

# Red Saunders

... By ...  
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"You have doubtless been attracted to our small but growing city from the reports—which are happily true—of the inexhaustible mineral wealth of the surrounding region," says he.

"No—not exactly," says I; "but I do want to hear something about mines. Mr. Hotelman out there (who's a gentleman of the old school if ever there lived one) told me that you might put me on to a good thing."

"Precisely," says he. "Now, sir, my name is Jones—Agamemnon G. Jones—and my partner, Mr. H. Smith, is on a business trip, selling shares of our mine, which we have called 'The Treasury' from reasons which we can make obvious to any investor. The shares, Mr.—"

"Saunders—Red Saunders—Chanta Seechee Red."

"Mr. Saunders, are 50 cents apiece, which price is really only put upon them to avoid the offensive attitude of dealing them out as charity. As a matter of fact, this mine of ours contains a store of gold which would upset the commercial world were the bare facts of its extent known. There is neither sense nor amusement in confining such enormous treasure in the hands of two people. Consequently my partner and I are presenting an interest to the public, putting the nominal figure of 50 cents a share upon it, to save the feelings of our beneficiaries."

"What the devil do I care?" says I. "I'm looking for a chance to dig. Could you tell me where to go?"

"Oh," says he, "when you come to that, that's different. Strictly speaking, my partner Hy hasn't gone off on a business trip. As a matter of fact, he left town night before last with two-thirds of the money we'd pulled out of a pocket up on Silver creek in the company of two half-breed Injuns, a Chinaman and four more sons of guns not classified, all in such a state of beastly intoxication that their purpose, route and destination are matters of the wildest conjecture. I've been laying around town here hating myself to death, thinking perhaps I could sell some shares in a mine that we'll find yet, if we have good luck. If you want to go wild catting over the hills and far away, I'm your huckleberry."

"That hits me all right," says I. "For what I don't know about mining nobody don't know. When do we start?"

"This or any other minute," says he, getting up from the table.

"Wait till I finish up these eggs," says I. "And there's a matter of one drink coming to me outside. I may as well put that where it won't harm any one else before we start."

"All right," says he, waving his hand. "You'll find me outside, at your pleasure, sir."

"I swallowed the rest of my breakfast whole and hustled out to the bar, where my friend and the hotel man was waiting. 'Now I'll take that drink that's coming, and rather than be small about it I'll buy one for you, too, and then we're off,' says I.

"You won't do no such thing," says the hotel man. "It's a horse on me, and I'll supply the liquor. Mr. Jones is in the play as much as anybody."

"So the hotel man set 'em up, and that made one drink. Then Jones said he'd never let a drink suffer from loneliness yet when he had the price, and that made two drinks. I had to uphold the honor of the ranch, and that made three drinks. Hotel man said it was up sticks now, and he meant to pay his just debts like an honest man, and that made four drinks. Then Jones said—well, by this time I see I needn't have hurried breakfast so much. More people came in. I woke up the next morning in the same old bedroom. Every breakfast Aggy and me got ready to pull for the mines, and every morning I woke up in the bedroom. I should like to draw a veil over the next two weeks, but it would have to be a pretty strong veil to hold it. I tried to keep level with Aggy, but he'd spend three dollars to my one, and the consequence of that was that we went broke within fifteen minutes of each other."

"Well, sir, we were a mournful pair to draw to that day. We sat there and cussed and said, 'Now, why didn't we do this, that and t'other thing instead of blowing our hard earned dough?' till bimeby we just dripped melancholy, you might say. However, we weren't booked for a dull time just yet. That afternoon there was a great popping of whips like an Injun skirmish and into town comes a bull train half a mile long. Twelve yoke of bulls to the team; lead, swing and trail wagons for each, as big as houses on wheels. You don't see the

like of that in this country. Down the street they come, the dust flying, whips crackling and the lads hollering: 'Whoa haw, Mary—up there! Wherr! Whoa haw!'

"And those fellers had picked up dry throats walking in the dust; also they had a month's wages aching in their pockets. We hadn't much more'n got the thump of their arrival out of our ears when who comes roaring into town but the Bengal Tiger gang, and they had four months' wages. The owner of the mine got on a bender and paid everybody off by mistake. You can hardly imagine how this livened up things. There ain't nobody less likely to play lame duck than me, but there was no dodging the hospitality. The only idea prevailing was to be rid of the money as soon as possible. The effects showed right off. You could hear one man telling the folks for their own good that he was the Old Missouri River, and when he felt like swelling his banks it was time for parties who couldn't swim to hunt the high ground, while the gentleman on the next corner let us know that he was a locomotive carrying 300 pounds of steam with the gauge still clirabing and the blower on. When he whistled three times, he said, any intelligent man would know that there was danger around."

"Well, sir, I put the Old Missouri River to bed that night, and he'd flattened out to a very small streamlet indeed, while the locomotive went lame before supper and had to be put in the roundhouse by a couple of pushers. That's the way with fine ideas. Cold facts comes and puts a crimp in them. Once I knew a small feller I could have stuck in my pocket and forgot about, but when we went out and took several prescriptions together on a day he spoke to me like this. 'Red,' says he, 'put your little hand in mine, and we'll go and take a birdseye view of the universe.' Astonishin' idea, wasn't it? And him not weighing over a hundred pound. Howsomever, he didn't take any birdseye view of the universe. He only become strikingly indisposed."

"Well, to get back to Boise, you never in all your life saw so many men and brothers as was gathered there that day, and old Aggy, he was one of the centers of attraction. That big voice and black beard was always where the crowd was thickest and the wet goods flowing the freest. 'Gentlemen,' says he, 'let's lift up our voices in melody!' That was one of Ag's delusions—he thought he could sing. So four of 'em got on top of a billiard table and presented 'Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep' to the company, which made me feel glad that I hadn't been brought up that way. After Ag had hip locked the last low note another song bird volunteered."

"This was a little fat Dutchman, with pale blue eyes and a mustache like two streaks of darning cotton. He had come to town to sell a pair of beef steers, but got drawn into the general hilarity, and now he didn't care a cuss whether he, she or it ever sold another steer. He got himself on end and sung 'Leeb Fadderlont moxtrue eekstein' in a style that made you wonder that the human nose could stand the strain."

"Aw, cheese that! says a feller near the door. 'Come, get your steers; one of 'em's just chased the barber up a telegraph pole!'

"So then we all piled out into the street to see the steers. Sure enough, there was the barber sitting on the crosspiece and the steer pawing dirt underneath."

"He done made me come a fast heat from de colner," says the barber. "I kep' hollerin' 'Next!' but he ain't pay no 'tention—he make it 'next' fur me, shuah! Yah, yah, yah! You gents orter seen me start at de bottom an' slide all de way up dis yer telegraph pole!'

"One of the bull whackers went out to rope the steers, and Ag gave directions from the sidewalk. He wasn't very handy with a riata, and that's a fact, but the way Ag lit into him was scandalous. When he'd missed about six casts of his rope, Ag opened up on him:

"Put a stamp on it and send it to him by mail," said Aggy in his sarcastic way. "Address it, 'Bay Steer, middle of Main street, Boise, Ida. If not delivered within ten days, return to owner, who can use it to hang himself.' Blast my hide if I couldn't stand here and throw a box car nearer to the critter! Well, well, well! How many left hands have you got, anyhow? Do it up in a wad and heave it at him for general results. He might get tangled in it."

"It rattled the bull whacker, having so much attention drawn to him, and he, stunned on the nose and twisted

himself up in it and was flying right generally.

"Say," says Ag, appealing to the crowd, "won't some kind friend who's fond of puzzles go down and help that gentleman do himself?"

"That made the whacker mad. He was as red in the face as a lobster. 'You come down and show what you can do,' says he. 'You've got gas enough for a balloon ascension, but that may be all there is to you.'

"Oh, I ain't so much," says Aggy, "although I'm as good a man today as ever I was in my life, but I have a little friend here who can rope, down and ride that critter from here to the brick front in five minutes by the watch, and if you've got a twenty-five dollar bill in your pocket or its equivalent in dust you can observe the experiment."

"I'll go you, by gosh!" says the bull whacker, slapping his hat on the ground and digging for his pile.

"Say, if you're referring to me, Ag," I says, "it's kind of a sudden spring. I ain't what you might call in training, and that steer is full of triple extract of giant powder."

"G'wan!" says Ag. "You can do it—and then we're twenty-five ahead."

"But suppose we lose?"

"Well—it won't be such an awful loss."

"Now, you look here, Agamemnon G. Jones," says I. "I ain't going to stand for putting up a summer breeze again that feller's good dough. That's a skin game, to speak it pleasantly."

"Then Aggy argues the case with me, and when Aggy started to argue you might just as well 'moo' and chase yourself into the corral, because he'd got you sure. Why, that man could sit in the cabin and make roses bloom right in the middle of the floor. While he was singing his little song you could see 'em and smell 'em. He could talk a snowbank off a high divide in the middle of February. Never see anybody with such a medicine tongue, and in a big man it was all the stranger. 'Now,' he winds up, 'as for cheating that feller, you ought to know me better, Red. Why, I'll give him my note.'

"So, anyhow, I done it. Up the street we went, steer bawling and buck jumping, my hair a-flying and me as busy as the little bee you read about keeping that steer underneath me 'stead of on top of me, where he'd ruther be, and after us the whole town, whoopin', yellin', crackin' off six shooters and carryin' on wild."

"Then we had \$25 and was as good as anybody. But it didn't last long. The tin horns come out after pay day like hoptoads after a rain. 'Twould puzzle the government at Washington to know where they hang out in the meantime. There was one lad had a face on him with about as much expression as a hotel punkin pie. He run an arrow game, and he talked right straight along in a voice that had no more bends in it than a billiard cue. 'Here's where you get your three for one any child may do it no chance to lose make your bets while the arrow of fortune swings all gents accommodated in amounts from two bits to double eagles and bets paid on the nail,' says he."

"Red," says Aggy, "I can double our pile right here. Let me have the money. I know this game. You'd hardly believe it, but I dug up. 'Double or quits?' says he to the dealer."

"Let her go," says the dealer. The arrow swung around. 'Quits,' says the dealer and raked in my dough. It was all over in one second."

"I grabbed Aggy by the shoulder and took him in the corner for a private talk. 'I thought you knew this game,' says I."

"I do," says he. "That's the way it always happens. And once more in my life I experienced the peculiar feeling of being altogether at a loss for words."

"Aggy," says I at last, "I've got a good notion to lay two violent hands on you and wind you up like an eight day clock, but rather than make hard feelings between friends I'll refrain. Besides, you are a funny cuss, that's sure. One thing, boy, you can mark down. We leave here tomorrow morning!'

"All right," says Ag. "This sporting life is the very devil. I like outdoors as well as the next man, when I get there."

"So the morrow morning away we went. All we had for kit was the picks, shovels and pans. The rest of our belongings was staying with the hotel man until we made a rise."

"Ag said he'd be cussed if he'd walk a hundred and fifty miles of stroll was too many."

"But we ain't got a cent to pay the stage fare," says I.

"Borrow it of Uncle Hotel-keep," says he.

"Not by a town site," says I. "We owe him all we're going to at this very minute. You'll have to hoof it, that's all!'

"I tell you I won't. I don't like to have anybody walk on my feet, not even myself. I can stand off that stage driver so easy that you'll wonder I don't take it up as a profession. Now, don't raise any more objections—please don't," says he. "I can't tell you how nervous you make me, always finding some fault with everything I try to do. That's no way for a hired man to act, let alone a partner!'

"So of course he got the best of me,

as usual, and we climbed into the stage when she come along. Now, our bad luck seemed to hold, because you wouldn't find many men in that country who wouldn't stake two fellers to a wagon ride wherever they wanted to go and be pleasant about it. I'd have sure seen that the man got paid, even if Aggy forgot it, but the man that drove us was the surliest brute that ever growled. When you'd speak to him he'd say, 'Unh—a style of thing that didn't go well in that part of the country. I kept my mouth shut, as knowing that I didn't have the come-up-with weighed on my



"I tell you I won't. I don't like to have anybody walk on my feet."

spirits, but Aggy gave him the jolly He only meant it in fun, and there was plenty of reason for it, too, for you never seen such a game of driving as that feller put up in all your life. The Lord save us! He cut around one corner of a mountain so that for the longest second I've lived through my left foot hung over about a thousand feet of fresh air. I'd have had time to write my will before I touched bottom if we'd gone over. I don't know as I turned pale, but my hair ain't been of the same rosy complexion since."

"Well," says Aggy in a surprised tone of voice when we got all four wheels on the ground again. 'Here we are!' says he. 'Who'd have suspected it? I thought he was going to take the short cut down to the creek.'

"The driver turned round with one corner of his lip h'isted—a dead ringer of a mean man. Says he to Aggy, 'Yer a funny bloke, ain't yer?'

"Why," says Ag, "that's for you to say—wouldn't look well coming from me—but if you press me I'll admit I give birth to a little gem now and then."

"Our bold buck puts on a great swagger. 'Well, yer needn't be funny in this wagon,' says he. 'The pair of yer spongin' a ride! Yer needn't be gay. Yer hear me, don't cher?'

"Why, I hear you as plain as though you set right next me," says Ag. "Now, you listen and see if I'm audible at the same range. You're a blasted chump!" he roars in a tone of voice that would have carried forty mile. 'Did you hear that, Red?' he asks yer innocent. I was so hot at the driver's sass—the cussed low downess of doing a feller a favor and then heaving it at him—that you could have lit a match on me anywhere, but to save me I couldn't help laughing—Ag had the comicallest way!'

"At that the driver begins to larrup the horses. I ain't the kind to feel faint when a cayuse gets what's coming to him for raising the devil, but to see that had wallo his team because there wasn't nothing else he dared hit got me on my hind legs. I nestled one hand in his hair and twisted his ugly mug back."

"Quit that!" says I.

"You let me be—I ain't hurting you," he hollers.

"That ain't to say I won't be hurting you soon," says I. "You put the bud on them horses again, and I'll boot the spine of your back up through the top of your head till it stands out like a flagstaff. Just one more touch and you get it!" says I.

"He didn't open his mouth again till we come to the river. Then he pulled up. 'This is about as far as I care to carry you two gents for nothin'," he says. "Of course you're two to one, and I can't do nothing if you see fit to bull the thing through. But I'll say this, if either one or both of you roosters has got the least smell of a gentleman about him he won't have to be told his company ain't wanted twice!'

"Now, mind you, Ag and me didn't have the first cussed thing—not grub nor blankets nor gun nor nothing, and this the feller well knew."

"Red," says Aggy, "what do you say to pulling this thing apart and seeing what makes it act so?'

"No," says I, "don't touch it—it might be catching. Now, you whelp," says I to the driver, "you tell us if there's a place where we can get anything to eat around here?" We'd ex-

pected to go hungry until we hit the camp some forty miles further on, where we knew there'd be plenty for anybody that wanted it."

"Yes," says he. "There's a man running a shack two mile up the river."

"All right," says I. "Drive on. You've played us as dirty a trick as one man can play another. If we ever get a cinch on you, you can expect we'll pull her till the latigoes snap."

"He kept shut till he got across the river, where he felt safe."

"It's all right about that cinch!" he hollers back, grinning. "Only wait till you get it, yer suckers! Sponges! Beats! Deadheads! Yah!'

"Well, a man can't catch a team of horses, and that's all there is about it, but I want to tell you he was on the anxious seat for a quarter of a mile. We tried hard."

"When we got back to where we started and could breathe again, we held a council of war."

"Now, Aggy," says I, "we're dumped. What shall we do?'

"He sat there awhile looking around him, snapping pebbles with his thumb."

"Tell you what it is, Red," he says at last, "we might as well go mining right here. This is likely gravel, and there's a river. If that bar in front of you had been further in the mountains it would have been punched full of holes. It's only because it's on the road that nobody's taken the trouble to see what was in it. This road was made by cattle ranchers that didn't know nothing about mining, and every miner that's gone over the trail had his mouth set to get further along as quick as possible—just like us. Do you see that little hollow running down to the river? Well, you try your luck there. I give you that place, as it's the most probable, and you as a tenderfoot in the business will have all the luck. I'll make a stab where I am."

"Well, sir, it sounds queer to tell it, and it seems queerer still to think of the doing of it, but I hadn't dug two feet before I come to bed rock, and there was some heavy black chunks."

"Aggy," says I, "what's these things?" throwing one over to him. He caught it and stared at it."

"Where did you get that?" says he in almost a whisper.

"Why, out of the hole, of course!" says I, laughing. "Come take a look!'

"Aggy wasn't the kind of a man to go off the handle over trifles, but when he looked into that hole he turned perfectly green. His knees give out from under him, and he sat on the ground like a man in a trance, wiping the sweat off his face with a motion like a machine."

"What the devil ails you?" says I, astonished. I thought maybe I'd done something I hadn't ought to do through ignorance of the rules and regulations of mining."

"Red," says he, dead solemn, "I've mined for twenty year and from old Mexico to Alaska, but I never saw anything that was ace high to that before. Gold laying loose in chunks on top of the bed rock is too much for me. I wish Hy could see this!'

"Gold!" says I. "What you talking about? What have those black hunks to do with gold?'

"The only answer he made was to lay the one I had thrown to him on top of a rock and hit her a crack with a pick. Then he handed it to me. Sure enough! There under the black

was the yeller. Of course if I'd known more about the business I could have told it by the weight, but I'd never seen a piece of gold fresh off the farm before in my life. I hadn't the slightest idea what it looked like, and I learned afterward it all looks different. Some of it shines up yeller in the start, some of it's red, and some is like ours, coated black with iron crust."

"So I looked at Ag, and Ag looked at me, neither one of us believing anything at all for awhile. I simply couldn't get hold of the thing—I ain't yet, for that matter. I expect to wake up and find it a pipe dream, and in some ways I wouldn't mind if it was. I never was so completely two men as I was on that occasion. One of 'em was hopping around and hollering with Ag, yelling 'Hooray!' and the other didn't take much interest in the proceedings at all. And it wasn't until I thought, 'Now I can pay that cussed coyote of a stage driver what I owe him!' that I got any good out of it. That brought it home to me. When I spoke to Ag about paying the driver, he says, 'That so.' Then he takes a quick look around. 'We can pay him in full, too, old horse!' he hollers, and there was a most joyful smile on his face."

"Red," says he, "don't you know this is the only ford on the river for—I don't know how many miles—perhaps the whole length of her?'

"Well," says I.

"Our little placer claim," says Aggy slowly, rubbing his hands together, "covers that ford, and by a judicious taking up of claims for various uncles and brothers and friends of ours along the creek on the lowlands we can fix it so they can't even bridge it!'

"Do you mean they can't cross our claim if we say they can't?'

"Sure thing!" says Aggy. "There's you and me and the law to say 'No' to that. I wish I had a gun!'

"You don't need any gun for that skunk of a driver!'

[To be continued.]