

DESERT GOLD

by
ZANE GREY

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



(Continued from last issue)

SYNOPSIS

PROLOGUE.—Seeking gold in the desert, "Cameron," a solitary prospector, forms a partnership with an unknown man whom he later learns is Jonas Warren, father of a girl whom Cameron wronged, but later married, back in Illinois. Cameron's explanations appease Warren, and the two proceed together. Taking refuge from a sandstorm in a cave, Cameron discovers gold, but too late; both men are dying. Cameron leaves evidence in the cave of their discovery of gold, and personal documents.

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 his escape, Charlie Ladd and Jim Lash, arrive in safety at a ranch known as Fort Horn 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 VI.—Riding the range, Gale falls in with a party of three Mexican raiders encamped at a water hole. Watching his opportunity to oust them, he sees two Indians ride into the camp. One of them, a Yaqui, is evidently badly wounded, and the Mexicans seek to kill him in a cruel way. Dick drives them off, conveying the wounded Yaqui to Belding's ranch.

The reports had frightened the horses in the corral; and a vicious black, crowding the rickety bars, broke them down. He came plunging out. With a splendid vaulting mount, the Mexican with the gun leaped to the back of the horse. He yelled and waved his gun, and urged the black forward. The manner of all three was savagely loose. They were having sport. The two on the ground began to dance and jabber. The mounted leader shot again, and then stuck like a leech upon the bare back of the rearing black. It was a vain show of horsemanship. Then this Mexican, by some strange grip, brought the horse down, plunging almost upon the body of the Indian that had fallen last.

Gale stood agliss with his rifle clutched tight. He could not divine the intention of the raider, but suspected something strikingly brutal. The horse answered to that cruel,



The Horse Answered to That Cruel Guiding Hand, Yet He Swerved and Bucked.

guiding hand, yet he swerved and bucked. He reared aloft, pawing the air, wildly snorting, then he plunged down upon the prostrate Indian. Even in the act the intelligent animal tried to keep from striking the body with his hoofs. But that was not possible. A yell, hideous in its passion, signaled this feat of horsemanship.

The Mexican made no move to trample the body of the Papago. He turned the black to ride again over the other Indian. Gale was horrified to see the Yaqui writhe and raise a feeble hand. The action brought renewed and more savage cries from the Mexicans. The horse snorted in terror.

Gale could bear no more. He took a quick shot at the rider. He missed the moving figure, but hit the horse. There was a bound, a horrid scream, a mighty plunge, then the horse went

down, giving the Mexican a stunning fall. Both beast and man lay still.

Gale rushed from his cover to intercept the other raiders before they could reach the house and their weapons. Then the frightened horses burst the corral bars, and in a thundering, dust-mantled stream fled up the arroyo.

The fallen raider sat up, mumbling to his sants in one breath, cursing in his next.

"Go, Greasers! Run!" yelled Gale. Then he yelled it in Spanish. At the point of his rifle he drove the two raiders out of the camp. His next move was to run into the house and fetch out the carbines. With a heavy stone he dismantled each weapon. That done, he set out on a run for his horse. Blanco Sol heard him coming and whistled a welcome, and when Gale ran up the horse was snorting war. Mounting, Gale rode rapidly back to the scene of the action, and his first thought, when he arrived at the well, was to give Sol a drink and to fill his canteens.

Then Gale led his horse up out of the waterhole, and decided before remounting to have a look at the Indians. The Papago had been shot through the heart, but the Yaqui was still alive. Moreover, he was conscious and staring up at Gale with great, strange, somber eyes, black as volcanic slugs.

"Gringo good—no kill," he said, in husky whisper.

His speech was not affirmative so much as questioning. "Yaqui, you're done for," said Gale, and his words were positive. He was simply speaking aloud his mind.

"Yaqui—no hurt—much," replied the Indian, and then he spoke a strange word—repeated it again and again.

An instinct of Gale's, or perhaps some suggestion in the husky, thick whisper or dark face, told Gale to reach for his canteen. He lifted the Indian and gave him a drink, and if ever in all his life he saw gratitude in human eyes he saw it then. Then he examined the injured Yaqui. The Indian had three wounds—a bullet hole in his shoulder, a crushed arm, and a badly lacerated leg.

The ranger thought rapidly. This Yaqui would live unless left there to die or be murdered by the Mexicans when they found courage to sneak back to the well. It never occurred to Gale to abandon the poor fellow. All the same, he knew he multiplied his perils a hundredfold by burdening himself with a crippled Indian. Swiftly he set to work, and with rifle ever under his hand, and shifting glance spared from his task, he bound up the Yaqui's wounds. At the same time he kept keen watch.

The Indians' burros and the horses of the raiders were all out of sight. Time was too valuable for Gale to use any in what might be vain search. Therefore, he lifted the Yaqui upon Sol's broad shoulders and climbed into the saddle. At a word Sol dropped his head and started eastward up the trail, walking swiftly, without resentment for his double burden.

Gale, bearing in mind the ever-present possibility of encountering more raiders and of being pursued, saved the strength of the horse. Once out of sight of Papago well, Gale dismounted and walked beside the horse, steadying with one firm hand the helpless, dangling Yaqui.

Gale kept pace with his horse. He bore the twinge of pain that darted through his injured hip at every stride. In the heat of midday he halted in the shade of a rock, and, lifting the Yaqui down, gave him a drink. Then, after a long, sweeping survey of the surrounding desert, he removed Sol's saddle and let him roll, and took for himself a welcome rest and a bite to eat.

The Yaqui was tenacious of life. He was still holding his own. For the first time Gale really looked at the Indian to study him. He had a large head nobly cast, and a face that resembled a shrunken mask. It seemed chiseled in the dark-eyed, volcanic lava of his Sonora wilderness. The Indian's eyes were always black and mystic, but this Yaqui's encompassed all the tragic desolation of the desert. They were fixed on Gale, moved only when he moved.

Gale resumed his homeward journey. He held grimly by the side of the tireless, implacable horse, holding the Yaqui on the saddle, taking the brunt of the merciless thorns. In the end it became heartrending toll. His heavy chaps dragged him down; but he dared not go on without them, for, thick and stiff as they were, the terrible, steel-bayoneted spikes of the choyas pierced through to sting his legs.

To the last mile Gale held to Blanco Sol's gait and kept ever watchful gaze

ahead on the trail. Then, with the low, flat houses of Fort Horn River shining red in the sunset, Gale flagged and rapidly weakened. The Yaqui slipped out of the saddle and dropped limp in the sand. Gale could not mount his horse. He clutched Sol's long tail and twisted his hand in it and staggered on.

Blanco Sol whistled a piercing blast. He scented cool water and sweet alfalfa hay. Twinkling lights ahead meant rest. The melancholy desert twilight rapidly succeeded the sunset. It accentuated the forlorn loneliness of the gray, winding river of sand and its grayish shores. Night shadows, trooping down from the black and looming mountains.

(Continued in Next Issue)

TURTLE RIVER

Mrs. Jens Nelson and daughter Mattie were afternoon callers at the Peterson home Friday.

Mr. and Mrs. Ed Gleissing transacted business in Bemidji Friday.

Lester Peterson called at the Wm. Grey home Sunday.

Miss Jessamine Ong left for Henning, Minn., last week, where she is dressmaking.

Mr. and Mrs. Henry King and daughter Mrs. Joe Montgomery called at the Peterson home.

Mr. and Mrs. Lester Peterson and Christ Bjurke transacted business in Bemidji Friday.

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