

# Wyoming

adapted from the  
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Picture  
by HALSEY RAINES

## CHAPTER ONE

Reb Harkness had been deserted by his train-robbing confederate, Pete Marillo, and that was boiling mad. Worse than that, however, he was in danger of capture by returning Civil War soldiers, organized into a posse and now scouring the Missouri woods. Pete had taken the cash acquired in the hold-up, not realizing that it was Confederate money, and had vanished. He had also taken Reb's horse.

Seeing a handsome, bridled steed in a small clearing, Reb stepped closer. He was stopped by a sharp challenge. It issued from a tall man wearing a dingy grey Confederate uniform.

Almost at the same moment Reb heard the sound of his pursuers. Taking a desperate chance, he appealed to the sentiment of the man whose horse he had been about to appropriate.

"Them fellows that's chasin' me is Union soldiers," he said.

The other man gestured, and Reb divided under an army blanket. The Confederate veteran sat down on it. When the search party appeared, they suspected nothing and went on.

"Guess I owe you a vote of thanks," said Reb, rising stiffly. "My name's Harkness."

"Mine's Dave Kincaid."

"Where you headin' for?"

"Wyoming. Haven't seen my family in five years."

"Could I walk along—sort of for company?" asked Reb, eyeing Kincaid's horse covetously.

"No need walking if you can ride my mule," was the answer.

On the way across the long green plains, Kincaid explained that his wife had died while he was in the army, and that he was going home to take care of his daughter, and little boy, Reb, conscious of his great obligation to the other man, could not hold back his latent desire to possess that handsome saddle horse. When they reached Sweetwater Valley he turned and drew out his gun.

"You're close to home," he said, averting his eyes. "I'm headin' for California and I'm sorry, Dave, but I'm takin' your outfit. Some day I'm going to pay you back."

Kincaid's anger was mingled with bewilderment, as Reb started off. Holding his feelings, he walked in the direction of his own ranch; in half an hour he caught sight of cattle with his own brand, being driven by a group of hard-looking cowboys whose faces were vaguely familiar.

"I'm Dave Kincaid," he cried out, darting forward. "This is my herd, I guess."

Bart, one of the leaders of the group, scowled blackly. "You're making a mistake, mister," he said. "These animals belong to me."

Like a flash of lightning, Kincaid realized he was witnessing the theft of his cattle. But he was in a bad spot, and unarmed.

"Maybe I made a mistake," he said, turning away.

He had gone less than twenty paces when Bart, taking cold-blooded aim, fired point blank. Kincaid tumbled to the ground like a stone.

Half way across the valley, Reb heard the sound of firing. Something within, perhaps a twinge of conscience, made him pause and turn about. When he reached Kincaid's side no one else was in sight.

"Dave, Dave! What happened?" cried Reb.

Kincaid spoke with great effort. "They were stealing my cattle," he said.

"Who shot you?"

"A man named Bart."

"Why, the dirty coyotes," cried Reb. "We'll go after 'em."

Kincaid reached out weakly. "My kids," he whispered. "Those cattle belong to them."

"Don't worry," said Reb. "I'll get back the cattle, or the money for 'em."

"Reb, I believe that's a promise," said the other man.

"Course it's a promise," insisted Reb.

"Thanks," murmured Kincaid gratefully. His head fell back, and in another moment he turned lifeless eyes to the ground.

Reb didn't know what to do with the responsibilities that had been put on his shoulders. As much as he wanted to run away, something prevented it. Perhaps it was the sight of Kincaid's two children, tall, blue-eyed Lucy and her brother Jimmy, who went through the ordeal of the funeral with great courage.

Jimmy, who was at the hero-worshipping age, sought out Reb in the yard outside the ranch house and put a trusting hand on his arm.

"You're just like I wanted you to be," he said.

"What are you talking about?" rejoined Reb, who was almost as ill at ease as if he had been on the witness stand at court.

"You're like my pa," said Jimmy. "And if something had to happen to him, I'm glad you're going to be here."

"Your pa was a lot better lookin'," said Reb, flattered in spite of himself.

"Where was his horse and his gun when he got shot?" asked Jimmy.

Reb felt a guilty flush. "He sorta left them with me," he answered. "And I brung 'em back just a little too late, and when he tol' me what them varmints done, it made my blood bile."

"I bet they sure will be sorry when you catch them," cried Jimmy.

Reb clenched his teeth. "They won't be sorry," he said. "They'll all be dead."

"It'll serve them right, too," said Jimmy, his eyes flashing. He paused and looked at Reb warmly. "Couldn't you be my daddy from now on?" he asked Reb.

"Me?" rejoined Reb, nervously. "Why I ain't fittin' to be nobody's pa."

"Yes, you are," insisted Jimmy. "I bet you could be the best daddy in the whole world."

Reb spared for time. "A feller can't turn himself into a pa just like that," he answered.

"Then maybe you could be my uncle?" went on Jimmy hopefully.

"That's different," supplied Reb. Without further ado, Jimmy threw his arms around Reb's neck and kissed him. Reb stepped back a pace in embarrassment, but the expression on his face showed that the younger boy's actions had begun to take effect.

Bart, the cowpuncher, who had killed Kincaid, was riding along inside a stage-coach with his companions, Corky and Gus, when they saw three Indians approaching single file down a mountain trail. As the coach came to an abrupt halt, they recognized the leader, Lightfoot, who drew his horse and whispered, "Soldiers come—plenty horses."

"Sure, that's the Seventh Cavalry," nodded Bart. "We knew they was comin'."

"Sitting Bull—Chief Crazy Horse—angry for more guns," went on the Indian messenger.

Bart looked around furtively and took out some cigars from his pocket. "We'll look into that," he said. "Give your chief these with our compliments."

When the Indians had moved along, Gus leaned forward nervously. "The Seventh Cavalry and Gen-



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eral Custer!" he whistled. "That's bad, ain't it?"

Bart seemed unconcerned. "It won't be as easy as it was when the soldiers were away fighting the war," he said. "But Buckley knows how to deal with the army."

"Was Mr. Buckley on the level?" continued Gus. "When he said we could keep half of what we got of Kincaid's cattle?"

"Buckley is always on the level with his friends," answered Bart suavely.

"That sure is liberal of him," said Gus.

"What Buckley wants is the land," explained Bart. "When his ranchers lose their cattle they get discouraged. They sell out for nothing and move on."

For the second time in ten minutes, the coach came to a sudden stop. The trio inside heard a harsh voice call out: "Pull up!" and a few seconds later there was the sharp explosion of a gun. The driver had attempted to reach for his weapon, and Reb, facing him on Dave Kincaid's horse, called out in a loud voice:

"If there's a man named Barton here, let him step outside."

"How come you know my name, stranger?" asked Bart, making his way to the ground.

"Just unbuckle your guns and let 'em drop," said Reb coldly. He beckoned towards the horse leading the coach. "Now climb aboard that nag."

As Bart slowly obeyed, Corky and Gus each attempted a shot at Reb. The latter turned with lightning speed and sent his own guns barking out twice with deadly accuracy. Corky and Gus fell back to the floor of the coach, lifeless.

"If it's money you're after—" began Bart, as he rode along under Reb's custody.

"Afterwards," grinned Reb. "Of course, if you'd like to give it to me, now—"

Bart decided he would and threw his wallet over.

"Ride to town with me and meet Mr. Buckley," he suggested, "he'll show you how to make ten times what there is in that wallet."

"You ain't goin' to town," cried Reb, seizing the other horse's bridle and turning it in the direction of the woods.

The small frontier town of Angel City was thrown into panic at the discovery of the two bodies in the stagecoach. Buckley, who possessed the title of mayor and operated the stage line as one of his incidental revenue-bearing activities sensed immediately that retribution had been demanded for Kincaid's murder. Concealing his emotion, he sent for the sheriff.

Dawson, one of Buckley's closest aides, broke his cigar in two and scratched his head. "I can't understand how one man could do that job," he said. "He must have shot plenty fast and straight. Too bad."

"Too bad nothing!" snorted Buckley. "It's their own fault. I've got no use for bunglers. I want you men to understand one thing—I'm building an empire. If the little man wants to stay, let him knuckle under and work for us."

"He's right," nodded Curly, another of Buckley's confederates.

Buckley held up a warning finger as he faced the two. "Wherever this man is who held up the coach,"

he said, "it's your job to get him. Take a couple of men and ride back over the trail and find out what happened to Bart."

When Reb slipped into town late that evening, he realized he would have to have his horse shod before he could make any further progress. He knew Lafe, who ran the livery stable, and stealthily made his way in that direction. Lafe was asleep, so Reb prodded him and then drew his gun. The next thing he knew he was sprawling on the floor. Spots danced before his eyes as he looked up at the determined, fiery eyes of Mehitabel, Lafe's Amazonian sister.

"I'll teach you to come around here in the middle of the night threatening to shoot people," cried Mehitabel. "Now get out!"

"All I wanted was a shoe for my horse," said Reb plaintively.

Mehitabel looked at the horse and a new expression of interest came over her face. The animal corresponded to the description the dying stagecoach driver had given earlier in the day. "Say, who are you anyway?" she asked, turning quickly.

"That ain't exactly none of your business," said Reb.

"Maybe so," answered Mehitabel. "We just buried three men here today and I thought you might know something about it."

"Me?" asked Reb. "How would I? Might be an epidemic."

Mehitabel stared. "I think I'm lookin' right straight at it," she said pointedly.

Reb shifted his feet. "You're making a mistake ma'am," he said.

Mehitabel eyes danced. "You made the mistake," she cried, "in not shootin' enough o' them. You should o' started with Buckley himself—that swindlin' high-bindin' skunk!"

She picked up a hammer and shoe and with a professional gesture took the horse's hoof between her knees, while Reb looked on in astonishment. There was not a waste motion or an inaccurate one as she put the shoe on the animal.

"I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it myself," muttered Reb as the job was completed.

"How much is it?"

"Nothing," answered Mehitabel. "It ain't often I meet up with such a handsome—horse."

A disturbing sound came from outside. Curly, who had discovered the body of Bart tied to the stagecoach horse, had ridden back in town with his two cowboy helpers and noticed the light in the blacksmith's windows. He went to investigate.

"Open up," he cried, pounding the door.

The light went out. Curly pounded again. There was no reply. Then suddenly the door flew open, knocking Curly off his feet. Reb charged out, shooting as he came, and disappeared into the darkness.

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