

# DESERT GOLD

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

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## A NEW GALE

**SYNOPSIS**—Seeking gold in the desert, "Cameron," 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. 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. 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. The pair, aided by the cowboys, Charlie Ladd and Jim Lash, arrive in safety at a ranch known as Forlorn River, across the border. 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

### A Desert Rose.

When Dick lay down that night he was dully conscious of pain and headache—that he did not feel well. Despite this, and a mind thronging with memories and anticipations, he succumbed to weariness and soon fell asleep.

It was light when he awoke, but a strange brightness seen through what seemed blurred eyes. A moment passed before his mind worked clearly, and then he had to make an effort to think. He was dizzy. When he essayed to lift his right arm, an excruciating pain made him desist. Then he discovered that his arm was badly swollen, and the hand had burst its bandages. The injured member was red, angry, inflamed, and twice its normal size. He felt hot all over, and a raging headache consumed him.

Belding came stamping into the room.

"Hello, Dick. Do you know it's late? How's the busted fist this morning?"

Dick tried to sit up, but his effort was a failure. He got about half up, then felt himself weakly sliding back.

"I guess—I'm pretty sick," he said. He saw Belding lean over him, feel his face, and speak, and then everything seemed to drift, and into darkness, but into some region where he had dim perceptions of gray moving things, and of voices that were remote. Then there came an interval when all was blank. When he again unrolled his eyes the room was sunny, and cool with a fragrant breeze that blew through the open door. Dick felt better; but he had no particular desire to move or talk or eat.

On the next day he was very much improved.

"We've been afraid of blood poisoning," said Belding. "But my wife thinks the danger's past. You'll have to rest that arm for a while."

Ladd and Jim came peeping in at the door.

"Come in, boys. He can have company—the more the better—if it'll keep him content. He mustn't move, that's all."

The cowboys entered, slow, easy, cool, kind-voiced.

"Shore it's tough," said Ladd, after he had greeted Dick. "You look used up."

Jim Lash wagged his half-bald, sunburned head. "Musta been more'n tough for Rojas."

"Gale, Laddy tells me one of our neighbors, fellow named Carter, is going to Casita," put in Belding. "Here's a chance to get word to your friend the soldier."

"Oh, that will be fine!" exclaimed Dick. "I declare I'd forgotten Thorne. . . . How is Miss Castaneda? I hope—"

"She's all right, Gale. Been up and around the patio for two days. She and Nell made friends at once. I'll call them in."

Both girls came in, Mercedes leading. Like Nell, she wore white, and she had a red rose in her hand. She was swift, impulsive in her movements to reach Dick's side.

"Senor, I am so sorry you were ill—so happy you are better."

Dick greeted her, offering his left hand, gravely apologizing for the fact that, owing to a late infirmity, he could not offer the right. Her smile exquisitely combined sympathy, gratitude, admiration. Then Dick spoke to Nell, likewise offering his hand, which she took shyly. Her reply was a murmured, unintelligible one; but her eyes were glad, and the tint in her cheeks threatened to rival the hue of the rose she carried.

Presently Dick remembered to speak of the matter of getting news to Thorne.

"Senor, may I write to him? Will someone take a letter? . . . I shall hear from him!" she said; and her white hands emphasized her words.

"Assuredly. I guess poor Thorne is almost crazy. I'll write to him. . . . No, I can't with this crippled hand."

"That'll be all right, Gale," said Belding. "Nell will write for you. She writes all my letters."

So Belding arranged it; and Mercedes flew away to her room to write, while Nell fetched pen and paper and seated herself beside Gale's bed to take his dictation.

What with watching Nell and trying to catch her glance, and listening to Belding's talk with the cowboys, Dick was hard put to it to dictate any kind of a creditable letter. Nell met his gaze once, then no more. Belding was talking over the risks involved in a trip to Casita.

"I'll tell you, boys, I'll ride in myself with Carter. There's business I can see to, and I'm curious to know what the rebels are doing. Gale, I'm going to Casita myself. Ought to get back tomorrow some time. I'll be ready to start in an hour. Have your letter ready. And say—if you want to write home it's a chance. Sometimes we don't go to the P. O. in a month."

He tramped out, followed by the tall cowboys, and then Dick was enabled to bring his letter to a close. Mercedes came back, and her eyes were shining. Dick, remembering Belding's suggestion, decided to profit by it.

"May I trouble you to write another for me?" asked Dick, as he received the letter from Nell.

"It's no trouble, I'm sure—I'd be pleased," she replied.

That was altogether a wonderful speech of hers. Dick thought, because the words were the first coherent ones she had spoken to him. He settled back and began.

Presently Gale paused, partly because of genuine emotion, and stole a look from under his hand at Nell. If she had in the very least been drawn to him—but that was absurd—impossible!

When Dick finished dictating, his eyes were upon Mercedes, who sat smilingly curious and sympathetic. How responsive she was! He looked at Nell. Presently she rose, holding out his letter. He was just in time to see a wave of red recede from her face. She gave him one swift gaze, unconscious, searching, then averted it and turned away. She left the room with Mercedes before he could express his thanks.

But that strange, speaking flash of eyes remained to haunt and torment Gale. It was indescribably sweet, and provocative of thoughts that he believed were wild without warrant.



"Hello, Dick! Good News and Bad!"

It dawned upon him that for the brief instant when Nell had met his gaze she had lost her shyness. It was a woman's questioning eyes that had pierced through him.

Next day Dick believed he was well enough to leave his room; but Mrs. Belding would not permit him to do so. She was kind, soft-handed, motherly, and she was always coming in to minister to his comfort; yet Gale felt that the friendliness so manifest in the others of the household did not extend to her. He was conscious of something that a little thought persuaded him was antagonism. It surprised and hurt him. He reflected that there might come a time when it would be desirable, far beyond any ground of every-day friendly kindness, to have Mrs. Belding be well disposed toward him. So he thought about her, and pondered how to make her like him. It did not take very long for Dick to discover that he liked her. Her face, except when she smiled, was thoughtful and sad. But it seemed too strong, too intense, too nobly lined. It was a face to make one serious. Like a haunting shadow,

like a phantom of happier years, the sweetness of Nell's face was there, and infinitely more of beauty than had been transmitted to the daughter. Dick believed Mrs. Belding's friendship and motherly love were worth much striving to win, entirely aside from any more selfish motive. He decided both would be hard to get.

Toward evening Gale heard the tramp of horses and Belding's hearty voice. Presently the rancher strode in upon Gale, shaking the gray dust from his broad shoulders and waving a letter.

"Hello, Dick! Good news and bad!" he said, putting the letter in 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 rifle 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, subject, 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 Mercedes. 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 kiss 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 pig-headed dad of yours I'm going to give him the surprise of his life."

"Send me a line whenever any one comes in from P. R., and enclose 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 of human nature to see that horses constituted Ladd's ruling passion.

"Shore it's a cinch Belding is a goin' 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 can'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 pride. There's more doin' than the raidin' of a few horses. 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. Sweet-ankled 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, cooling, 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 Bedonins 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 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, stamp-



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

ing 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 Papazon 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 care-free 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.

"A crippled Yaqui! Why the h—l did you saddle yourself with him?" roared Belding.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Follow the river and you will go to sea.

# Scraps of Humor

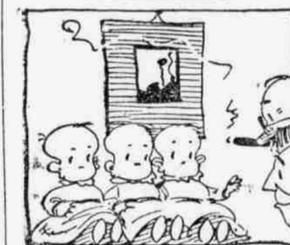


## EASILY CAPPED

An argument was in progress. Private Smart claimed that the tallest man was in his regiment, while Private White upheld his own regiment's claims.

"Why," said the first, "we've a chap in our lot who can light a cigarette from a lamp post."

"That's nothing," replied the other. "A fellow in my company's so tall that he has to kneel down when he wants to put his hands in his trousers pockets."



## IMPARTIAL JUDGMENT

Popmore—There! What do you think of those for triplets?  
Sourbatch—That one in the middle is the best. I'd keep him, if any.

## Domesticity.

There was a married couple  
Who never had a fuss,  
The woman, s'e went crazy,  
The man ain't worth a cuss.

## The Main Thing.

"My poor man," said the sympathetic prison visitor, "do let me send you some cake."

"Thank you, mum. That would suit me fine."

"What kind would you prefer?"

"Any kind, mum," said the prisoner, lowering his voice to a whisper, "just so it's got a file in it."

## An Aid to Packing.

Friend—Come home to dinner with me tonight, old chap.

Fatleigh—Does your wife know you are inviting me?

Friend—Well, not you, especially, but you see she's going away on a visit and she asked me to be sure and bring home some heavyweight to sit on her trunk.

## Speeding a Guest.

"You didn't stay long with your relatives in the city."

"No," said Uncle Jeremiah Scroggsby. "I was plannin' to spend about a month doin' th' town with my nevy's folks, but when I'd been there about a week somebody put a calendar in my room with some figures on it a foot high."

## Hard to Believe.

"I told him plainly just what I thought," she said.

"Laud sakes!" her grandmother exclaimed; "how could you say such awful things to a man?"

## Persiflage.

"There goes a girl of the period."  
"She brought you to a full stop, all right."

"Her name is 'Dot.'"

"Oh, comma long!"

## The Flaw.

"There is no particular pleasure in motoring these days."

"Too many cars, eh?"

"No, too few pedestrians."



## NO WONDER

She: Aren't you afraid we'll fall in?

He: I've already fallen in—love.

## Ask Dad; He Knows.

Take a tip from father,  
Although it causes pain—  
Fall in love with the pretty girl,  
But marry one that's plain.

## Both.

Jack—"Did Clara keep that secret under her hat?"  
Marie—"Yes, right on the end of her tongue."

## And His Present.

Mae—I wouldn't marry that artist if I were you, dear. Why, you know nothing whatever of his past.

June—Perhaps not, but when he's my husband I'll know something of his future.

## His Business.

"Aren't your questions rather personal? Suppose you mind your own business."

"I am doing so. I make it my business to keep informed on what other people are doing."