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by
Zane Grey

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THE STORY

CHAPTER I.—Jim Wall, young cowpuncher from Wyoming, in the early days of the cattle industry, seeks a new field in Utah. He meets Hank Hays, who admits to being a robber, and tells Wall he is working for an Englishman named Herrick, who has located a big ranch in the mountains. Herrick has employed a small army of rustlers and gun-fighters, and Hays and others are plotting to steal their employer's cattle and money. Hays wants Wall to throw in with the rustlers.

"Bah!" cut in Wall, good-humoredly. "Men who can handle guns don't pack them that way."

Presently they bade Red good night and went outside.

"Where you sleepin'?" asked Hays. "Left my pack in the stall out back with my horse. What do we do tomorrow?"

"I was thinkin' of that. We'll shake the dust of Green River. I reckon tomorrow we'd better stock up on everything 'an' hit the trail for the Henrys."

"Suits me," replied Wall.

"Wal, then, good night. Breakfast here early," concluded Hays.

A red sunrise greeted Wall upon his awakening. When, a little later, he presented himself at the back of Red's house for breakfast he was to find Hays, Happy Jack and Brad Lincoln ahead of him.

They had breakfast. "Brad, you fetch your pack horses round back," ordered the leader, when they got outside. "Happy, you get yourself a horse. Then meet us at the store quick as you can get there. . . . Jim, you come with me."

"Hays, I'm in need of some things," said Wall.

Hays drew out a handful of bills and pressed them upon Wall.

"Shore. Buy what outfit you need an' don't forget a lot of shells," replied Hays. "If I don't miss my guess we'll have a smoky summer. Haw! Haw! . . . Here's the store."

A bright young fellow, who looked to be the son of the proprietor, took charge of Wall. A new saddle blanket was Wall's first choice, after which he bought horsehoes and nails, a hammer and file, articles he had long needed, and the lack of which had made Bay lame. After that he selected a complete new outfit of wearing apparel, a new tarpaulin, a blanket, rope, and wound up with a goodly supply of shells for his .45 revolver. Likewise he got some boxes of .44 rifle shells.

Half an hour later the four men, driving five packed horses and two unpacked, rode off behind the town across the flat toward the west. Coming to a road, Hays led on that for a mile or so, and then branched off on a seldom-used trail.

Towards sunset they drew down to the center of a vast swale, where the green intensified, and the eye of the range rider could see the influence of water.

Hays halted for camp at a swampy sedge plot where water oozed out and grass was thick enough to hold the horses.

"Aha! Good to be out again, boys," said Hays, heartily. "Throw saddles an' packs. Turn the horses loose. Happy, you're elected cook. Rest of us rustle somethin' to burn."

Jim rambled far afield to collect an armload of dead stalks of cactus, greasewood, sunflower; and dusk was mantling the desert when he got back to camp. Happy Jack was whistling about a little fire; Hays knelt before a pan of dough, which he was kneading; Lincoln was busy at some camp

chore.

"Well, I don't like store bread," Hays was saying. "Give me sourdough biscuits. . . . How about you, Jim?"

"Me, too. And I'd like some cake," replied Jim, dropping his load.

"Cake! Wal listen to our new hand. Jack, can you bake cake?"

"Sure. We got flour an' sugar an' milk. Did you fetch some eggs?"

"Haw! Haw! That reminds me, though. We'll get eggs over at Star ranch. Name of you ever seen such a ranch. Why, fellers, Herrick's bought every durn' hoss, burro, sow, steer, chicken in the whole country."

"So you said before," returned Lincoln. "I'm sure curious to see this Englisher. Must have more money than brains."

"He hasn't got any sense. But Lordy, the money he's spent!" Jim sat down to rest and listen.

"Queer deal—a rich Englishman hirin' men like us to run his outfit," pondered Lincoln, in a puzzled tone. "I don't understand it."

"Wal, who does? I can't, that's shore. But it's a fact, an' we're goin' to be so rich pronto that we'll jest about kill each other."

"More truth than fun in that, Hank, old boy, an' don't you forget it," rejoined Lincoln. "How do you aim to get rich?"

"Shore, I've no idee. That'll all come. I've got the step on Heeseman an' his pards."

"He'll be aimin' at precisely the same deal as you."

"Shore. We'll have to kill Heeseman an' Progar, sooner or later. I'd like it sooner."

"I don't like the deal," concluded Lincoln, forcibly.

Presently they sat to their meal, and ate almost in silence. Darkness settled down. One by one they sought their beds, and Wall was the last.

Dawn found them up and doing. Wall fetched in some of the horses; Lincoln the others. By sunrise they were on the trail, which about mid-afternoon led down through high gravel banks to a wide stream bed, dry except in the middle of the sandy waste.

"This here's the Muddy," announced Hays for Jim's benefit. "Bad enough when the water's up. But nothin' to the Dirty Devil. Nothin' at all."

"What's the Dirty Devil?" asked Jim.

"It's a river an' it's well named, you can gamble on that. We'll cross it tomorrow some time."

Next camp was on higher ground above the Muddy. Here Hays and Lincoln renewed their argument about the Herrick ranch deal. It proved what Wall had divined—this Brad Lincoln was shrewd, cold, doubtful and aggressive. Hays was not distinguished for any cleverness. He was merely an unscrupulous robber. These men were going to clash. That was inevitable, Jim calculated.

Early the next day Jim Wall had reason to be curious about the Dirty Devil river, for the descent into the defiles of desert to reach it was a most remarkable one. The trail, now only a few dim old hoof tracks, wound tortuously down and down into deep canyons.

The tracks Hays was following faded and he got lost in a labyrinthine maze of deep washes impossible to climb, and seemingly impossible to escape from.

Lincoln got off his horse and went down the canyon, evidently searching for a place to climb up to the rim above. He returned in an assertive manner and, mounting, called for the others to follow.

"I hear the river an' I'm makin' for it," said Lincoln.

Jim had heard a faint, low murmur, which had puzzled him, and which he had not recognized. They all followed Lincoln. Eventually he led them into a narrow, high-walled canyon where ran the Dirty Devil. The water was muddy, but as it was shallow the riders forded it without more mishap than a wetting.

Still they were lost. There was nothing to do, however, but work up a side canyon. Hays led them to a camp-site that never could have been expected there.

"Fellers, I'll bet you somethin'," he said, before dismounting. "There's a roost down in that country where never in Gawd's world could anybody find us."

"Ha! An' when they did it'd be only our bleached bones," scoffed Lincoln.

There never had been any love lost between these two men, Jim conjectured.

After supper Jim strolled away from camp, down to where the canyon opened upon a nothingness of space and blackness and depth. The hour hung suspended between dusk



He Felt an Overpowering Sense of the Immensity of This Region.

and night. He felt an overpowering sense of the immensity of this region of mountain, gorge, plain and butte. While Jim Wall meditated there in the gathering darkness he was visited by an inexplicable reluctance to go on with this adventure.

CHAPTER III

Next morning they got a late start. Nevertheless Hays assured Jim that they would reach Star ranch towards evening.

The trail led up a wide, shallow, gravelly canyon full of green growths. They rode on side by side. The trail led into a wider one, coming around from the northeast. Jim did not miss fresh hoof tracks, and Hays was not far behind in discovering them.

"Woods full of riders," he muttered.

"How long have you been gone, Hays?" inquired Jim.

"From Star ranch? Let's see. Must be a couple of weeks. Too long, by gosh! Herrick sent me to Grand Junction. An' on the way back I circled. That's how I happened to make Green River."

"Did you expect to meet Happy Jack and Lincoln there?"

"Shore. An' some more of my outfit. But I guess you'll more'n make up for the other fellers."

"Hope I don't disappoint you," said Jim, dryly.

"Well, you haven't so far. Only I'd feel better, Jim, if you'd come clean with who you air an' what you air."

"Hays, I didn't ask you to take me on."

"Shore, you're right. Reckon I figured everybody knew Hank Hays. Why, there's a town down here named after me, Hankville."

"A town? No one would think it."

"Wal, it ain't much to brag on. A few cabins, the first of which I threw up with my father years ago. In his later years he was a prospector. We lived there for years. I trapped fur up here in the mountains. In fact I got to know the whole country except the Black Dragon canyon, an' the hellhole of the Dirty Devil. . . . My old man was shot by rustlers."

"I gathered you'd no use for rustlers. . . . Well, then, Hays, how'd you fall into your present line of business?"

"Haw! Haw! Present line. That's a good one. Now, Jim, what do you reckon that line is?"

"You seem to be versatile, Hays. But if I was to judge I'd say you relieved people of surplus cash."

"Very nice put, Jim. I'd hate to be a low-down thief. . . . Jim, I was an honest man once, not so long ago. It was a woman who made me what I am today. That's why I'm cold on women."

"Were you ever married?" went on Jim, stirred a little by the other's crude pathos.

"That was the h—l of it," replied Hays, and he seemed to lose desire to confide further.

They rode into the zone of the foothills, with ever-increasing evidence of fertility. But Jim's view had been restricted for several hours, permitting only occasional glimpses up the gray-black slopes of the Henrys and none at all of the low country.

Therefore Jim was scarcely prepared to come round a corner and out into the open. Stunned by the magnificence of the scene he would have halted Bay on the spot, but he esped Hays waiting for him ahead.

Continued Next Week

SNOODLES



By CY HUNGEEFORD