

# Desert Dust

By Edwin L. Sabin

Author of "How Are You Feeling?" etc.

I writhed to the words.  
 "And that fellow Jim?" I asked.  
 "He's jest a common roper. He alluz wins, to encourage suckers like you. 'Tisn't his money he plays with; he's on commish. Beginn'n' to understand, ain't you?"  
 "But the bent card?" I insisted.  
 "That is the mystery. It was the queen. What became of the queen?"  
 "Ho ho!" And again he laughed. "A cute trick, shore. That's what we got for bein' so plumb crooked ourselves. Why, o' course it was the queen, once. You see 'twas this way. That she-male and the capper in caboots with her tolled you on straight for Montoyo's table; teased you a liddle along the trail, no doubt, to keep you interested." I nodded. "They promised you winnin's, easy winnin's. Then at Montoyo's table the game was a liddle slack; so one capper touched him on the shoulder and another marked the card. O' course a gambler like Jim wouldn't be up to readin' his own cards. Oh, no. You sports were the smart ones."  
 "How about yourself?" I retorted, nettled.  
 "Me? I know them tricks. But I reckoned I was smart, too. Then that capper Jim led out and we all made a small winnin', to prove the system. And Montoyo, he gets tired o' losin'—but still he's blind to a card that everybody else can see, and he calls for real play so he can go broke or even up. I didn't look for much of a deal on that throw myself. Usully it comes less promise'yus, with the gudgeon stakin' the big roll, and then I pull out. But you-all slapped down the stuff in a stampede, sartin you had him buffaloed. On his last shuffle he'd straightened the queen and turned down the eight, usin' an extra finger or two. Them card sharps have six fingers on each hand and several in their sleeve, and he was slicker'n I thought. He might have refused all bets and got your mad up for the next pass; but you'd come down as handsome as you would, he figured. So he let go. 'Twas fair and squar', robber eat robber, and we none of us have any call to howl. But you mind my word: Don't aim to put something over on a professional gamblin' sharp. It can't be done. As for me, I broke even and I alluz expect to lose. When I look to be skinned I leave most my dust behind me where I can't get at it."  
 Now I saw all, or enough. I had received no more than I deserved. Such a wave of nausea surged into my mouth—but he was continuing.  
 "Jest why he struck his woman I don't know. Do you?"  
 "Yes. She had cautioned me and he must have heard her. And she showed which was the right card. I don't understand that."  
 "To save her face, and egg you on. Shore! Your twenty dollars was nothin'. She didn't know you were busted. Next time she'd have stered you to the tune of a hundred or two and cleaned you proper. You hadn't be a worked along, yet, to the right pitch o' smartness. Montoyo must ha' mistook her. She encouraged you, didn't she?"  
 "Yes, she did." I arose unsteadily, clutching the table.  
 "I'll excuse me, sir, I think I'd best go. I—I—I thank you. I oz, wish I'd met you before. You're at liberty to regard me as a saphead. Good-night, sir."  
 "No! Hold on. Sit down, sit down, man. Have another drink."  
 "I have had enough. In fact, since arriving in Benton I've had more than enough of everything." But I sat down.  
 "Where were you going?"  
 "To the hotel. I am privileged to stay there until to-morrow. Thank Heaven I was obliged to pay in advance."  
 "Alluz safer," said he. "And then what?"  
 "To-morrow?"  
 "Yes. To-morrow."  
 "I don't know. I must find employment, and earn enough to get home with." To write for funds was now impossible through very shame. "Home's the only place for a person of my greenness."

"Why did you come out clear to end o' track?" he inquired.  
 "I was ordered by my physician to find locality in the Far West, high and dry." I gulped at his smile. "I've found it and shall go home to report."  
 "With your tail between your legs?" He clapped me upon the shoulder. "Stiffen your back. We all have to pay for eddication. You're not wolf meat yet, by a long shot. You've got your hair, and that's more than some men I know of. You look purty healthy, too. Don't turn for home; stick it out."  
 "I shall have to stick it out until I raise the transportation," I reminded. "My revolver should tide me over, for a beginnin'."  
 "Sell it!" said he. "Sell your breeches fus, either way you'd be only half dressed. No!"  
 "It would take me a liddle way. I'll not stay in Benton—not to be pointed at as a dupe."  
 "Oh, pshaw!" he laughed. "Nobody'll remember you, specially if you're known to be broke. Busted, you're of no use to the camp. Let me make you a proposition. I believe you're straight goods. Can't believe anything else, after seein' your play and sizin' you up. Let me make you a proposition. I'm on my way to Salt Lake with a bull outfit and I'm in need of another man. I'll give you a dollar and a half a day and found, and it will be good honest work, too."  
 "You are teaming west, you mean?" I asked.  
 "Yes, sir. Freightin' across. Mule-whackin'."  
 "But I never drove spans in my life, and I'm not in shape to stand hardships," I faltered.  
 "I'm here for my health. I have—"  
 "Stow all that, son," he interrupted more tolerantly than was my due. "Forge your lungs lights and liver and stand up a full-size man. In my opinion you've had too much doctorin'. A month with a full train, and a diet of beans and sowbilly will put a linin' in your in'ards and a heart in your chest. When you've slept under a wagon to Salt Lake and I'arned to sling a bull whip and relish your beans burned, you can look anybody in the eye and tell him to go to hell, if you like it. This roarin' town life—it's no life for you. It's a bobtail, wide open in the middle. I'll be o'ly too glad to get away on the long trail myself. So you come with me," and he smiled winningly. "I hate to see you ruined by women and likker. Mule-skinnin' ain't all beer ad skittles, as they say; but this job'll tide you over, anyhow, and you'll come out at the end with money in your pocket, if you choose, and no doctor's bill to pay."  
 "Sir," I said gratefully, "may I think it over tonight, and let you know in the morning? Where will I find you?"  
 "The train's camped near the wagon trail, back at the river. You can't miss it. It's mainly a Mormon train, that some of us Gentiles have thrown in with. Ask for Cap'n Hyrum Adams' train. My name's Jenks—George Jenks. You'll find me there. I'll hold open for you till ten o'clock—yes, til noon. I mean that you shall come. It'll be the makin' of you."  
 I arose and gave him my hand; shook with him.  
 "And I hope to come," I asserted with glow of energy. "You've set me upon my feet, Mr. Jenks, for I was desperate. You're the first honest man I've met in Benton."  
 "Tut, tut," he reproved. "There are others. Benton's not so bad as you think it. But you were dead ripe; the buzzards scented you. Now you go straight to your hotel, unless you'll spend the night with me. No! Then I'll see you in the mornin', I'll risk your gettin' through the street alone."  
 "You may, sir," I affirmed.  
 "At present I'm not worth further robbin'."  
 "Except for your gun and clothes," he rejoined. "But if you'll use the one you'll keep the other."  
 Gazing neither right nor left I strode resolutely for the exit. Now I had an anchor to windward. Sometimes just one word will face a man about when for lack of that mere word he was

drifting. Of the games, and people I wished only to be rid forever; but at the exit I was halted by a hand laid upon my arm, and a quick utterance.  
 "Not going? You will at least say good-night."  
 I barely paused, replying to her.  
 "Good-night."  
 "Still she would have detained me."  
 "Oh, no, no! Not this way. It was a mistake. I swear to you I am not to be blamed. Please let me help you. I don't know what you've heard—I don't know what has been said about me—you are angry."  
 I twitched free, for she should not work upon me again. With such as she, a vampire and yet a woman, a man's safety lay not in words but in unequivocal action.  
 "Good-night," I bade thickly, half choked by that same nausea, now hot. Bearing with me a satisfying but somehow annoyingly persistent imprint of moist blue eyes under shimmering hair, and startled white face plashed on one cheek with vivid crimson, and small hand left extended empty, I roughly stalked on and out, free of her, free of the Big Tent, her lair.  
 All the way to the hotel, through the garish street, I nursed my wrath while it gnawed at me like the fox in the Spartan boy's bosom; and once in my room, which fortuitously had no other tenants at this hour, I had to lean out of the narrow window for sheer relief in the coolness. Surely pride had had a fall this night.  
 There "roared" Benton—the Benton to which, as to prosperity, I had hopefully purchased my tinker ages ago. And here cowered I, pillaged, dishonored, worthless in even this community; a young fellow in jaunty frontier costume, new and brave, but really reduced to sackcloth and ashes; a young fellow only a hulk, as false in appearance as the Big Tent itself and many another of those canvass shells.  
 The street noises—shouts, shots, music, songs, laughter, rattle of dice, whirl of wheel and clink of glasses—assailed me discordant. The scores of tents and shacks stretching on irregularly had become pocked with dark spots, where lights had been extinguished, but the street remained ablaze and the desert without winked at the stars. There were moving gleams at the railroad yards where switch engines puffed back and forth; up the grade and the new track, pointing westward, there were sparks of camp-fires; and still in other directions beyond the town other tokens redly flickered, where overland freighters were biding till the morning.  
 Two or three miles in the east (Mr. Jenks had said) was his wagon train, camped at the North Platte River; and peering between the high canopy of stars and the low stratum of spectrally glowing, earthy—yes, very earthy—Benton, I tried to focus upon the haven for comfort.  
 I had made up my mind to accept the berth. Anything to get away. Benton I certainly hated with the rage of the defeated. So in a fling I drew back, wrestled out of coat and boots and belt and pantaloons, tucked them in hiding against the wall at the head of my bed and my revolver underneath my stained pillow; and tried to forget Benton, all of it, with the blanket to my ears and my face to the wall, for sleep.  
 When once or twice I wakened from restless dreams the glow and the noise of the streets seemed scarcely abated, as if down there sleep was despised. But when I finally aroused, and turned, gathering wits again, full daylight had paled everything else.  
 Snores sounded from the other beds; I saw tumbled coverings, disheveled forms and shabby heads. In my own corner nothing had been molested. The world outside was strangely quiet. The trail was open. So with no attention to my roommates I hastily washed and dressed, buckled on my armament, and stumped freely forth, down the somnolent hall, down the creaking stairs, and into the silent lobby.  
 Even the bar was vacant. Behind the office counter a clerk sat sunk into a doze. At my approach he unclashed blank, heavy eyes.  
 "I'm going out," I said shortly. "Number Three bed in Room Six."  
 "For long, sir?" he stammered. "You'll be back or are you leaving?"

"I'm leaving. You'll find I'm paid up."  
 "Yes, sir. Of course, sir." He rallied to the problem. "Just a moment. Number Three, Room Six, you say. Pulling your freight, are you?" He scanned the register. "You're the gentleman from New York who came in yesterday and met with misfortune?"  
 "I am," said I.  
 "Well, better luck next time. We'll see you again?" He quickened. "Here! One moment. Think I have message for you." And reaching behind him into a pigeonhole he extracted an envelope, which he passed to me. "Yours, sir?"  
 I stared at the fine slanting script of the address:  
 Please deliver to  
 Frank R. Beeson, Esqr.,  
 At the Queen Hotel.  
 Arrived from Albany N.Y.  
 CHAPTER X  
 I Cut Loose  
 "I nodded; rebuffing his attentive eyes I stuffed the envelope into my pantaloons pocket.  
 "Good-bye, sir."  
 "Good luck. When you come back remember the Queen."  
 "I'll remember the Queen," said I; and with the envelope smirching my flesh I stepped out, holding my head as high as though my pockets contained something of more value.  
 The events of yesterday had hardened, thank Heaven; and so had I, into an obstinacy that defied this mocking Western country. I was down to the ground and was going to scratch. To make for home like a whipped dog, there to hang about, probably become an invalid and die resistless, was unthinkable. Already the Far West air and vigor had worked a change in me. In the fresh morning I felt like a fighting cock, or a runner recruited by a diet of unbolted flour and strong red meat.  
 The falsity of the life here I looked upon as only an incident. The gay tawdry had faded; I realized how much more enduring were the rough, uncouth but genuine products like my friend Mr. Jenks and those of that ilk, who spoke me well instead of merely fair. Health of mind and body should be for me. Hurrah!  
 But the note! It could have been sent by only one person—the superscription, dainty and feminine, betrayed it. That woman was still pursuing me. How she had found out my name I did not know; perhaps from the label on my bag, perhaps through the hotel register. I did not recall having exchanged names with her—she never had proffered her own name. At all events she appeared determined to keep a hold upon me, and that was disgusting.  
 England is feeling more cheerful. MacDonald, the labor leader, praises the Prince of Wales and his "respected father, the king," and says the British empire is all right. It is probable, that able Englishmen, from the king down, trained to think through centuries and to give way gracefully, will give the labor government a fair chance.  
 Even the London stock market is cheerful with the railway strike settled, and labor sitting in the high places without any earthquake or tornado sweeping away Buckingham Palace.  
 One-hundred and ten little Pomeranians—very small fluffy pet dogs—were exhibited in New York city last week. Each dog had a nicely dressed lady, nurse or owner, watching the dear little creature affectionately and faithfully. Those dogs are worth more than \$100,000.  
 The "disaster" bird is back in Dantzic. It's the silk-tailed thrush. The superstitious say that it has not been seen in Dantzic since 1914, when the war began. They fear trouble.  
 Not far away, in an institutional ward, you can find 110 human babies, three or four nurses taking care of a whole lot. And all the babies put together are hardly worth ten cents, in fact, they are a liability.  
 Moral: Be born a Pomeranian, if you want to go through life comfortably in this civilization.  
 The position of President Coolidge in the oil scandal is not pleasant or easy. He will do his duty thoroughly in his own way, there is no doubt about that. But the men involved through official connection with the matter, whether guilty or innocent of an illegal act, are the appointees of President Harding. President Coolidge is obligated to act more cautiously and circumspectly than would be the case if, the men were his own appointees.  
 One thing is certain, it is fortunate for the people that they have in congress such men as Curaway and Walsh to watch the corruptionists, and not afraid to demand the truth and the right punishment.

## NERVOUS & HALF-SICK WOMEN

### Relieved by taking Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound

#### These Three Letters Prove It

Lowell, Mass.—"I am sending you a few lines to let you know what good your medicine has done for me. I want you to let every one know that it has helped me in nervous troubles. I have four children and you know there is a lot to do where children are. They would come in from school and they would start telling me about their little troubles but I could not stand it. I had to send them away. I could not even walk on the street alone I was so nervous. I found one of your books and read it and then I saw in the paper about Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound. I got it and had taken one bottle when I saw a change in myself. I was surprised. The children can talk all they want to now and it does not bother me. I am still taking the Vegetable Compound."—Mrs. JOSEPH LEMERS, 84 South Street, Lowell, Mass.

most no time. I had hardly been able to do my own work and after taking the Vegetable Compound I felt like a new woman. I recommend it to my friends who have troubles like I did, and hope they will find the same results."—Mrs. M. CARPENTER, 607 W. Chase Street, Springfield, Missouri.

40 Years Old, Feels Like 20  
 Hagerstown, Md.—"I was very bad off with backache, a bearing-down feeling in my body and a pain in my left side. I could not be on my feet at times and once I was so bad I walked bent over to one side for three weeks. My sister read of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound and got me a bottle. I got so much relief that I took more until I was well. I am 40 years old and feel like 20. I am sure this medicine will help all women."—Mrs. MARY E. SANDY, 436 W. Franklin Street, Hagerstown, Md.

Felt Like A New Woman  
 Springfield, Missouri.—"For four or five months I was run-down, nervous, my back ached and I did not feel like doing a thing. Sometimes my legs ached and felt like they would break and I had a hurting in my sides. I had been reading in the newspapers the letters of other women who had taken Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound and the advertising of it appealed to me so I bought some and saw results in al-

Over 100,000 women have so far replied to our question, "Have you received benefit from taking Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound?" 98 per cent of these replies are "Yes."  
 That means that 98 out of every 100 women who take this medicine for the ailments for which it is recommended are benefited by it.  
 All druggists are having increased sales of this medicine.

Hard Pressed  
 Mrs. Newlywed—Why did you tell the neighbors that you married me because I was such a good cook, when you knew I couldn't even boil a potato?  
 Mr. Newlywed—I had to make some excuse, my dear.

Not Guilty  
 An old negro went to the office of the commissioner of registration in a Missouri town and applied for registration papers.  
 "What is your name?" asked the official.  
 "George Washington," was the reply.  
 "Well, George, are you the man who cut down the cherry tree?"  
 "No, suh. I ain't de man. I ain't done no work for nigh onto a year."

Demand



# ASPIRIN

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 Pain Toothache Neuritis Rheumatism

Genuine

Accept only "Bayer" package which contains proven directions.  
 Handy "Bayer" boxes of 12 tablets. Also bottles of 24 and 100—Druggists.

Aspirin is the trade mark of Bayer Manufacture of Monoaceticacidester of Salicylicacid

He Wanted to Know  
 Emigration Agent—Married or single?  
 Applicant—Married.  
 "Where were you married?"  
 "I don't know."  
 "Don't know where you were married?"  
 "Oh, I thought you said 'Why.'"

Up Against It  
 Customer—Oh, dear! There's three things I always forget when ordering, and I forget what the third one is.

A Prairie Chicken  
 Young Lady (on first visit to Western ranch)—For what purpose do you use that coil on your saddle?  
 Cowpuncher—That line, you call it, lady, we use for catching cattle and horses.  
 Young Lady—Oh, indeed! Now, may I ask, what do you use for bait?—London Weekly Telegraph.

It's a great life if you don't weaken. Most of the people who have things, don't.

## Children Cry for



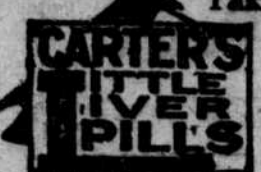
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MOTHER:—Fletcher's Castoria is a pleasant, harmless Substitute for Castor Oil, Paregoric, Teething Drops and Soothing Syrups, prepared for Infants and Children all ages.

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