

QUARTZ HILL

BY STEVEN DEAY

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A work of fiction

Buck O'Malley was new to French Gulch, a mining town in Northern California. There were a few in town, however, who wanted nothing more than to put a noose around his neck for making fools of them and for the gold he carried on him.

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Chapter 1

Buck O'Malley was new to French Gulch, a mining town in Northern California. Buck got his name at 10 years old when he shot his first buck. His real name was Emery and he came from Kansas.

Throughout his life, Buck had learned of the western hospitality and easygoing folks. He respected the limits of the west. There were a few in town however who wanted nothing more than to put a noose around his neck for making fools of them and for the gold he carried on him. Once he got wind of this he promptly left town by way of seldom-used trails.

He was riding a beautiful black horse that was good in any situation and he used it now. These boys had been drinking and were ready for just about anything. Of course they didn't know the type of man they were up against. The black horse sensing something in his rider quickened his step. He took off on a dead run. No horse could beat Blacky. After a while Buck started using tactics he learned from the Indians to hide his tracks. At least for the moment he was sure he had lost them, but they would pick up his trail again.

The big black horse could hang in for quite a spell. He had good staying power. By the time his escape was sure, Buck was fifteen miles from water. He had crossed Clear Creek and Crystal Creek was back toward the west. There was nothing but

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mountains. Shasta lay too far to the east for now. He headed for the Trinity River to the west. By the time he got there his throat was parched and his horse drank greedily. He had to pull him back. Behind him the men from French Gulch had found his trail. They probably had full canteens and didn't need to stop at every water hole. He could follow the Trinity to Weaverville or turn east and head for Shasta. Neither one sounded good at the moment.

He thought of hiding all his gold, but chose to play it close to the vest. Let them come; shy to a gun battle he was not. He had killed a few men. All in fair fights. He wouldn't consider himself a fast draw artist, but he was. His six-gun was like an extension of his arm. He just pointed and fired and usually he hit where he aimed.

He decided to bed down for the night. When his shelter was finished with some thatched pine boughs, he went inside. He thought he could get away with a small fire. He was cold and miserable. He was hungry and took out some hardtack and beef jerky to eat. It wasn't much, but he had plenty of it

Several hours later he heard a noise. It wasn't the sound of the forest or any animal. This sound he knew. It was the sound of a rider coming. His lean-to was back off the trail and deep into the trees. For a long time there was no other noise, just the branches moving in the wind. Then he heard it again, this time closer. Behind him his horse pricked it's ears at the sound. This told him he wasn't just imagining it. His camp was good. He had picked a spot with good vision on three sides. Rising a little he looked over the knoll.

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When he saw them through the trees, he saw three tired men. He recognized one of them as one of the men following him from French Gulch. They were walking their horses and following his tracks looking for him.

He pulled his Winchester 30-30 close to him. It was new. He paid for it with his gold, which may have got these thieves on to him.

He was well hidden and had no notion of moving. They could pass within ten feet of him and not see him. You can't be too careful with this type around and he was used to keeping a gun to hand. Buck could see them through a gap in the trees. One was wearing a buckskin jacket that he recognized. The other one was wearing the gray coat of a confederate. He only saw them for a second or two through the trees, and then they were out of sight. So he just sat back and waited. He knew they couldn't see him. At one point they would be no more than twenty yards from him, so he kept his Winchester at hand.

He was at a place he didn't know. A river he didn't know. Behind him was the Trinity River. To the left was thick brush and to the right the trail they must follow. So he waited. He would be able to get through the brush on his left easy enough, but with more noise than he wanted to make, but if he had to that would be his escape plan.

He was fairly new to the West from Kansas and even newer to this part of California. He had found gold outside of French Gulch and he wasn't giving it up without a fight. He worked too hard for it. It was his stake for a ranch. When he had been younger in Kansas; he'd take nothing from no one. He met fist with fist and later

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gun with gun. That's why he left, but it was this wide-open land he felt was home and no one was driving him out. It was a land he had come to love.

The three men came around the bend in the trail. As he looked, he recognized all three as the ones he made fools of in the saloon. They were looking to get even and pick up some gold as a bonus.

He hid behind a fallen log and some rocks that gave him good cover and a better field of fire. He felt no bad feelings about shooting them. These men were here to shoot and to rob him. As they drew closer on the trail they made an easy shot for him. They stopped and talked for a while. He eased out from his position and headed towards them. He was mindful always of his step. If you step on wet leaves you won't be heard.

"Skip", he said, just loud enough to be heard. They turned around so fast you would have thought a mountain lion had just snuck up on them. Skip was a thin man about six feet tall. He stood there measuring him up. You see, none of them knew anything about neither him nor he them, but he paid more attention to Skip. He had a tied down six-shooter in the style of a quick draw artist. What they were seeing when they looked at him wasn't much. He weighed around 185 pounds in worn out jeans, a squaw-made jacket from a Wintu Indian woman and a battered black hat, but his Winchester was new and his six gun in excellent working order. Buck had the face of a man who had seen his share of trouble. He was a man use to hard times and little loving.

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He had heard the names of the other two men in the saloon. George Tanner was spending his time with a saloon gal named Annette and he believed the other guy's name was Vince something.

Buck's Winchester was cocked and aimed at the breast pocket of Skip's chest. He knew he could take two, but he wasn't sure about the third. Then it happened... Skip made his move and Buck fired. Skip was dead before he hit the ground. He cocked his rifle and swung on George. George took his in the brisket before he cleared leather. He turned towards Vince who had his gun cleared and aimed right at him and Buck had his aimed right at Vince. "The gold is hidden and you are never going to find it", Buck told Vince. "You can take your friend and go or you can try your luck. Either way you lose. You may shoot me, but I am going to shoot you too." George spoke up for the first time. "Vince, forget it. You got to get me to a doctor." Vince looked down at George. They had traveled many trails together. Slowly he lowered his arm and holstered his gun. Buck helped put George in the saddle and they headed off. He hoped they'd make it back to town before George died. As they left he gave a sigh of relief. It was over now.

Buck decided to head west up the mountains toward Weaverville. There was a Wells Fargo bank there where he could off load his gold. He would feel a lot better once he got rid of all of his gold. He had about two thousand dollars worth. He planned to buy ranch land with it.

He had his gold, a good horse, and time to kill. When he finally got to Weaverville, he headed straight for the Wells Fargo bank. He deposited his money and

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kept a couple of hundred for himself. He needed a new set of cloths, so he bought himself a new hat, jacket, shirt, and a pair of blue jeans. Best of all, he bought a new pair of boots. His army issue boots were threadbare. He headed for the saloon for a drink and maybe he would find a card game. His mood was happy, things looked good indeed. The poker game was just a way to kill time in a new town. The game was five-card draw. As time went by he won some pots and lost some. The night progressed slowly and he drew nothing very good. He was up about ten dollars and was ready to call it a night when things changed.

Buck O'Malley was a man who knew cards inside and out. He could bottom deal or second deal or even shift the cut. He knew all the tricks, but for all that he was an honest player and he was playing an honest game tonight. He had money and wasn't looking to make a big score. He was just killing some time.

He was dealt a king, then another and then another. He discarded two cards and was given two tens for a full house. The pot was pretty good too and no one said anything. The following hand went much the same as before. He collected another nice pot. This time a man named Mervin, and a local here commented on the hand. He gave Buck a long look and said, "You were lucky again." Buck decided to call it a night and said as much to the boys around the table. Mervin gave him an odd look. Then he and a man named Larry exchanged a look.

"You won quite a lot of our money, stranger. Aren't you going to give us a chance to win some of it back?" asked Larry. Buck said, "I'm pretty tired and I've a long

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ride ahead of me tomorrow, but I will play another few hands.” He had a gut feeling that warned him he should get out soon, while he still could, but the dealing had already started. He was dealt two fives. He put in a few dollars and planned to lose this hand and maybe one other. However; on the draw he got two more fives. He could not believe his luck. He made an anguished look. The others saw this and raised the bet, but Larry drew to four threes and lost the pot. Next Buck drew three sixes and two eights and won again. A man named Tyson decided to try his hand with a gun instead of cards. Buck placed two holes over his heart before he drew his gun. You could have placed a silver dollar over the holes.

It was a fair shooting and everyone saw it that way. However, Tyson was a local and well liked and none of the other players wanted to see all that money leave Weaverville.

A small posse formed around O’Malley and they decided to hang him. His hands were bound behind him. Bottles of whiskey were passed around and everyone drank to their decision to hang the stranger. Many toasts were made and the town’s people led him out to his horse and down the road to a selected oak tree.

They hadn’t bothered to take his Winchester or search his saddlebags. After all, his hands were tied behind him and they were only going a quarter mile from town.

Buck didn’t miss many opportunities and he wasn’t about to miss one now. Once upon his horse he began to work his fingers and wrists to loosen his bound hands. He

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was no stranger to hangings, having seen a few up close before. He had no intention of letting these fools hang him now. He wasn't going to be the main attraction tonight.

First he got a few fingers loose. Then he was able to wrench his hands loose and free. At the same time he spurred his big black horse in the sides. Blacky took off like a bullet. Buck grabbed his Winchester and fired a few shots behind him. He was off and running into the night. He was safe for now.

Buck headed back east toward Shasta. He would make it there by mid-day. From there he decided to head south to Red Bluff. There he would look for ranch land.

He rode ten miles before he rested and let his horse drink. He wanted to put a few miles more behind him before he rested down and made camp.

He made it a few more miles before he saw a fire going in the distance. As he approached he saw it was wagons. There were two covered wagons with oxen on both teams and three saddle horses, a couple of cows and about eight people in all. The lead wagon was leaning to one side with a broken wheel.

He beat dust from his body with his hat and headed in. He was dressed nicely and appeared well off. He didn't look like just another drifter, so he hoped for a friendly meal. He decided to be himself, bold and in control.

He never missed an opportunity and he needed that now in case any of those guys from Weaverville had decided to follow him here. He doubted that any had. They were drunk at the time and once he got away, their party ended. They did however get a lot of his cash and he sure could use a little stake until he could cash his Wells Fargo check.

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He was a sentimentalist to the core and that is why with all his knowledge of cards and crookery, he was a gentleman in the best sense of the word, but he kept it well hidden and to himself as much as possible. When the occasion arose to deal harshly with someone or some situation, he did so ruthlessly and with no qualms.

He had a glib tongue and a gift for dealing with any situation. He was also gifted with an excellent memory of mostly useless information.

Buck rode into their camp and shouted “hello to the camp”, which was customary. As he approached he hoped he didn’t look just like another drifter. He needed the edge here if at all possible. For a meal and a safe haven for the night, he would help them fix their wheel. He needed their gun power just in case he was followed.

When he drew near he noticed there were only two men, two teenage boys, three women and one child.

Taking off his hat in a sweeping motion, he asked, “Can I be of some service?” One of the men spoke up. “Our wheel is broken”. He was about forty years old with yellow hair, a strong jaw and well-shaped body. “We can fix it, but we need help”. Buck stepped gladly from the saddle. He noticed a large barrel for storing water and could smell bacon frying. He was glad he had stopped.

“Are you going to the mines?” he asked. “That is where we are going, yes, if we can fix this wagon. We can offer you food and drink for your help mister, but we have little else.”

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His plan of getting a stake from these people left Buck. They needed what little they had and he would be okay until he reached the Wells-Fargo bank.

His stomach growled for food and water. Salvation was here for a day or two while he helped them fix the wagon. His eyes fell upon one of the women. He averted his eyes quickly. Then his eyes fell upon the water barrel. "Do you mind?" he asked. "Help yourself," said one of the men. Buck strolled over to the water. He drank deep. It sure tasted good. One of the women brought over a plate full of bacon, beans and bread. "Thank you, ma'm," he said.

He ate slowly savoring his meal. These were good folks and he was happy to help them. He usually stayed away from people like these. Trouble just naturally followed him.

After he ate, he filled his hat with water and took it to Blacky. His horse drank gladly. He filled it one more time for his horse and put away the gourd.

"Are you headed for Shasta", he asked. "Yes", one of the men said. "We are planning to look for gold around that area. We've heard of many strikes there. We had a small plot of land west of Weaverville, but we couldn't make much off the land there, so we decided to try the mines. We plan to stake a claim there.

"My Uncle Pete, one of the men said, has a claim there and said we should try our luck. Land is cheap and we have a small stake."

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Buck started telling them about his trouble in Weaverville. He wasn't going to at first, but these were good people. They all were listening to him except the younger woman. She looked at him disdainfully, with cool calculating eyes.

He walked to the water again. He drank from the gourd. He walked back and finished his story. They all looked at him a little differently now. They had forgotten their troubles for the moment. He knew their imaginations would add to the story he told.

One of the women went to get coffee. She came back and passed around coffee to the men. It tasted wonderful. Thick and black, just the way he liked it.

The woman with the disdainful eyes asked, "That's all very exciting mister, but have you brought trouble to us by being here?" He looked at her across the fire. She was beautiful. "No," he said. "It is very unlikely any of them have come after me. If they do, I will handle them." She didn't care for this stranger.

These were simple folks with the bare supplies needed for their travels, some equipment, their weapons, the animals and their wagons.

They all clung to the dream of land and riches in the gold mines, but they needed their wagon fixed first and he would give them a hand with that in the morning. He could tell that they were used to hardships.

The heat and dust of the many miles they had traveled had robbed them of their strength for the time being, but after a good night's sleep they would be okay. Their stock had taken a beating coming over the Trinity Mountain range as well. Through it all

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though, they had hope of better days just ahead. Once they reached Shasta in just a day or two all would be good for them.

As they talked into the night he told them of a valley just outside of Shasta where Clear Creek was. It would be good land for their stock and they were mining all around there. It was about twenty miles as the crow flies from where they were. They had mountains to pass before they got there. He drew them a detailed map of the area.

“It is close to French Gulch,” he said. People were doing well all along Clear Creek and this would put them east of French Gulch and west of Shasta with plenty of good land. He also told them of the gold found in the upper Sacramento River. There were a few little towns between Shasta and Dunsmuir on the Sacramento River where they were also finding gold.

Later on, Buck took a few minutes to brush his horse down. Then he gave him another hat full of water. He spent time wiping the action of his Winchester. His arms were still sore where the ropes had been tied around his wrist.

He had a spare .44 he kept in his saddlebags. He cleaned it and holstered it to replace the one that was taken by those friendly boys in Weaverville.

He thought of Red Bluff. He wanted to find a place to settle down and do a little ranching. He also thought of towns like Sacramento, Jackson, Nevada City, and others where he could ranch and also mine a little.

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He wasn't sure where he wanted to go; he only knew he wanted to settle down somewhere. Not in town, but a few miles outside of town. He knew Red Bluff was good for ranching and farming, so was Sacramento.

He would make his mind up soon, but first he needed to help these people out. He decided to bed down for the night. He picked a spot outside of camp beneath some trees with a good field of vision on all sides.

He awoke the next morning to the smell of bacon frying. He couldn't remember anything smelling so good. He rolled up his bedroll and grabbed his saddle and went to his horse. Blacky nudged him when he came over. Buck wished he had a carrot for him. He rubbed him down a little and put his saddle on. Then he tied his bedroll behind the saddle. He put his Winchester in its scabbard.

He walked over to the fire and got a cup of coffee and one of the women, Martha, brought him a plate of bacon, potatoes and bread. It tasted great....

After breakfast the men talked of the best way to fix the wagon. First they would have to unload it so one side could be lifted to put the wheel back on. They thought they could get away with not replacing the axle. It took half the day to fix and reload the wagon, but they did a good job and it should hold up until they got to Shasta, or they could stop in French Gulch and get a new axle there.

They asked Buck if he was going to travel with them or would be going on alone. He could make better time on his own, but the thought of good food for the next couple

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of days was tempting. He decided what the hell, I'll get there soon enough and they had been good to him. He would travel with them.

They made slow time traveling and arrived in French Gulch late the following day. He stopped a couple of miles from town. "I'll leave you here," he said. "Nothing good can come of me going into town with you." He wished them good luck and turned away. He headed off east again. He would make it to Shasta in a few hours.

About eleven miles east of Shasta, quite a few people were living in Redding. They were spread throughout the area. Some were mining the river; some mining streams around the area and others were ranching. Buck could not quite decide where he wanted to settle down at; maybe he might just drift for a while.

Chapter 2

He made it to Shasta early in the evening. The Wells Fargo was closed. He had enough for a meal and a room at the hotel. He was pretty tired, but he was hungrier than he thought. He went into the restaurant and had their special—Venison and beans. It was good. After he ate, he went to his room. He would sleep well tonight. He awoke at first light. He didn't have enough for breakfast so he decided to wait for the bank to open. He would get a couple of hundred dollars. He needed money for meals and supplies for the road. Plus he needed another .44 for his saddlebags. He went to his horse and got some jerky to eat while he waited for the bank to open.

The bank opened promptly at eight o'clock. He went to the teller and handed him his check from Weaverville. He told him to give him two hundred dollars and a check for the rest. The teller said he would have to wire Weaverville first. He had to wait 45 minutes for the bank to answer. Once he got his money he went back to the hotel to eat. He was ravenous. After breakfast he went down to the supply store and general market. He was able to get another .44 and a box of shells, plus the supplies he needed. He decided then to check out the rest of the town.

Morning came to Shasta with an orange light in the eastern sky and bouncing off the brick buildings. The signs that lined the street were almost glowing in the light.

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The town was coming alive with people going here and there. Far up the street a rider came into view, and then turned off on another street. It was a nice quiet little town, but he knew this wasn't the town for him. He would head east to the Sacramento River and follow it south. He wanted to first go to Red Bluff and perhaps after that go on to Sacramento.

He was a man used to hardship and He had a man's hard judgment. There were many long, long miles behind him. Riding with only his horse and his gun for companionship. Bitter days lay behind him.

There was a will within him. He had always loved the land and rich soil of the West and that was where he wanted to live. He still remembered those long miles to the east where it was dry and lonely and stretched on for miles on end.

Now that he was here in the West, he could think of no other place he would like to be. This was land a man could come to love and he planned to stay here for the rest of his life.

He headed out of town around ten o'clock in the morning. He was in no hurry to get anywhere soon. He would take it slow and enjoy the land he traveled. To the east were plains for a couple of miles before you headed back up the hills. Susanville lay to the east over the mountains.

Chapter 3

He had no family west of Kansas. There were quite a few O'Malleys in Southeastern Kansas. They were farmers and ranchers, but he couldn't go back there. As he rode he thought of where he was going. He really had no plan. He was just drifting, but he knew what he wanted. He had a knack for mining. He had been lucky so far. Maybe he could find gold again.

He rode into Redding later that day. He rode to the stable and for two bits he put Blacky in a stall and gave him some oats. Blacky loved it when he got oats.

He strolled into town in look of a place to eat. One of the saloons offered eggs and venison for four bits. It was mighty good too. He drank plenty of coffee along with his meal. One thing he liked was good black coffee.

At the next table a couple of miners were talking of gold found on a creek that ran into the Sacramento River northwest of town. He listened as they talked and got a general idea of where they were talking about. They were working a creek off Quartz Hill. That was just a few miles away.

He decided he would give mining another chance. He could use a bigger stake for his ranch and he was in no big hurry. He wasn't even sure where he wanted to settle down.

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There was a general store here that sold mining equipment and supplies. He asked around and found a man with a few mules to sell. He needed one for supplies. He would need quite a few things to start mining again. He was also able to find a man who could draw him a map of Quartz Hill and the surrounding area.

At the supply store he bought shovels, a pick, a gold pan, a crow bar and various other things he would need to begin mining again. He had a good feeling about this. If he could find a little gold again he could be able to purchase many cows for his ranch.

After he got his supplies, he headed off northwest towards Quartz Hill. He found it easy enough. He headed down the north slope of the hill to the creek below. He didn't see any sign of them where he was.

He started panning the creek and found a little color. He was impressed in what he found. These were flakes and small nuggets with jagged edges, which told him he wasn't far from where the flakes were coming from.

He sat back and pondered his situation. He rolled a smoke and took a long drag. He figured he was close to where the gold was. He wondered if it was just a pocket or a vein. If it was a pocket he could only hope for a pound or two of gold, but if it was a vein he could stand to make a nice amount of money.

He decided to make camp to the north and pan a little there before he lost the light of day. He took his shovel and gold pan up the creek. He walked about a mile up before

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putting his pan in the creek. After a few pans he got a little color. He found what he was looking for. The edges of the flakes were smooth. This told him the gold had traveled quite a ways from the source. This also told him he would find the spot where the gold came from at his camp. Between here and there his source area was only one mile long. He headed back to camp for some more coffee.

He built up his fire a little and made a lean-to out of pine boughs. He put his bedroll down and used his saddle for a pillow. It got hot here in the summer, but the nights cooled off considerably

He decided he would work the stream all the way up to his marker. Once he found the source he would go into Redding and file his claim. He was confident he would find the source of the flakes. He was getting enough color to justify working the stream all the way up.

He had found a few old boards on his walk and thought he could make a crude sluice box out of them, but he would need some nails first. He decided he would go into Redding first thing in the morning.

He awoke at first light and saddled Blacky for his ride into town. He made breakfast and coffee and then left for town. He went directly to the general store. He got everything he needed to make his sluice box, including a new piece of wood for the bottom. He headed back to his camp. Once he got here, he sat out to build his sluice. It was crude, but it would work okay. Bedrock here was sandstone and very close to the surface. This meant he didn't have to move much sand and stone.

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He sat back and rolled a smoke. He studied the stream for a moment. He was going to work an eddy. By looking at the water line from when the water was high in winter gave him an idea of where best to work. He spent some time blocking off the water flow to the area he wanted to work so it wasn't moving so fast.

He spent the next few hours working the stream by his camp. Moving big rocks and working the sand. After a while he checked his sluice box. There was some nice color there and a few small nuggets. He kept working. As the day went on he found more and more gold.

After a week and a half he had gathered quite a bit of gold. It wasn't a fortune, but a nice little bit. Still he hadn't found his source yet. He was about a quarter mile up the creek from his camp. He knew he was getting close just by the way the flakes and nuggets were jagged around the edges.

He decided to call it a day and head back to camp. He left his sluice behind because he decided to move his camp. He wanted to find a better site. He always kept his Winchester close to hand while he was working the stream. He had to stay alert for any sound. Anyone could come upon him easy enough.

Once back at camp he loaded his mule down and saddled Blacky. He headed back up stream. When he got there he made a fire and put coffee on to boil. Buck brought fuel to the fire and went off into the setting sun to strip his mule and take the

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saddle off Blacky. He made a new lean-to and brought his supplies over. The coffee smelled good. While sitting drinking his coffee and having a smoke, he thought of how lucky he had been so far.

He had liked French Gulch, but he couldn't go back there now. Folks would not have forgotten Buck O'Malley. They would remember. He had enough trouble in his past. All he wanted now was to be left alone.

The next morning he awoke and built a fire. He heard the sound of approaching horses. They yelled "hello the camp." He told them to come on in. He had the loop of his .44 off just in case of trouble.

Two men rode into his camp. These were big men riding two sorrel horses. One was about 45-50 years old and the other looked to be in his 20's. "My name is John O'Hare," the older one said "and this is my son, Shawn. We have a mine a mile and a half up stream." "My name is Buck," he answered. "Sit a spell and have some coffee."

These seemed like good folks to Buck. He found a couple of other cups. "We're headed into town," John said. "How would you like to come up to the house for supper tonight?" "That would be nice," Buck answered. "A man gets awful tired of his own cookin'.

They talked for a while about mining and then they went on their way. Buck felt good about these men. They were hard working folks, honest folks.

He decided to get an early jump on the day. He took his shovel and crowbar to the creek. He set up his sluice box and went to work trying to move a boulder in the

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middle of the stream. He worked steady until noon and only then did he take a break. He was impressed by what he found in his pan and in his sluice. He noticed that some of the little nuggets were encrusted on quartz. The quartz was crumbly and broke off easily in his hand. This was exciting in itself because it most likely meant he was looking for a vein of quartz and not just a pocket of gold.

He sat back and rolled another smoke. He knew the vein could be at bedrock or at the topsoil, but he thought it most likely was towards the topsoil and had broke off during the rainy season when the water level was higher. He worked until about four o'clock and decided to stop and clean up for dinner with the O'Hares.

He took a bath in the creek and then saddled up Blacky. It only took him a little while to find the O'Hare mine. They had built the place up quite a bit. They had a barn, a stone house and a small orchard of apples and pears. They had also dug a well. They were here to stay.

There were six of them, two men, two women and two children. The women put together a good meal. They had venison stew, freshly made bread with butter and for dessert, fresh apple pie. This was a fine meal and he complimented the women on it.

They asked him if he would like to see the mine before it got dark. This was quite an operation they had going here. They had three entrances to the mine. One went back sixty feet, they said, one went back forty feet and the new one was just being started. They were using dynamite to blow away the quartz and other rock. They had a smelter also.

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Buck was very impressed by what he saw. The O'Hares were making a good living here. They told him how the veins kept shifting on them. Buck found himself telling them how he was doing. They all agreed it was a good area for gold. Buck liked these people, but more importantly, he trusted them.

As he rode back to camp, he was glad he had the O'Hares for neighbors. He didn't know the two guys to the south of him, but he was sure he would meet them soon enough. He figured they were about a mile to the south of him, but he wasn't sure.

When he got back to camp, he rustled up a little more dry wood for the fire and put the coffee pot on to boil.

Buck squatted over the fire. It was nice and quiet out. Somewhere a quail spoke to the night. He thought he would build a more permanent place to live once he staked his claim. He figured another week of working the stream would be enough to find the vein. Then he would ride to Redding and file his claim.

He had another cup of coffee and a smoke. Then he laid down and took a deep breath of fresh air. He lay very still planning the days to come. He would work the stream tomorrow down to bedrock, which wasn't far. There was only a foot or so to the sandstone bottom. He was taking in a good little amount of gold. He was very impressed in what he found so far. He had about a pound of gold already. Not a lot, but still impressive.

The next few days went by slowly with Buck taking more and more flakes and nuggets from the stream. He was close to the source of the gold. He could feel it. He

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worked an eddy in the creek and pulled out a boulder. He found a pocket of gold there. He stopped for a while to check his sluice. There was more gold there. All had jagged edges. He was close. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon.

He decided to quit for the day and look for the vein. He had worked about three quarters of a mile from his first campsite. He knew he was close. He could taste it. He expanded a little up stream and found a little color, but these flakes were smooth from travel, so he marked the spot. Next he marked the spot where he hit the pocket.

Tomorrow he would look for the vein. He knew it was just a matter of finding the outcropping of quartz, but he didn't have any luck looking for it on either side of the

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creek. Tomorrow he would block the creek off some so the water was diverted. He knew he was close.

He went back to camp and set about to fixing his supper. He put the coffee on to boil. He went and got some more wood for the fire. Then he sliced some venison and bacon in the pan. He shot a buck a few days back and had it hanging from a tree. He cut a couple of nice steaks.

He sat back and rolled a smoke and took a long drag. Tomorrow would be the day. He would find the outcropping. He was excited. All his hard work was about to pay off, but then the real work would kick in.

He would need to pick up some supplies when he went into town. He also planned to take his gold to the assayer's office. He would do that first. He also planned

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to have a nice meal at the hotel. His cooking was not to be desired, but the venison was good.

He laid back on his bedroll and smoked. Tomorrow he would see what he could find. He felt good about his outcome. He would find the outcropping he was sure. He threw his smoke into the fire and laid back. He was asleep in just a few minutes.

Chapter 4

Daybreak found him making a fire and putting coffee on to boil. He saddled up the mule and Blacky. He decided to follow the creek south and meet the guys working the creek below him. He found them a little more than a mile south of his first campsite. He yelled "Hello the camp." They told him to come on in slowly. He approached the camp in plain sight. He introduced himself and they looked at each other. "You're the one that had that trouble in French Gulch aren't you?" "It was a fair shooting," Buck said. "Yeah, that's what we heard from a fellow in town the other day that was there."

These guys seemed okay to him. They were brothers working the stream. They said they were working south to where another stream connected to this one. They had also met the O'Hare family. These were just hard working boys. He invited them to come by for coffee and venison later. They said, "Thank yah, we will."

He headed off again towards town. He would be there early, just around eight o'clock. He would go to the assayer's office first, the bank and then, afterwards, he would go buy his supplies.

At the assayer's office they weighed his gold. It was just over a pound. At thirty-four dollars an ounce, he collected about five hundred and fifty dollars. Next he went to the Wells-Fargo and deposited most of the money. Then he went to the hotel for steak

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and eggs. It was a fine meal, too. Shirley was a good waitress who kept the coffee coming. When he had finished his meal, he headed to the supply store and bought his supplies. Some flour, a side of cured ham and bacon, coffee and tobacco. Once he had the mule loaded he headed off towards his camp.

It looked as though it was going to rain. May showers can be heavy. He was half way back to camp before the rain started. He found some pine trees to stand under and wait for the rain to stop. He rolled a cigarette and got off Blacky. He squatted on his heels in the rain and struck a match under his hat brim. The match flared and he leaned in and cupped the flame with his hand and lit his smoke. He took a long drag, savoring the taste. A noise in the brush warned him a minute before a voice spoke. Buck straightened up slowly releasing the loop of his .44. His gun was ready to hand. He had no enemies here that he knew of, but he had to be careful. He was cautious turning around in case his action was misunderstood.

Through the rain, he could see a big man, powerfully built. He couldn't make out any details of the man he faced and he could see even less of Buck. Blacky snorted in the background. He had his hat pulled down covering his face, with the rain pouring off it.

"You like to sneak up on people, mister?" "That's a good way to die. Yeah, it's a wet day for anyone to die." Just then lightning flashed and he could see more of the man. Buck recognized him from French Gulch.

"That was a friend of mine you killed back at French Gulch. I come to settle the score." He stated. "You don't have to do this." Buck said. "No one needs to die today." "That's

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not the way I see it. We rode many trails together. Now the trail ends here with you.”

Buck was ready. The man was talking as he went for his gun. They both cleared leather about the same time. Buck got shot in the left arm as he put a bullet in the big man’s chest. He staggered back and his hand lowered. Buck stood there with his gun aimed at his breast pocket. The big man took a step forward and raised his gun. Buck shot him through the heart.

Buck stripped the gun belt off the big man and slung it over the saddle horn of Blacky. He took the time to pile rocks over the body so the animals wouldn’t get to him. He felt bad about shooting the man, but what could he do?

He gathered Blacky and the mule and headed back to camp. His arm hurt like hell and he needed to clean it up. He wasn’t hurt too bad. The bullet had gone clean through his upper arm, but it was bleeding badly.

He got to camp around four in the afternoon. The Tift brothers would be here soon for the meal he promised them. He didn’t want them to know what happened, but he was sure they heard the shots.

They rode into camp just around four-thirty. He told them to sit and have some coffee. “We heard shots, what happened?” So while Buck was frying steaks he told them about the man who rode up on him about a half-mile back. He was a friend of the guy in French Gulch and had followed Buck from town.

Eli remarked, "Let me have a look at that wound. I was a medic in the war." Buck took off his shirt and the bandages he had made. Eli put some water on to boil. It

had stopped raining a little while before. He used a clean cloth and put boiling water on both sides of the wound. He then added a liberal amount of antiseptic powder on both sides and bandaged the wound. It wasn't too bad, but would be sore as hell for a while.

The men had a good meal of venison steaks, ham, pan bread and coffee. Buck had a bottle of whiskey and brought it out for them. He filled their cups and they talked about mining for a while. These were good men and he was glad of the neighbors he had on both sides of him.

The Tift brothers left about seven-thirty and headed back to their camp. Buck had another cup of coffee and thought of tomorrow. He had a lot of work to do to find his source. He needed to change the course of the water on the left side of the creek so the water level would go down. He would do that first thing in the morning. Buck lay down and was asleep shortly there after.

The following day Buck awoke early. His arm was stiff and sore, but a little work would loosen it up some. He started a fire and put coffee on and started breakfast. He thought of the creek and what he had to do today. He had a lot of work ahead of him. He would block the creek on the left bank because he was sure he would find what he was looking for there.

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He went to his marker and started blocking the creek with rocks and boulders. He left enough water running on the right side to work his sluice box. Once he had the creek shifted enough, he took a break and had a smoke. His arm burned like hell, but it was loosening up some. He would get through it okay.

Next he started panning and shoveling dirt into his sluice box a little ways up from his marker down stream. He found some good color and after moving a boulder in the creek, he found some nice nuggets with quartz attached to it. The quartz was crumbly in his fingers.

He moved a little farther upstream. He was excited now. He was close; he was about twenty feet south of the eddy. He was pulling dirt from the bank as well as dirt, sand and rocks from the creek. He was on top of it. He knew he was. He didn't find anything from the bank, but he did find some color from the creek.

He moved up to the eddy and started working there. He worked a boulder loose from the creek and found more nuggets with quartz in them.

The gold will work down stream until a rock or a boulder stops it. It will work its way around to the front of the stone and sink in the sand. That is what he was finding here, little pockets of gold.

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He studied the eddy real close, but he couldn't find the outcropping of quartz. He rolled a smoke. He lit a match and cuffed his hand, then took a long drag. It was here, he knew it was here. Buck was about two-thirds of the way through the eddy when he found what he was looking for. It was about a foot down from topsoil. He didn't see it at first because some moss was growing there. He was working from the topsoil down. Once he stripped away the topsoil, he caught a glimpse of quartz. Buck took his crow bar and broke off a piece of the quartz.

There was a type of gold on it they call spider web or jewelers gold. You can almost peel it off in your hand. The quartz was crumbly and broke easily. Now he was very excited indeed. The vein didn't seem too wide and appeared to slant down in the ground from its exit point. There wasn't much gold on the quartz that he held in his hand, but still he was excited. He had found what he was looking for.

Chapter 5

Buck decided to spend the rest of the day moving his camp and marking off his claim site. He would go into Redding first thing in the morning and stake his claim legally. He sat back and rolled a smoke. He could relax now. He had found his gold. Now if he could just stay away from trouble long enough to mine it. Trouble just naturally found him.

He would have to kill another deer before too long, but right now he had gold on his mind. He contemplated the days to come. He wished he had a partner to help him out now that he had found what he was looking for.

He lay down on his bedroll and smoked for a while. He was going to end up with enough for a ranch, he was sure of it. There was plenty of grass here for a few head of cattle and plenty of water, but too many hills unless he fenced them in. He could do that of course. He would give it some thought.

Buck woke up first thing in the morning and built a small fire. He could be back from town by ten-thirty if he hurried. He saddled up Blacky and headed off towards

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town. Once he got there he filed his claim. Now it was his legally. He headed back to camp. Once he got back to camp he picketed Blacky and the mule next to where he would be working. Blacky would warn him if anyone were coming

He went to work on the vein of quartz. It didn't slant too much at first. After about fifteen feet it took a dive down. He worked through out the day on that first fifteen feet. What he found was exciting. Spiderweb gold was all over the quartz.

He stopped for the day and took his gold to a sandstone shelf. There with a hammer he broke loose the gold. There was gold in his sluice box also. He had had a good day.

He put all his gold in a bag. He didn't know how much he had gotten out of it so far, but it was a nice start. He set about fixing his supper. Pan bread, ham and bacon. Again he ate in silence thinking of what he had to do tomorrow. His arm was throbbing a little, but he was okay. It was healing nicely. In a few days it would be a lot better.

The next day he was at it again with pick, shovel, and crow bar and throwing it all in his sluice box. The sluice box would hold the heavier stones and the sand and gravel would wash out, leaving mostly gold and quartz.

He worked for four hours straight without a break. When he did stop for a smoke he checked what he had found. There was plenty of quartz rock and quite a bit of gold.

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The gold vein wasn't very thick, but it was pure gold. All you had to do was break off the quartz and you had your gold.

He heard the riders coming before he saw them. He drew his .44 and his Winchester was close to hand. They yelled "Hello the camp." It was the O'Hare's on their way to town. He called them in.

They talked for a while and he showed them a piece of the quartz with gold on it. They were impressed too. They asked how the vein was running and he told them it was going down. That makes hard work of it. They asked how his arm was. He said it was okay. The Tift boys must have told them of his trouble. They sat there drinking coffee for a while. Then they headed off to town. He said to stop by any time.

He went back to work on what can only now be called a mine entrance. He had to dig around the rock as well as the quartz just to get at it. He worked until four o'clock and called it quits. He was tired and sore. He went back to his camp. He went to the sluice box and gathered all the quartz. Then he went to his sandstone ledge and started separating the gold from the quartz.

Buck finished around six-thirty. It was still plenty light out. He was starving. He decided to take a dip in the creek before he ate. Right in front of his camp the water was about four feet deep. There were pockets like this all over the area, but most of the creek was only sixteen inches deep.

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As he bathed he cleaned his wound again. It was looking good. No infection. He rewrapped the wound. Then he decided to fix himself some dinner. As he cooked he tried to figure out how much gold he had. He had quite a bit from the last couple of days.

Buck had a place dug out under a flat stone where he hid his gold. If anything happened to him, they wouldn't get his gold. He worked too hard for it to let someone else have it. He decided he would work a few more days on his mine before he went into town with his gold.

After three more days of digging, he had two bags filled with gold. He figured he had at least a pound and a half or even two pounds of gold.

Buck was working on a more permanent house. He already had three sides of it up. He decided that first thing in the morning he would head into town then come back and spend the rest of the day working on his house. He saddled up Blacky and got his gold together. He put it in his saddlebags and headed off to town. Once he got there, he headed straight for the assayer's office and then to the bank where he deposited most of his money.

At the supply store he bought various items he needed back at the mine. An ax, a saw, some nails and more bacon and ham. He should have brought the mule, but Blacky could handle it.

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Next he went to the hotel to eat. Shirley was there again. She was a looker too. She brought him bacon, eggs, bread and butter, plus coffee. He gave her a gold nugget. He liked coming here to eat.

As he left the hotel he noticed a couple of surly men checking him out. He could smell trouble so he just went straight to his horse and mounted up. He headed west out of town just to throw them off. Once he was sure they weren't following him, he headed north again.

He got back to camp around ten o'clock in the morning and went to work on his house. It was basically just a rectangle, eight feet on one side, twelve feet on the other. He figured he would cut a lot of small pines for the roof and then use mud and grass to fill in the cracks. At least it would keep him out of the rain. He also built a small corral for Blacky and the mule. There was plenty of grass for them and he had bought them some oats too.

He would sleep inside tonight for the first time. He had made a fireplace and bed on one side of his little house. He was use to sleeping outside. It took him a while to get to sleep, but he finally managed to doze off.

Buck woke early the next day and then decided he would get an early start on the mine. His mine was now about nine feet into the ground. It was slow going too. He had to make enough room for him to pick, move freely and still get at the quartz.

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After a few hours of digging he took a break. What he needed now was dynamite. He had got some when he was in town. He went and got a few sticks of dynamite and returned to the mine. He dug holes in three places at the end of the mine. One he placed at the end, one he placed in the quartz and the other he placed opposite of the quartz. He used extension fuses to tie all three together. Then he struck a match and lit the fuse. Then he got the hell out of there

The explosion was big. A lot of rock and dust came out of the mine entrance. Once the dust settled he went back in. He had done a pretty good job of placing the sticks of dynamite. A big section of the quartz had been broken off, but a lot of other rock lay on the floor of the mine as well. He would have to sift through it all tomorrow. First he had to go to town and buy a wheelbarrow and a chair for his room, you couldn't really call it a house.

When he got to town he went to the saloon first for a drink. He had a whiskey, then a beer and left the saloon. He wasn't much of a drinking man, but he enjoyed it once in a while.

Chapter 6

The windows threw patterns of light across the dusty street. He could hear the sound of a tin-pan piano from one of the saloons. It was a mining town set in a valley with mountains on three sides and mining all around. There hadn't been a lot of big strikes, but enough to keep the people coming in to try their luck.

He headed off to the general store. He bought some tobacco, his wheelbarrow and a bunch of apples for his horse and mule. They liked a treat now and then. Over at the mercantile store he bought a good sturdy chair for his house. He also bought a new pair of pants and a couple of shirts. He loaded everything on the mule and gave each one an apple. He even ate one; it was sweet and tasted good.

He saw the same two guys standing outside of the saloon. They were watching him. They had been at the post office when he rode into town. They saw him go to the assayer's office and then to the bank. Here was trouble waiting to happen. He had had his share of trouble and wanted no more. He would head west out of town again. It was a gentle rise in elevation and he would be able to tell if he was followed. He wouldn't lead them to the O'Hare's or the Tift boys. He would go west then north. He knew a good spot to wait for them if they came. He headed off out of town.

He was riding past the last buildings in town when he remembered a trail past the mill that wended northwest out of town. There was an old building there that was mostly

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gone. It might have been torn down for its lumber, he didn't know. If there, it would give him enough cover to look back and see if he was being followed. He was.

He kept going northwest towards his mine. He had a place planned out for an ambush. They would not get close to the Tift's or the O'Hare's if he could help it.

With his plan laid out, he turned into the trail and started up the slant. He was heading towards Quartz Hill. He would reach the top long before they did. He had a wooded area where three trails met that he planned to wait for them.

Once he got to the top of the hill he dismounted and went back a ways so he could see down the hill. There they were. They were following him that was obvious. He could pick them off from here, but he wasn't a cold-blooded killer.

He mounted up and took his horse and the mule on the trail to the left. He rode about fifty yards into the trees and brush and picketed his horse and the mule there. Next he went back to where they must pass by him. He would wait for them there. He heard them coming up the hill. He waited. Once they passed him he drew his .44 and stepped out from cover. "You boys looking for me?" He asked. They stiffened in the saddle. Slowly they turned their horses around. He had them covered.

They were caught dead to rights, but they had come prepared. They both had their guns lying in their laps. One of them spoke up. "We want your outfit, mister."

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“You got to take it first.” Buck said. The one on the left brought his gun up and Buck shot him off his horse. The other one charged Buck with his horse. He fired as he moved and missed. Then he turned in his saddle and shot at Buck. Buck felt the bullet go by. He shot the guy in the hip and he fell from his horse. Buck told him to drop his gun. He cursed Buck and brought his gun up. Buck shot him between the eyes.

Buck gathered up the horses and stripped the men of their gun belts. He carried the guns to one of the horses and put them over the saddle horn. He took the horses with him. He got Blacky and the mule and headed off towards his mine. He never asked for trouble, it just naturally followed him. He wished he could stay away from trouble while he was here. He didn't want to have to move again. He liked it here.

He rode into camp about an hour later. After he unloaded the mule, he put the other two horses in the corral along with Blacky and the mule. He would try to sell them the next time he went to town.

He thought if he were smart he would now own a ranch or a business in town of some kind. When he made up his mind to do something, the only way he knew how to do it was to go in swinging and take the bull by the horns. After he ate he went out to the stable to strip the horses of their saddles. There were four horses in his stable now. Well, three horses and a mule. He would have to make his stable bigger to accommodate all four of them. He stripped them of their saddles and he took his supplies into the house.

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Now he had a chair to sit on in the evening. He took a dry sack and rubbed down Blacky and then rubbed down the others. Come what may he wasn't moving again. He liked it here. He liked his neighbors and he wasn't leaving come hell or high water.

He heard a couple of riders coming from the north. He grabbed his Winchester and stepped out to meet them. It was the O'Hare's. He invited them to light and have some coffee. They talked over coffee and discussed mining and the two extra horses in his corral.

He told them about the two men who had followed him from town. "You sure have your share of trouble." O'Hare said. Buck had to agree with him.

O'Hare told him he had a small table he could have if he wanted it. Buck thanked him and said he would be by in the morning to pick it up. They had another cup of coffee before they left.

Buck lay back on his bed having a smoke. He wondered who those two men were. Was there more of them in town? Did they act alone? He thought they were probably just drifters out to steal what they could. He decided to keep the two geldings for a while before he sold them.

That night he fell asleep thinking he could make a ranch here where his mine was. There was plenty of grass for more than a few head of cattle. He could fence them in

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easy enough too. He could fence off the entire hill that rose behind his little house and do some fencing on the other side of the creek. He would play his mine out first though. It was just an idea, one of many he was working on. It would be nice to have fresh milk and butter all the time.

He woke up early the next morning and started a fire for his coffee and rolled a smoke. He had a lot of work to do today on the mine. After he ate he saddled Blacky and the mule and headed up stream to the O'Hare's to get the table. It was a beautiful morning. The O'Hare's were out to meet him. The table was just the right size for his house. They also had an extra chair.

He picketed Blacky and the mule and went in for coffee. He really liked the O'Hare's. They talked of mining for a while, and then he told them of his idea to bring in a few head of cattle. They all thought it was a good idea.

He went back outside and tied the little table and chair to the mule. He said goodbye and thanks. He headed off towards his mine. It had all began as a dream. It was a dream that was coming true. He had his mine and he had his money. All was going good for him. If trouble would only stay away it could be a great life.

I've put by a little he told himself...not enough, but a nice amount. He had enough to do whatever he wanted, whether farming or ranching. He was pretty sure it would be ranching, though. That is what he wanted to do most of all. He would buy a

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couple of milk cows and a few head of cattle. Maybe he could pay the Tift boys to help him drive the cattle in, but he wouldn't be able to do it alone. With the supply of water here, he could probably let them run wild. There was plenty of grass and he didn't think they would travel too far.

Buck got his wheelbarrow and headed off to his mine. He had a lot of work to do today. He would spend the day separating his quartz from the other rocks and then the gold from the quartz.

He worked the mine for a week straight, pulling more and more quartz from the vein. He was about eighteen feet into the mine now. The vein had leveled off for now and was basically going straight back. There wasn't a lot of gold there, but there was enough to make him stay at it.

He had a pile of quartz to separate from the other rock. He was going to spend the next day separating the gold from the quartz. It would take most of his day, but he planned to use some more dynamite tomorrow. At four o'clock he quit for the day. He was tired and hungry. He went into the house and started a fire and put on the coffee. He couldn't wait for a cup of coffee. He rolled a smoke and lit a match. He took a deep drag and exhaled. He was hungry so he started cooking some dinner. He needed to kill another deer. He would go hunting first thing in the morning.

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He wanted to get some cattle up here as soon as possible. He would talk to the Tift boys tomorrow and see if they would help him.

He went to bed early. He woke the next morning and went out to saddle Blacky. He headed over the hill behind his mine. There was another creek at the bottom. It was still a little dark out and this was where he got his last deer. He picketed Blacky about half way down the hill. He slowly worked his way down the hill. He found where the deer had bedded down for the night. He had either spooked them or they were feeding or drinking at the creek. Just then he saw a nice sized buck across the creek stick his head up. It was a shot of about a hundred yards or so. He took steady aim and let his breath out a little and fired. He shot him right behind the front right leg. The deer buckled and then took off. Buck went after him. The deer stopped about fifty yards away and Buck shot him again. Buck went back for Blacky and then to the deer. He bled it and gutted it and then prepared to take it to the house. He had his venison.

He would need to buy more coffee when he went to town to buy his cattle, but first he needed to talk to the Tift boys.

After he ate he took three sticks of dynamite back to the mine. He placed them the same way he did before. Again there was a big explosion. Rocks flew out of the mine. Once the dust settled, he went into the mine with his lantern to see how he did. He had dislodged quite a bit of rock and quartz from the walls of the mine. It would take

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him most of the day to separate the quartz, but before he did that he still needed to have a talk with the Tift boys.

He saddled up Blacky and rode on down to the Tift claim. They told him to sit a spell. He dismounted and they talked about the cattle and mining. They said they would be happy to help him with the cattle in exchange for a little milk and butter once in a while. Buck laughed and said it was a deal. He asked them how their mining was going. They said they were doing pretty good on the new creek.

Buck said goodbye and headed back to his house to work on the quartz. They had agreed to head into town for the cattle the next morning. He hoped to buy at least twenty cows to start with. He also hoped to start work on a bigger house in a few days, but first he had work to do. He had a lot of quartz to separate. He needed to clear all the rocks from the floor of his mine.

The next day he woke early and made his breakfast. The Tift boys showed up just as he was finishing his coffee. He offered them some coffee. Afterwards, they all headed for town.

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Chapter 7

Buck had met a man named Swanson who had a ranch right out of town. He had about a hundred and fifty head of cattle and had said he would sell a few to Buck when he needed them.

They arrived at the Swanson ranch around eight-thirty and went in to talk about the cattle. They made a deal for thirty head of cattle and Swanson said he could use one or two of his hands to drive the cattle back to his place. They arrived back at his place in the afternoon. He put the cattle on the hill opposite the creek from his house. There was plenty of grass for them there and they wouldn't venture too far from the water. Now he would have fresh milk and butter all the time. He would have plenty for the Tift boys as well.

Buck spent the rest of the day working at the mine. He had a lot of work to do there. He worked until about six o'clock at the mine. He had cleared most of the floor of the mine of rocks and quartz. Tomorrow he would separate the gold from the quartz. He decided to quit for the day and fix his supper. He even went out and got some milk. He

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also spent some time making butter. Tomorrow he would make more and take some down to the Tifts.

He planned to keep his milk cows in the stable. He would cut grass for them. He didn't want to have to go looking for them every time he needed to milk them. He had gotten some good-looking cattle from Swanson. He was now doing what he wanted...ranching.

He made his meal around seven-thirty. It was later than he usually ate, so he was hungry. He had venison steaks and pan bread. The pan bread tasted a lot better with fresh butter and fresh milk. He could get used to eating like this.

The next morning he woke at first light. He put the coffee on to boil and went out to milk the cows. He had gotten some containers for the milk during one of his trips to town. He went out and cut some grass for the cows. He would need to spend part of the day stocking up on grass. He went back into the house. He planned to dig a hole and line it with rocks to keep his milk cold and keep his butter fresh. He buttered some bread that was left over from the day before and ate it while he drank his coffee.

He went back out and cut enough grass so that he wouldn't need to do it again for quite a while. He spent the remainder of the day separating the gold from the quartz. Around four o'clock it was hot and he was tired. He decided he would take a walk up to the O'Hare's ranch and see how things were going for them. He headed off up the creek.

Buck was about fifty feet from the O'Hare's house when he heard a scream come from that direction. He took off at a dead run for the house. He side-led up to the house and listened through a window. There were two strange horses in front of the house. That told him there were at least two men inside. He snuck a peek through the open window. One man was against the table holding O'Hare's wife while the other one held a gun on both the women. His back was to Buck. This meant if Buck went through the front door he would have to turn to fire and the other man would have to draw to fire. Buck eased his way to the front door. He would go in in one smooth movement. He reached the door. He drew his .44 and threw open the door. He went to the right of the doorway and fired just as the other man was turning. Buck shot him twice through the chest and swung around to meet the other man. Buck shot him through the heart before he had his gun cleared from its holster.

The women were in shock. These two men had terrified them and Buck knew what these men had planned to do. One thing you didn't do in western towns was harass women, but the O'Hare's lived out of town and these were not decent men. They took the situation in...the men gone from the home and two women all alone. Yes, Buck knew what would have happened here today if he hadn't showed up.

He dragged the men outside and flung them over the saddles of their horses. Then he tied them on. He would take them away so the women didn't have to look at them any longer. Their ordeal was over for now.