STEWART EDWARD WHITE



ARIZONA NIGHTS

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Arizona Nights

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DigiCat, 2022

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CHAPTER ONE

THE OLE VIRGINIA

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The ring around the sun had thickened all day long, and the turquoise blue of the Arizona sky had filmed. Storms in the dry countries are infrequent, but heavy; and this surely meant storm.

We had ridden since sun-up over broad mesas, down and out of deep canons, along the base of the mountain in the wildest parts of the territory. The cattle were winding leisurely toward the high country; the jack rabbits had disappeared; the quail lacked; we did not see a single antelope in the open.

"It's a case of hole up," the Cattleman ventured his opinion. "I have a ranch over in the Double R. Charley and Windy Bill hold it down. We'll tackle it. What do you think?"

The four cowboys agreed. We dropped into a low, broad watercourse, ascended its bed to big cottonwoods and flowing water, followed it into box canons between rim-rock carved fantastically and painted like a Moorish facade, until at last in a widening below a rounded hill, we came upon an adobe house, a fruit tree, and a round corral. This was the Double R.

Charley and Windy Bill welcomed us with soda biscuits. We turned our horses out, spread our beds on the floor, filled our pipes, and squatted on our heels. Various dogs of various breeds investigated us. It was very pleasant, and we did not mind the ring around the sun.

"Somebody else coming," announced the Cattleman finally.

"Uncle Jim," said Charley, after a glance.

A hawk-faced old man with a long white beard and long white hair rode out from the cottonwoods. He had on a battered broad hat abnormally high of crown, carried across his saddle a heavy "eight square" rifle, and was followed by a half-dozen lolloping hounds.

The largest and fiercest of the latter, catching sight of our group, launched himself with lightning rapidity at the biggest of the ranch dogs, promptly nailed that canine by the back of the neck, shook him violently a score of times, flung him aside, and pounced on the next. During the ensuing few moments that hound was the busiest thing in the West. He satisfactorily whipped four dogs, pursued two cats up a tree, upset the Dutch oven and the rest of the soda biscuits, stampeded the horses, and raised a cloud of dust adequate to represent the smoke of battle. We others were too paralysed to move. Uncle Jim sat placidly on his white horse, his thin knees bent to the ox-bow stirrups, smoking.

In ten seconds the trouble was over, principally because there was no more trouble to make. The hound returned leisurely, licking from his chops the hair of his victims. Uncle Jim shook his head.

"Trailer," said he sadly, "is a little severe."

We agreed heartily, and turned in to welcome Uncle Jim with a fresh batch of soda biscuits.

The old man was one of the typical "long hairs." He had come to the Galiuro Mountains in '69, and since '69 he had remained in the Galiuro Mountains, spite of man or the devil. At present he possessed some hundreds of cattle,

which he was reputed to water, in a dry season, from an ordinary dishpan. In times past he had prospected.

That evening, the severe Trailer having dropped to slumber, he held forth on big-game hunting and dogs, quartz claims and Apaches.

"Did you ever have any very close calls?" I asked.

He ruminated a few moments, refilled his pipe with some awful tobacco, and told the following experience:

In the time of Geronimo I was living just about where I do now; and that was just about in line with the raiding. You see, Geronimo, and Ju [1], and old Loco used to pile out of the reservation at Camp Apache, raid south to the line, slip over into Mexico when the soldiers got too promiscuous, and raid there until they got ready to come back. Then there was always a big medicine talk. Says Geronimo:

"I am tired of the warpath. I will come back from Mexico with all my warriors, if you will escort me with soldiers and protect my people."

"All right," says the General, being only too glad to get him back at all.

So, then, in ten minutes there wouldn't be a buck in camp, but next morning they shows up again, each with about fifty head of hosses.

"Where'd you get those hosses?" asks the General, suspicious.

"Had 'em pastured in the hills," answers Geronimo.

"I can't take all those hosses with me; I believe they're stolen!" says the General.

"My people cannot go without their hosses," says Geronimo.

So, across the line they goes, and back to the reservation. In about a week there's fifty-two frantic Greasers wanting to know where's their hosses. The army is nothing but an importer of stolen stock, and knows it, and can't help it.

Well, as I says, I'm between Camp Apache and the Mexican line, so that every raiding party goes right on past me. The point is that I'm a thousand feet or so above the valley, and the renegades is in such a devil of a hurry about that time that they never stop to climb up and collect me. Often I've watched them trailing down the valley in a cloud of dust. Then, in a day or two, a squad of soldiers would come up, and camp at my spring for a while. They used to send soldiers to guard every water hole in the country so the renegades couldn't get water. After a while, from not being bothered none, I got thinking I wasn't worth while with them.

Me and Johnny Hooper were pecking away at the old Virginia mine then. We'd got down about sixty feet, all timbered, and was thinking of cross-cutting. One day Johnny went to town, and that same day I got in a hurry and left my gun at camp.

I worked all the morning down at the bottom of the shaft, and when I see by the sun it was getting along towards noon, I put in three good shots, tamped 'em down, lit the fusees, and started to climb out.

It ain't noways pleasant to light a fuse in a shaft, and then have to climb out a fifty-foot ladder, with it burning behind you. I never did get used to it. You keep thinking, "Now suppose there's a flaw in that fuse, or something, and she goes off in six seconds instead of two minutes? where'll you be then?" It would give you a good boost towards your home on high, anyway.

So I climbed fast, and stuck my head out the top without looking—and then I froze solid enough. There, about fifty feet away, climbing up the hill on mighty tired hosses, was a dozen of the ugliest Chiricahuas you ever don't want to meet, and in addition a Mexican renegade named Maria, who was worse than any of 'em. I see at once their hosses was tired out, and they had a notion of camping at my water hole, not knowing nothing about the Ole Virginia mine.

For two bits I'd have let go all holts and dropped backwards, trusting to my thick head for easy lighting. Then I heard a little fizz and sputter from below. At that my hair riz right up so I could feel the breeze blow under my hat. For about six seconds I stood there like an imbecile, grinning amiably. Then one of the Chiricahuas made a sort of grunt, and I sabed that they'd seen the original exhibit your Uncle Jim was making of himself.

Then that fuse gave another sputter and one of the Apaches said "Un dah." That means "white man." It was harder to turn my head than if I'd had a stiff neck; but I managed to do it, and I see that my ore dump wasn't more than ten foot away. I mighty near overjumped it; and the next I knew I was on one side of it and those Apaches on the other. Probably I flew; leastways I don't seem to remember jumping.

That didn't seem to do me much good. The renegades were grinning and laughing to think how easy a thing they had; and I couldn't rightly think up any arguments against that notion—at least from their standpoint. They were chattering away to each other in Mexican for the benefit of Maria. Oh, they had me all distributed, down to my suspender buttons! And me squatting behind that ore dump about as formidable as a brush rabbit!

Then, all at once, one of my shots went off down in the shaft.

"Boom!" says she, plenty big; and a slather of rock, and stones come out of the mouth, and began to dump down promiscuous on the scenery. I got one little one in the shoulder-blade, and found time to wish my ore dump had a roof. But those renegades caught it square in the thick of trouble. One got knocked out entirely for a minute, by a nice piece of country rock in the head.

"Otra vez!" yells I, which means "again."

"Boom!" goes the Ole Virginia prompt as an answer.

I put in my time dodging, but when I gets a chance to look, the Apaches has all got to cover, and is looking scared.

"Otra vez!" yells I again.

"Boom!" says the Ole Virginia.

This was the biggest shot of the lot, and she surely cut loose. I ought to have been half-way up the bill watching things from a safe distance, but I wasn't. Lucky for me the shaft was a little on the drift, so she didn't quite shoot my way. But she distributed about a ton over those renegades. They sort of half got to their feet uncertain.

"Otra vez!" yells I once more, as bold as if I could keep her shooting all day.

It was just a cold, raw blazer; and if it didn't go through I could see me as an Apache parlour ornament. But it did. Those Chiricahuas give one yell and skipped. It was surely a funny sight, after they got aboard their war ponies, to see them trying to dig out on horses too tired to trot.

I didn't stop to get all the laughs, though. In fact, I give one jump off that ledge, and I lit a-running. A quarter-hoss couldn't have beat me to that shack. There I grabbed old Meat-in-the-pot and made a climb for the tall country, aiming to wait around until dark, and then to pull out for Benson. Johnny Hooper wasn't expected till next day, which was lucky. From where I lay I could see the Apaches camped out beyond my draw, and I didn't doubt they'd visited the place. Along about sunset they all left their camp, and went into the draw, so there, I thinks, I sees a good chance to make a start before dark. I dropped down from the mesa, skirted the butte, and angled down across the country. After I'd gone a half mile from the cliffs, I ran across Johnny Hooper's fresh trail headed towards camp!

My heart jumped right up into my mouth at that. Here was poor old Johnny, a day too early, with a pack-mule of grub, walking innocent as a yearling, right into the bands of those hostiles. The trail looked pretty fresh, and Benson's a good long day with a pack animal, so I thought perhaps I might catch him before he runs into trouble. So I ran back on the trail as fast as I could make it. The sun was down by now, and it was getting dusk.

I didn't overtake him, and when I got to the top of the canon I crawled along very cautious and took a look. Of course, I expected to see everything up in smoke, but I nearly got up and yelled when I see everything all right, and old Sukey, the pack-mule, and Johnny's hoss hitched up as peaceful as babies to the corral.

"THAT'S all right!" thinks I, "they're back in their camp, and haven't discovered Johnny yet. I'll snail him out of there."

So I ran down the hill and into the shack. Johnny sat in his chair—what there was of him. He must have got in about two hours before sundown, for they'd had lots of time to put in on him. That's the reason they'd stayed so long up the draw. Poor old Johnny! I was glad it was night, and he was dead. Apaches are the worst Injuns there is for tortures. They cut off the bottoms of old man Wilkins's feet, and stood him on an ant-hill—.

In a minute or so, though, my wits gets to work.

"Why ain't the shack burned?" I asks myself, "and why is the hoss and the mule tied all so peaceful to the corral?"

It didn't take long for a man who knows Injins to answer THOSE conundrums. The whole thing was a trap—for me—and I'd walked into it, chuckle-headed as a prairie-dog!

With that I makes a run outside—by now it was dark—and listens. Sure enough, I hears hosses. So I makes a rapid sneak back over the trail.

Everything seemed all right till I got up to the rim-rock. Then I heard more hosses—ahead of me. And when I looked back I could see some Injuns already at the shack, and starting to build a fire outside.

In a tight fix, a man is pretty apt to get scared till all hope is gone. Then he is pretty apt to get cool and calm. That was my case. I couldn't go ahead—there was those hosses coming along the trail. I couldn't go back—there was those Injins building the fire. So I skirmished around till I got a bright star right over the trail head, and I trained old Meatin-the-pot to bear on that star, and I made up my mind that when the star was darkened I'd turn loose. So I lay there a while listening. By and by the star was blotted out, and I cut loose, and old Meat-in-the-pot missed fire—she never did it before nor since; I think that cartridge—

Well, I don't know where the Injins came from, but it seemed as if the hammer had hardly clicked before three or four of them bad piled on me. I put up the best fight I could, for I wasn't figuring to be caught alive, and this miss-fire deal had fooled me all along the line. They surely had a lively time. I expected every minute to feel a knife in my back, but when I didn't get it then I knew they wanted to bring me in alive, and that made me fight harder. First and last, we rolled and plunged all the way from the rim-rock down to the canon-bed. Then one of the Injins sung out:

"Maria!"

And I thought of that renegade Mexican, and what I'd heard bout him, and that made me fight harder yet.

But after we'd fought down to the canon-bed, and had lost most of our skin, a half-dozen more fell on me, and in less than no time they had me tied. Then they picked me up and carried me over to where they'd built a big fire by the corral. Uncle Jim stopped with an air of finality, and began lazily to refill his pipe. From the open mud fireplace he picked a coal. Outside, the rain, faithful to the prophecy of the wideringed sun, beat fitfully against the roof.

"That was the closest call I ever had," said he at last.

"But, Uncle Jim," we cried in a confused chorus, "how did you get away? What did the Indians do to you? Who rescued you?"

Uncle Jim chuckled.

"The first man I saw sitting at that fire," said he, "was Lieutenant Price of the United States Army, and by him was Tom Horn."

"'What's this?' he asks, and Horn talks to the Injins in Apache.

"'They say they've caught Maria,' translates Horn back again.

"'Maria-nothing!' says Lieutenant Price. 'This is Jim Fox. I know him.'"

"So they turned me loose. It seems the troops had driven off the renegades an hour before."

"And the Indians who caught you, Uncle Jim? You said they were Indians."

"Were Tonto Basin Apaches," explained the old man —"government scouts under Tom Horn."

CHAPTER TWO

THE EMIGRANTS

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After the rain that had held us holed up at the Double R over one day, we discussed what we should do next.

"The flats will be too boggy for riding, and anyway the cattle will be in the high country," the Cattleman summed up the situation. "We'd bog down the chuck-wagon if we tried to get back to the J. H. But now after the rain the weather ought to be beautiful. What shall we do?"

"Was you ever in the Jackson country?" asked Uncle Jim. "It's the wildest part of Arizona. It's a big country and rough, and no one lives there, and there's lots of deer and mountain lions and bear. Here's my dogs. We might have a hunt."

"Good!" said we.

We skirmished around and found a condemned army pack saddle with aparejos, and a sawbuck saddle with kyacks. On these, we managed to condense our grub and utensils. There were plenty of horses, so our bedding we bound flat about their naked barrels by means of the squawhitch. Then we started.

That day furnished us with a demonstration of what Arizona horses can do. Our way led first through a canon-bed filled with rounded boulders and rocks, slippery and unstable. Big cottonwoods and oaks grew so thick as partially to conceal the cliffs on either side of us. The rimrock was mysterious with caves; beautiful with hanging gardens of tree ferns and grasses growing thick in long

transverse crevices; wonderful in colour and shape. We passed the little canons fenced off by the rustlers as corrals into which to shunt from the herds their choice of beeves.

The Cattleman shook his head at them. "Many a man has come from Texas and established a herd with no other asset than a couple of horses and a branding-iron," said he.

Then we worked up gradually to a divide, whence we could see a range of wild and rugged mountains on our right. They rose by slopes and ledges, steep and rough, and at last ended in the thousand-foot cliffs of the buttes, running sheer and unbroken for many miles. During all the rest of our trip they were to be our companions, the only constant factors in the tumult of lesser peaks, precipitous canons, and twisted systems in which we were constantly involved.

The sky was sun-and-shadow after the rain. Each and every Arizonan predicted clearing.

"Why, it almost never rains in Arizona," said Jed Parker.

"And when it does it quits before it begins."

Nevertheless, about noon a thick cloud gathered about the tops of the Galiuros above us. Almost immediately it was dissipated by the wind, but when the peaks again showed, we stared with astonishment to see that they were white with snow. It was as though a magician had passed a sheet before them the brief instant necessary to work his great transformation. Shortly the sky thickened again, and it began to rain.

Travel had been precarious before; but now its difficulties were infinitely increased. The clay sub-soil to the rubble turned slippery and adhesive. On the sides of the mountains

it was almost impossible to keep a footing. We speedily became wet, our hands puffed and purple, our boots sodden with the water that had trickled from our clothing into them.

"Over the next ridge," Uncle Jim promised us, "is an old shack that I fixed up seven years ago. We can all make out to get in it."

Over the next ridge, therefore, we slipped and slid, thanking the god of luck for each ten feet gained. It was growing cold. The cliffs and palisades near at hand showed dimly behind the falling rain; beyond them waved and eddied the storm mists through which the mountains revealed and concealed proportions exaggerated into unearthly grandeur. Deep in the clefts of the box canons the streams were filling. The roar of their rapids echoed from innumerable precipices. A soft swish of water usurped the world of sound.

Nothing more uncomfortable or more magnificent could be imagined. We rode shivering. Each said to himself, "I can stand this—right now—at the present moment. Very well; I will do so, and I will refuse to look forward even five minutes to what I may have to stand," which is the true philosophy of tough times and the only effective way to endure discomfort.

By luck we reached the bottom of that canon without a fall. It was wide, well grown with oak trees, and belly deep in rich horse feed—an ideal place to camp were it not for the fact that a thin sheet of water a quarter of an inch deep was flowing over the entire surface of the ground. We spurred on desperately, thinking of a warm fire and a chance to steam.

The roof of the shack had fallen in, and the floor was six inches deep in adobe mud.

We did not dismount—that would have wet our saddles but sat on our horses taking in the details. Finally Uncle Jim came to the front with a suggestion.

"I know of a cave," said he, "close under a butte. It's a big cave, but it has such a steep floor that I'm not sure as we could stay in it; and it's back the other side of that ridge."

"I don't know how the ridge is to get back over—it was slippery enough coming this way—and the cave may shoot us out into space, but I'd like to LOOK at a dry place anyway," replied the Cattleman.

We all felt the same about it, so back over the ridge we went. About half way down the other side Uncle Jim turned sharp to the right, and as the "hog back" dropped behind us, we found ourselves out on the steep side of a mountain, the perpendicular cliff over us to the right, the river roaring savagely far down below our left, and sheets of water glazing the footing we could find among the boulders and debris. Hardly could the ponies keep from slipping sideways on the slope, as we proceeded farther and farther from the solidity of the ridge behind us, we experienced the illusion of venturing out on a tight rope over abysses of space. Even the feeling of danger was only an illusion, however, composite of the falling rain, the deepening twilight, and the night that had already enveloped the plunge of the canon below. Finally Uncle Jim stopped just within the drip from the cliffs.

"Here she is," said he.

We descended eagerly. A deer bounded away from the base of the buttes. The cave ran steep, in the manner of an inclined tunnel, far up into the dimness. We had to dig our toes in and scramble to make way up it at all, but we found it dry, and after a little search discovered a foot-ledge of earth sufficiently broad for a seat.

"That's all right," quoth Jed Parker. "Now, for sleeping places."

We scattered. Uncle Jim and Charley promptly annexed the slight overhang of the cliff whence the deer had jumped. It was dry at the moment, but we uttered pessimistic predictions if the wind should change. Tom Rich and Jim Lester had a little tent, and insisted on descending to the canon-bed.

"Got to cook there, anyways," said they, and departed with the two pack mules and their bed horse.

That left the Cattleman, Windy Bill, Jed Parker, and me. In a moment Windy Bill came up to us whispering and mysterious.

"Get your cavallos and follow me," said he.

We did so. He led us two hundred yards to another cave, twenty feet high, fifteen feet in diameter, level as a floor.

"How's that?" he cried in triumph. "Found her just now while I was rustling nigger-heads for a fire."

We unpacked our beds with chuckles of joy, and spread them carefully within the shelter of the cave. Except for the very edges, which did not much matter, our blankets and "so-guns," protected by the canvas "tarp," were reasonably dry. Every once in a while a spasm of conscience would seize one or the other of us. "It seems sort of mean on the other fellows," ruminated Jed Parker.

"They had their first choice," cried we all.

"Uncle Jim's an old man," the Cattleman pointed out.

But Windy Bill had thought of that. "I told him of this yere cave first. But he allowed he was plumb satisfied."

We finished laying out our blankets. The result looked good to us. We all burst out laughing.

"Well, I'm sorry for those fellows," cried the Cattleman. We hobbled our horses and descended to the gleam of the fire, like guilty conspirators. There we ate hastily of meat, bread and coffee, merely for the sake of sustenance. It certainly amounted to little in the way of pleasure. The water from the direct rain, the shivering trees, and our hat brims accumulated in our plates faster than we could bail it out. The dishes were thrust under a canvas. Rich and Lester decided to remain with their tent, and so we saw them no more until morning.

We broke off back-loads of mesquite and toiled up the hill, tasting thickly the high altitude in the severe labour. At the big cave we dumped down our burdens, transported our fuel piecemeal to the vicinity of the narrow ledge, built a good fire, sat in a row, and lit our pipes. In a few moments, the blaze was burning high, and our bodies had ceased shivering. Fantastically the firelight revealed the knobs and crevices, the ledges and the arching walls. Their shadows leaped, following the flames, receding and advancing like playful beasts. Far above us was a single tiny opening through which the smoke was sucked as through a chimney. The glow ruddied the men's features. Outside was thick

darkness, and the swish and rush and roar of rising waters. Listening, Windy Bill was reminded of a story. We leaned back comfortably against the sloping walls of the cave, thrust our feet toward the blaze, smoked, and hearkened to the tale of Windy Bill.

There's a tur'ble lot of water running loose here, but I've seen the time and place where even what is in that drip would be worth a gold mine. That was in the emigrant days. They used to come over south of here, through what they called Emigrant Pass, on their way to Californy. I was a kid then, about eighteen year old, and what I didn't know about Injins and Agency cattle wasn't a patch of alkali. I had a kid outfit of h'ar bridle, lots of silver and such, and I used to ride over and be the handsome boy before such outfits as happened along.

They were queer people, most of 'em from Missoury and such-like southern seaports, and they were tur'ble sick of travel by the time they come in sight of Emigrant Pass. Up to Santa Fe they mostly hiked along any old way, but once there they herded up together in bunches of twenty wagons or so, 'count of our old friends, Geronimo and Loco. A good many of 'em had horned cattle to their wagons, and they crawled along about two miles an hour, hotter'n hell with the blower on, nothin' to look at but a mountain a week way, chuck full of alkali, plenty of sage-brush and rattlesnakes—but mighty little water.

Why, you boys know that country down there. Between the Chiricahua Mountains and Emigrant Pass it's maybe a three or four days' journey for these yere bull-slingers. Mostly they filled up their bellies and their kegs, hoping to last through, but they sure found it drier than cork legs, and generally long before they hit the Springs their tongues was hangin' out a foot. You see, for all their plumb nerve in comin' so far, the most of them didn't know sic 'em. They were plumb innocent in regard to savin' their water, and Injins, and such; and the long-haired buckskin fakes they picked up at Santa Fe for guides wasn't much better.

That was where Texas Pete made his killing.

Texas Pete was a tough citizen from the Lone Star. He was about as broad as he was long, and wore all sorts of big whiskers and black eyebrows. His heart was very bad. You never COULD tell where Texas Pete was goin' to jump next. He was a side-winder and a diamond-back and a little black rattlesnake all rolled into one. I believe that Texas Pete person cared about as little for killin' a man as for takin' a drink—and he shorely drank without an effort. Peaceable citizens just spoke soft and minded their own business; onpeaceable citizens Texas Pete used to plant out in the sagebrush.

Now this Texas Pete happened to discover a water hole right out in the plumb middle of the desert. He promptly annexed said water hole, digs her out, timbers her up, and lays for emigrants.

He charged two bits a head—man or beast—and nobody got a mouthful till he paid up in hard coin.

Think of the wads he raked in! I used to figure it up, just for the joy of envyin' him, I reckon. An average twentywagon outfit, first and last, would bring him in somewheres