

# DESERT GOLD

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



Illustrations by **Irwin Myers**

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## CHAPTER I

### Old Friends.

Richard Gale reflected that his journey in the West had been what his disgusted father had predicted— idling here and dreaming there, with no objective point or purpose.

It was reflection such as this, only more serious and perhaps somewhat desperate, that had brought Gale down to the border. For some time the newspapers had been printing news of the Mexican revolution, guerrilla warfare, United States cavalry patrolling the International line, American cowboys fighting with the rebels, and wild stories of bold raiders and bandits. Regarding these rumors Gale was skeptical. But as opportunity, and adventure, too, had apparently given him a wide berth in Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, he had struck southwest for the Arizona border, where he hoped to see some stirring life.

It was after dark one evening in early October when Richard arrived in Casta. There was a jostling, jabbering, sombered crowd of Mexicans around the railroad station. He felt as if he were in a foreign country. After a while he saw several men of his nationality, one of whom he engaged to carry his luggage to a hotel. Of the many people encountered by Gale most were Mexicans. His guide explained that the smaller half of Casta lay in Arizona, the other half in Mexico, and of several thousand inhabitants the majority belonged on the southern side of the street, which was the boundary line. He also said that rebels had entered the town that day, causing a good deal of excitement.

Gale was almost at the end of his financial resources, which fact occasioned him to turn away from a pretentious hotel and ask his guide for a cheaper lodging house. When this was found, a sight of the longers in the office, and also a desire for comfort, persuaded Gale to change his traveling clothes for rough outing garb and boots.

"Well, I'm almost broke," he soliloquized, thoughtfully. "The governor said I wouldn't make any money. He's right—so far. And he said I'd be coming home beaten. There he's wrong. I've got a hunch that something'll happen to me in this Greaser town."

He went out into the wide, white-washed, high-ceiled, corridor, and from that into an immense room which, but for pool tables, bar and benches, would have been like a courtyard. Bare-legged, sandal-footed Mexicans in white rubbed shoulders with Mexicans mantled in black and red. There were black-bearded, coarse-voiced Americans, some gambling round the little tables, others drinking. There were khaki-clad cavalrymen strutting in and out.

At one end of the room, somewhat apart from the general melee, was a group of six men round a little table, four of whom were seated, the other two standing. These last two drew a second glance from Gale. The sharp-featured bronzed faces and piercing eyes, the tall, slender, loosely jointed bodies, the quiet, easy, reckless air that seemed to be a part of the men—these things would plainly have stamped them as cowboys without the buckled sombreros, the colored scarfs, the high-topped, high-heeled boots with great silver-rolled spurs.

He satisfied his hunger in a restaurant adjoining, and as he stepped back into the saloon a man wearing a military cape joined him. Apologies from both were instant. Gale was moving on when the other stopped short as if startled, and, leaning forward, exclaimed:

"Dick Gale? If this isn't great! Don't you know me?"

"I've heard your voice somewhere," replied Gale. "Maybe I'll recognize you if you came out from under that bonnet."

For answer the man, suddenly manifesting thought of himself, hurriedly drew Gale into the restaurant, where he thrust back his hat to disclose a handsome, sunburned face.

"George Thorne! So help me—"

"S-s-sh. You needn't yell," interrupted the other, as he met Gale's outstretched hand. There was a close, hard, straining grip. "I must not be recognized here. There are reasons. I'll explain in a minute. Say, but it's fine to see you! Five years, Dick, five years since I saw you run down University field and spread-eagle the whole Wisconsin football team."

"Don't recollect that," replied Dick, laughing. "George, I'll bet you're glad to see you that you are to see me. It seems so long. You went into the army, didn't you?"

"I did. I'm here now with the Ninth cavalry. But—never mind me. What're you doing way down here?"

"On the square, George, I don't know any more why I'm here than—than you know."

"Well, that beats me!" ejaculated Thorne, sitting back in his chair, amazed and concerned in his expression. "What the devil's wrong? Your old man's got too much money for you ever to be up against it. Dick, you couldn't have gone to the bad?"

A tide of emotion surged over Gale.

How good it was to meet a friend— someone to whom to talk! He had never appreciated his loneliness until that moment.

"George, how I ever drifted down here I don't know. I didn't exactly quarrel with the governor. But—d—n it, Dad hurt me—shamed me, and I dug out for the West. It was this way. After leaving college I tried to please him by tackling one thing after another that he set me to do. On the square, I had no head for business. I made a mess of everything. The governor got sore. When I quit—when I told him straight out that I was going west to fare for myself, why, it wouldn't have been so tough if he hadn't laughed at me. He said I couldn't earn a dollar—that I'd starve out west, and couldn't get back home unless I sent to him for money. He said he didn't believe I could fight—could really make a fight for anything under the sun. Oh—he—he shot it into me all right."

Dick dropped his head upon his hands, somewhat ashamed of the smarting dimness in his eyes.

"Light!" cried Thorne, hotly. "What's ailing him? Didn't they call you Biff Gale in college? Dick, you were one of the best men Stagg ever developed."

"The governor didn't count football," said Dick. "He didn't mean that kind of a fight. When I left home I don't think I had an idea what was wrong of me. But, George, I think I know now. I was a rich man's son—spoiled, dependent, absolutely ignorant of the value of money. I haven't yet discovered any earning capacity in me. I seem to be unable to do anything with my hands. That's the trouble. But I'm at the end of my tether now. And I'm going to punch cattle or be a miner, or do some real stunt—like joining the rebels."

"Aha! I thought you'd spring that last one on me," declared Thorne, wagging his head. "Well, you just forget it. Say, old boy, there's something doing in Mexico. The United States in general doesn't realize it. But across that line there are crazy revolutionists, ill-paid soldiers, guerrilla leaders, raiders, robbers, outlaws, bandits galore, starving peons by the thousand, girls and women in terror. Mexico is like some of her volcanoes— ready to erupt fire and hell. Don't make the awful mistake of joining the rebel force. If you didn't starve or get shot in ambush or die of thirst, or get your belt buckle or boots. There are a good many Americans with the rebels eastward toward Agua Prieta and Juarez. Orozco is operating in Chihuahua, and I guess he has some idea of warfare. But this is Sonora, a mountains desert, the home of the slave and the Yaqui. There's unorganized revolt everywhere. We're patrolling the boundary line. We're making a grand bluff. I could tell you of a dozen instances where cavalry should have pursued raiders on the other side of the line. But we won't do it. The officers are a grouchy lot these days. You see, of course, what significance would attach to United States cavalry going into Mexican territory. There would simply be hell. My own colonel is the sorest man on the job. We're all sore. It's like sitting on a powder magazine. We can't keep the rebels and raiders from crossing the line. Yet we don't fight. My commission expires soon. I'll be discharged in three months. You can bet I'm glad for more reasons than I've mentioned."

Thorne was evidently laboring under strong, suppressed excitement. His face showed pale under the tan, and his eyes gleamed with a dark fire. He had seated himself at a table near one of the doorlike windows leading into the street, and every little while he would glance sharply out. Also he kept consulting his watch.

These details gradually grew upon Gale as Thorne talked.

"George, it strikes me that you're upset," said Dick, presently. "I seem to remember you as a cool-headed fellow whom nothing could disturb. Has the army changed you?"

Thorne laughed. It was a laugh with strange, high notes. It was reckless—it hinted of exaltation. He peered out one window, then another. His actions were rapid. Returning to the table, he put his hands upon it and leaned over to look closely into Gale's face.

"I'm away from camp without leave," he said.

"Isn't that a serious offense?" asked Dick.

"Serious? For me, if I'm discovered, it means ruin. There are rebels in town. Any moment we might have trouble. I ought to be ready for duty within call. If I'm discovered it means arrest. That means delay—the failure of my plans—ruin."

Thorne bent over closer with his dark eyes searchingly bright.

"What would you say, Dick Gale, if I told you that you're the one man I'd rather have come along than any other at this crisis of my life?"

The earnest gaze, the passionate voice with its deep tremor drew Dick upright, thrilling and eager, conscious of strange, unfamiliar impetuosity.

"Thorne, I should say I was glad to be the fellow," replied Dick.

Their hands locked for the moment, and they sat down again with heads

close over the table.

"Listen," began Thorne, in low, swift whisper, "a few days, a week ago—it seems like a year—I was of some assistance to refugees fleeing from Mexico into the States. They were all women, and one of them was dressed as a nun. Quite by accident I saw her face. It was that of a beautiful girl. I observed she kept aloof from the others. I suspected a disguise, and, when opportunity afforded, spoke to her, offered my services. She replied to my poor efforts at Spanish in fluent English. She had fled in terror from her home, some place down in Sinaloa. Rebels are active there. Her father was captured and held for ransom. When the ransom was paid the rebels killed him. The leader of these rebels was a bandit named Rojas. Rojas saw the daughter, made off with her. But she contrived to bribe her guards, and escaped almost immediately before any harm befell her. She hid among friends. Rojas nearly tore down the town in his efforts to find her. Then she disguised herself and traveled by horseback, stage and train to Casta. She had no friends here, no money. She knew Rojas was trailing her. This talk I had with her was at the railroad station, where all was hustle and confusion. No one noticed us, so I thought, I advised her to remove the disguise of a nun before she left the waiting-room. And I got a boy to guide her. But he fetched her to this house. I had promised to come in the evening to talk over the situation with her.

"I found her, Dick, and when I saw her—I went stark, staring, raving mad over her. She is the most beautiful, wonderful girl I ever saw. Her name is Mercedes Castaneda, and she belongs to one of the old wealthy Spanish families. She has lived abroad and in Havana. She speaks French as well as English. She is—but I must be brief.

"Dick, think, think! With Mercedes also it was love at first sight. My plan is to marry her and get her father to the interior, away from the border. It may not be easy. She's watched. So am I. Rojas must have got word to his friends here; yesterday his gang of cutthroat rebels arrived, and today he came. When I learned that, I took my chance and left camp; I hunted up a priest. He promised to come here. It's true he's dead. But I'm afraid he'll be stopped. You see, we're over the line—"

"Are we in Mexican territory now?" queried Gale, sharply.

"I guess yes, old boy. That's what complicates it. Rojas and his rebels have Casta in their hands. If Mercedes is really watched—if her identity is known, which I am sure is the case—we couldn't get far from this house before I'd be knifed and she seized."

"Good heavens! Thorne, can that

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.

"Senor Gale—ah! I cannot speak my happiness. Hija 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!"

(Continued next week)

with glittering dark eyes that flashed in sinister intentness.

Dick stiffened in his seat. Thorne, with sudden clenching of hands, wheeled toward the window.

"Rojas!" he whispered.

The dark face vanished. Dick Gale heard footsteps and the tinkle 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. Further 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.

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(Continued next week)

## SHIPPING OF FURS OUT OF THE STATE

The trapping season will open November 15, and as usual a large number of furs will be shipped to dealers residing out of Louisiana. It is essential that trappers and dealers and those who handle these furs in transportation should be acquainted with the law governing such shipments. Under the terms of the Lacey

act, a law regulating interstate shipments of birds and mammals and parts thereof, postmasters and express agents are required to make certain that every package of furs destined to points outside the State of Louisiana has attached an official conservation tag, as provided by the rules and regulations of the Department of Conservation.

These tags are printed in red, and are issued either by the Department of Conservation to the trappers shipping their own catch or to resident dealers, or are issued by the licensed non-resident dealers to Louisiana trappers shipping their own catch on consignment to those dealers. Tags issued by non-resident dealers carry the name of the dealer that issues them, but otherwise are identical with the tags issued directly by the Department of Conservation.

Fur shipped within the State must have attached tags for that purpose. Such tags are printed in black.

Advertising in The Farmer pays.

# Illinois Central System Tells About Shortage of Transportation

We are now in one of those periods when the business of the country, including agriculture, suffers severe losses by reason of the shortage of railway transportation—the inability of the railroads to move promptly all of the traffic awaiting shipment.

The Illinois Central System is leaving nothing undone in its efforts to meet the situation. In our October statement we showed that we have this year added to our rolling equipment new cars and locomotives costing a total of more than \$14,000,000. These purchases include 65 locomotives. Since that statement was published we have purchased, in addition, 75 large freight locomotives, making a total of 140 locomotives purchased this year. However, we are handling the largest traffic in the history of this system, and our patrons doubtless will continue to be inconvenienced by the general shortage of transportation facilities.

The miners' strike, which continued for nearly five months, and the railway shopmen's strike have naturally had an effect upon the present shortage of transportation, but the main cause goes far deeper than those strikes.

What is commonly called the "car shortage" is in reality a shortage of all kinds of railway facilities, including locomotives, freight cars, passing tracks, terminal facilities, etc. For a number of years the rate at which the railroads have been able to increase their facilities has gradually fallen off, while the ton mileage hauled, which represents the public demand for transportation, has been gaining steadily.

In the seven years ended with 1907 the number of locomotives increased 2,500 a year, and the number of freight cars 30,000 a year. In the next seven years the number of locomotives increased only 1,500 a year, and the number of freight cars only 5,000 a year. In the seven years ended with 1921 the number of locomotives increased only 275 a year, and the number of freight cars only 6,000 a year. The increase in number of locomotives in the seven years ended with 1921 was only one-tenth as great as in the seven years ended with 1907, while with the increase in the number of freight cars was only one-fifteenth as great. The decline in the amount and capacity of the equipment provided has been accomplished by a corresponding decline in other facilities. This condition cannot continue without causing frequently recurring losses of a serious nature to the country.

During periods of business depression, when there is a surplus of transportation, the railroads should be most active in enlarging and extending their facilities for future needs, but that has not been possible in the past because business depressions have been accompanied by widespread demands for reduced rates. Such agitations discourage railway managements when question of recommending extensive and costly improvements are being considered and drive investors away from railway securities. When the confidence of investors in railway securities is fully restored, large expenditures for additions and betterments can be made, and the railroads will then be able to supply all necessary transportation. This is the "railway question in a nutshell."

What the country needs badly are many leaders among business men, farmers and workers with vision to see that business, including agriculture, must have ample railway service, and with courage to tell the truth about the transportation situation. Upon the attitude of the public toward the railroads will depend whether such crisis as the present one are to be avoided in the future.

Constructive criticism and suggestions are invited.

C. H. MARKHAM,  
President, Illinois Central Railroad Company.



"Serious? For me, if I'm Discovered It Means Ruin."

sort of thing happen less than a stone's throw from the United States line?" asked Gale, incredulously.

"It can happen, and don't you forget it. You don't seem to realize the power these guerrilla leaders, these rebel captains, and particularly these bandits, exercise over the mass of Mexicans. I've seen Rojas. He's a handsome, bold, sneering devil, valier than any peacock. He decks himself in gold lace and silver trappings, in all the finery he can steal. He spends gold like he spills blood. But he is chiefly famous for abducting women. The peon girls consider it an honor to be ridden off with. Rojas has shown a penchant for girls of the better class."

Thorne wiped the perspiration from his pale face and bent a dark gaze out of the window before he resumed his talk.

"Consider what the position of Mercedes really is. Rojas can turn all the hidden underground influences to his ends. Unless I thwart him he'll get Mercedes as easily as he can light a cigarette. But I'll kill him or some of his gang or her before I let him get her. . . . This is the situation, old friend. I've little time to spare. I face arrest for desertion. Rojas is in town. I think I was followed to this hotel. The priest has betrayed me or has been stopped. Mercedes is here alone, waiting, absolutely dependent upon me to save her from— from . . . She's the sweetest, loveliest girl! . . . In a few moments—sooner or later there'll be hell here! Dick, are you with me?"

Dick Gale drew a long, deep breath. A coldness, a lethargy, and indifference that had weighed upon him for months had passed out of his being. On the instant he could not speak, but his hand closed powerfully upon his friend's. Thorne's face changed wonderfully, the distress, the fear, the appeal all vanishing in a smile of passionate gratefulness.

Then Dick's gaze attracted by some slight sound, shot over his friend's shoulder to see a face at the window—a handsome, bold, sneering face,

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Mrs. Bella Malhos, widow, vs. Theo. Nelson.  
Third Ward Justice Court, Parish of St. Tammany, State of Louisiana.  
Notice is hereby given that by virtue of a writ of provisional seizure, issued out of the aforesaid court and to me directed, I have seized and will offer for sale to the last and highest bidder, at 710 Florida Street, in the Town of Covington, La., within legal hours for judicial sales, on **Saturday, November 4, 1922**, the following described property, to-wit:  
One lot of furniture and household effects.  
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