and conventional standards of life, Dick Gale was a starved, lonely, suffering, miserable wretch. But in his case the judgment would have hit only externals, would have missed the vital inner truth. For Gale was happy with a kind of strange, wild glory in the privations, the pains, the perils, and the silence and solitude to be endured on this desert land.

He had a duty to a man who relied on his services. He was a comrade, a friend, a valuable ally to riding, fighting rangers. Gale's happiness, as far as it concerned the toil and strife, was perhaps a grim and stoical one. But love abided with him, and it had engendered and fostered other undeveloped traits—romance and a feeling for beauty, and a keen observation of nature. He felt pain, but he was never miserable. He felt the solitude, but he was never lonely.

As he rode across the desert, even though keen eyes searched for the moving black dots, the rising puffs of white dust that were warnings, he saw Nell's face in every cloud. The clean-cut mesas took on the shape of her straight profile, with its strong chin and lips, its fine nose and forehead. There was always a glint of gold or touch of red or graceful line or gleam of blue to remind him of her. Then at night her face shone warm and glowing, flushing and paling, in the campfire.

By and by Gale remembered what he was waiting for; and, getting up, he took the halter and went out to find Blanco Sol. It was pitch-dark now, and Gale could not see a rod ahead. He felt his way, and presently as he rounded a mesquite he saw Sol's white shape outlined against the blackness. Gale haltered him in the likeliest patch of grass and returned to his camp. There he lifted his saddle into a protected spot under a low wall of the mound, and, laying one blanket on the sand, he covered himself with the other and stretched himself for the night.

Daylight came quickly. The morning was clear and nipping cold. He threw off the wet blanket and got up cramped and half frozen. A little brisk action was all that was necessary to warm his blood and loosen his muscles, and then he was fresh, tingling, eager. The sun rose in a golden blaze, and the descending valley took on wondrous changing hues. Then he fetched up Blanco Sol, saddled him, and tied him to the thickest clump of mesquite.

"Sol, we'll have a drink pretty soon," he said, patting the splendid neck.

Gale meant it. He would not eat till he had watered his horse. No three raiders could keep Gale away from that well. Taking his rifle in hand, he faced up the arroyo. From the lay of the land and position of trees seen by daylight, he found an easier and safer course than the one he had taken in the dark. And by careful work he was enabled to get closer to the well, and somewhat above it.

CHAPTER VI, (Continued)

NOTICE

Paving Assessments for the following districts may now be paid at the office of the City Treasurer.

Paving District

3 (East 4th Street)
4 (West 5th)
5 (West 4 to Oak)
6 (East 5th)

Districts 3 and 6 have been drawing interest since October 6th, 1922, and districts 4 and 5 will begin drawing interest December 6th, 1922.

L. E. MEHLMANN
City Treasurer

NOTICE TO BIDDERS

Notice is hereby given that sealed bids will be received for the construction of Sewer Lateral District No. 4 which consists of Blocks "B", 7, 8, and 9 of Cody's addition to the city of North Platte, Nebraska and that part of the Northwest Quarter of Southeast Quarter of Section 32, Township 14, Range 30, commencing at the main sewer on Jackson Avenue where the same intersects the center line of the alley, thence westerly along the alley line through the above described property. Plans and specifications may be had from the City Engineer of the city of North Platte, Nebraska. Said bids will be received up to eight o'clock p. m., December 19th, 1922.

The Council reserves the right to reject any and all bids.

Witness my hand this 5th day of December, 1922.

O. E. ELDER
City Clerk.

Halligan, Bettty & Halligan, Attys.

NOTICE OF PETITION

Estate No. 1919 of James R. Shaw, deceased in the County Court of Lincoln County, Nebraska.

The State of Nebraska. To all persons interested in said Estate take notice that a petition has been filed for the probate of an instrument purporting to be the last will and testament of said deceased, and for the appointment of Mary B. Shaw as Executrix of said estate, which has been set for hearing on Dec. 26, 1922, at 10 o'clock a. m.

Dated Dec. 4, 1922.

Wm. H. C. WOODHURST,
(SEAL) County Judge

NOTICE OF TAKING UP ESTRAY

Taken up by undersigned Block 33 and 34, Neville addition, County of Lincoln, State of Nebraska; on the 19 day of November 1922, 1 black gelding, 2 years old; 1 dun colored gelding coming 2 years old; 1 gray mare coming 4 yrs. old. Unbroke and no brands.

Dated this 22 day of November 1922.

Signed Gene Crook.

NOTICE OF FINAL REPORT

Estate No. 1857 of Edward P. Rebhausen, deceased in the County Court of Lincoln County, Nebraska.

The State of Nebraska, to all persons interested in said Estate take notice that the Administratrix has filed a final account and report of her administration and a petition for final settlement and discharge as such. which have been set for hearing before said court on December 26, 1922, at 10 o'clock a. m., when you may appear and contest the same.

Dated December 1st, 1922.

Wm. H. C. Woodhurst
County Judge

EXTENSION ROAD NO. 37

To whom it may concern:

A consent petition presented to the board of county commissioners to locate a road commencing at the South-West corner of Section nine (9) and the Southeast corner of Section eight (8) Town Thirteen (13) Range Thirty four (34) to connect with road No. 213. All objections thereto or claims for damage must be filed in the County Clerk's office on or before noon on the 2nd day of January, A. D. 1923 or such road will be established without reference thereto.

Said road to be 66 feet wide.

A. S. ALLEN
County Clerk

EXTENSION ROAD NO. 247

To whom it may concern:

A consent petition presented to the board of county commissioners to locate a road commencing at the Southwest corner of Section 27, Township 14, North of Range 31 west of the 6th P. M. and running thence North on section line to the Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way. All objections thereto or claims for damage must be filed in the County Clerk's office on or before noon of the 2nd day of January A. D. 1923 or such road will be established without reference thereto.

Said road to be 66 feet wide.

A. S. ALLEN
County Clerk

VACATION OF ROADS NO. 120 & 161

To whom it may concern:

The commissioner appointed to vacate roads Number 120 and 161. Road No. 120 commencing on the section line between sections 8 and 9 Town 14, Range 33, thence in a Northeasterly direction, parallel with the south bank of the North Platte river, and terminating on the section line between sections 9 and 10 Town 14 Range 33.

And road No. 161, commencing on section line between Sections 9 and 10, Town 14, Range 33, thence running in a Southeasterly direction to the section line between sections 10 and 11 in Town 14, Range 33, West was reported in favor of the vacation thereof, and all objections thereto must be filed in the county clerk's office on or before noon on the 2nd day of January, 1923 or such roads will be vacated without reference thereto.

A. S. ALLEN
County Clerk