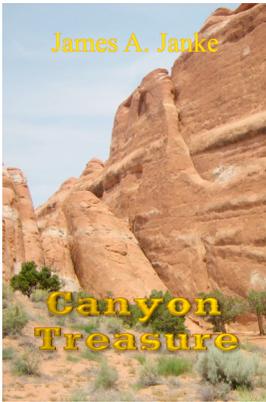


James A. Janke

**Canyon  
Treasure**



*Rancher Jason McHenry sells his ranch and heads for Chicago to work in the stockyards. The first leg of his journey is in a stagecoach with five other passengers: a fellow rancher heading for Flagstaff, a railroad executive from San Francisco with his pretty young daughter exploring the area for business opportunity, a mining salesman, and a young cavalry officer heading for Washington.*

*They are all tested. McHenry learns much about people. And he finds something he wasn't looking for. But he doubts he'll be able to get any of them out of their ordeal alive.*

# Canyon Treasure

by James A. Janke

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Cover photo taken by author in [Arches National Park](#), Utah, 2008.

Dedicated to  
Joanne

# Canyon Treasure

By  
James A. Janke

## Chapter One

Jason McHenry's head bobbed about as the stagecoach bounced over the rough desert road. He realized that the young woman seated across from him and who had just asked him a question was probably trying to make conversation to make the endless miles go faster. But in his somber mood he didn't feel much like talking to anyone, not even to the five people—the woman and four men—sharing the cramped vehicle with him. And, anyhow, the heat was making him drowsy.

Still, he had to admit that the beauty of the woman was a definite tonic to his troubled mind. How old was she? Eighteen, maybe a little older. She wore an attractive blue dress with vertical white stripes that accentuated a slim and comely figure. Waves of red-brown hair cascaded from under a wide-brimmed hat. She had a pretty face with dark-brown eyes, high cheekbones, a slim nose and an almost-white complexion. How she managed to maintain that fashionable shade of paleness in the burning sun of Arizona amazed McHenry. And she didn't seem the least bit bothered by the heat. So he stopped staring out the stage window and shifted his glance toward her.

"Sir," the young woman repeated pleasantly. "Are you headed for Flagstaff too?"

"Actually, I'm headed for Chicago," he said.

"Oh? That's a very long journey from here. Are you going to visit someone in Chicago?"

McHenry shook his head. "Nope. Moving there permanent."

The middle-aged male companion of the young lady blurted, "Chicago? What on earth is a man like you moving to Chicago for?"

McHenry's eyes narrowed at what sounded like an insult. The man was wearing shiny brown shoes and a heavy pin-striped suit with a vest, which must have felt like an oven on a day like today. McHenry had rolled up his shirtsleeves, but sweat still made his shirt stick to his back. The breeze coming in the window didn't help at all, because it was hot and dusty.

The young woman playfully slapped the man on his wrist. "Father, that didn't sound polite," she scolded with a smile.

"No offense intended, sir," her father said quickly. "In fact, I meant it as a compliment. You look like you belong here." He gestured toward McHenry, who wore battered boots, rough trousers, a shirt, and a leather vest that looked like it had been through a cattle stampede. "A young man like you—why, you fit this land. I'd say you're quite an asset here."

The girl laughed and pointed to herself as she continued looking at McHenry. "Sir, I don't think we look like we fit here, do we?"

McHenry smiled. "Ma'am, you'd fit perfectly anywhere."

She smiled and nodded slightly. "Thank you, sir," she said softly. But she didn't feel self-conscious; she was used to those kinds of compliments.

She said, "My name is Peggy Winslow."

McHenry touched the brim of his dusty hat. "A pleasure to meet you, ma'am. I'm Jason McHenry."

"Actually," she said, "my name is Margaret. But only my father calls me that." She pointed to her father and looked at him fondly.

Her father said, "Eli Winslow, sir." He extended a hand toward McHenry. "Pleased to meet you."

McHenry stretched to shake the offered hand. "Mr. Winslow."

The man next to McHenry in the middle of the seat spoke for the first time. "But you're right, Mr. Winslow. He belongs here, not in Chicago. He's just turned out to be a quitter."

McHenry turned to the man. "Mitch, I oughta bust your face in for that. It's not like I didn't try."

Peggy said, "I thought you two knew each other, from the few words you'd exchanged before."

Mitch said, "Jason's not the talkative kind, especially now."

"Oh?"

"I ranch near Jason," Mitch said, jerking a thumb toward McHenry. "Or I did until the young fool sold out to the rancher north of him and decided to run away to—"

"Shut up, Mitch," McHenry said. "I'm not running away. I just decided to do something different."

Uncomfortable, Peggy cleared her throat and looked at Mitch. "And you are . . .?"

Mitch tipped his hat. "Mitchell Dragseth, miss," he said. "At your service. And Flagstaff is where I'm headed. To buy me some machinery. Gonna try makin' my own lumber."

"Machinery?" Peggy turned to her father. "My father loves machinery. He's with the railroad."

Winslow leaned forward and shook hands with Mitch. "Pleased to me you, Mr. Dragseth."

"Oh, folks just call me Mitch, sir," Mitch said. "Railroad, huh? We could use a railroad through here. Link us to markets all over the country."

"Well, Mitch, that's just the kind of thing I'm doing on these trips—trying to find where economic growth could be the fastest, where a railroad would be most useful. And profitable."

Mitch smiled. "Of course."

"I brought my daughter along this time to show her what she was missing in San Francisco."

On the other end of McHenry's seat sat a young cavalry officer in uniform, and he spoke up. "Heading back to California after you reach Flagstaff, Mr. Winslow?"

Peggy told him, "No, we're going all the way to Santa Fe before we turn back."

"Really?" the officer said brightly. "That's wonderful. I'm headed for Washington, so we'll be riding together all the way to Santa Fe. My name's Bradley Falwell. Lieutenant Bradley Falwell." He and Winslow shook hands.

Winslow said, "Lieutenant."

Peggy smiled. "Pleased to meet you, sir."

Winslow asked, "Going to give a report to the War Department in Washington? I hope you mention that we can use more help with the Apaches. I know they used to inhabit these lands, but progress is progress. And they're resisting most ferociously."

Falwell said, "I expect my experience out here fighting the Apache will be invaluable to them in Washington, Mr. Winslow."

McHenry looked at the lieutenant in cynical amusement. The lieutenant's uniform looked fairly new, with none of the fraying that he had seen on so many of the experienced officers out in this desert country. The brass buttons on Falwell's tunic still glistened, and the yellow stripe on his trouser legs had not yet faded to dull gold. Just how much experience fighting Indians could Falwell have had? First, he didn't look much older than Peggy, and second, the U.S. Cavalry usually spent their time chasing Apaches but never catching and fighting them. You usually got a chance to fight Apaches only when they decided to attack you, and they only did that when the odds were in their favor. McHenry figured he'd been in more fights with the Apaches than Falwell had. And even then he had hardly seen the Apaches he was fighting. They were like ghosts.

Falwell went on. "I've been appointed to a staff position there."

"Really?" Winslow said. "Don't often hear about frontier officers winding up in Washington."

Falwell smiled. "My uncle is Senator Falwell. From New York."

"Ah, yes," Winslow acknowledged, a knowing smile on his face. "A strong supporter of our railroad, in fact." *For a price, the greedy bandit.*

On the other side of Winslow, a potbellied man in a rumpled brown suit had been dozing. He took this opportunity to belch loudly. He looked about, a bit embarrassed, but not much.

"And you, sir?" Falwell asked. His voice was disapproving.

"Totten," the man said. "Josiah Totten. Mining equipment. And the mines could use a railroad, too."

Peggy turned to McHenry. "With all this economic potential, why are you moving to Chicago?"

Mitch snorted. "To work in the stockyards, if you can believe that."

Peggy frowned, continued to look at McHenry. "The stockyards? You know you can work there?"

"I've got an uncle, too," McHenry said. "But he's not a senator."

Falwell shot a suspicious glance in McHenry's direction.

Peggy noticed it and frowned. "But, Mr. McHenry, you're a rancher like Mr. Dragseth here."

"Please," Mitch said, holding up a hand. "Mitch, just Mitch."

Peggy smiled. "Mitch."

"He's a good rancher, too, miss," Mitch said. "One of the best. Could have made a go of it, too, if he'd stuck it out a little longer."

"How long does it take, Mitch?" McHenry said. "I tried for five years—five years of drought and heat and dust and sickness and Apaches and bandits. Grass burned up, cows run off by Apaches and rustlers, brother got sick and died, hired hands left or got killed by Apaches. I tried, tried hard, but I'm just tired of it. So I'm off to Chicago."

Mitch snorted. "Hmph. A cow is a cow, huh? Whether in Arizona or Chicago. Well, Jason, you never learned to love the land. It was never home to you. As for me, I'll never leave my place no matter how much heat or how many Apaches."

McHenry said, "All you'll get for your work is an early grave."

"Yeah?" Mitch said. "But at least I'll be home on my own land. My house. What do you have to show for your five years of work now that you're leavin'?" No home, just a few gold

coins in your pack. Why, you even sold your saddle. How could you do that, Jason? Just don't seem right."

McHenry looked out the window again and pulled his hat lower over his eyes. "I won't need a saddle in Chicago." He folded his arms and made a point of staring at sagebrush.

Mitch said, "You can still change your mind. Casey said he'd be glad to sell the ranch right back to you for what he paid you for it."

"Mostly he paid the bank," McHenry said. "I owed them most of what the ranch was worth."

Mitch sighed. "Well, get your last look at the best country in the world, Jason. Nothin' like this in Chicago." He said the name of the city with derision.

"No, but there aren't any Apaches there, either," McHenry retorted.

Falwell said, "The Army will soon have the Apaches under control."

Mitch laughed. "The only way to control 'em is to kill 'em."

Peggy asked, "But aren't they all men, too, just like you?"

Mitch just stared at her, and even McHenry turned back to look. Totten buried his head in disgust against the wall of the stage and decided to try to go back to sleep. Falwell blinked several times.

Winslow raised an eyebrow and turned to his daughter. "Margaret, I daresay they don't think that at all, my dear." He said.

Only McHenry offered a defense. "Old ways die hard, Miss Winslow. You'll never get the Apaches to settle peacefully on reservations. They're raiders, not farmers."

Peggy said, "Well, maybe—"

The stagecoach came to a sudden stop, harness and tack rattling, brake squealing, the driver cursing, the passengers lurching forward. McHenry glanced outside. They were in the middle of nowhere. He stuck his head out the window. "Hey, driver! Why are we stopping here?"

"We got trouble up ahead, mister!" the driver answered.

Instinctively, McHenry's right hand slipped down to his pistol in its holster strapped to his hip.

"Oh, dear," Peggy said. Her hand touched her lips.

"What kind of trouble?" McHenry called out to the driver.

"Come out and see for yourself," the driver answered.

McHenry didn't like the sound of that. If a horse had simply slipped a harness, the driver could have said so. McHenry opened the stagecoach door and hopped out. The other passengers followed quickly, Mitch first.

Falwell helped Peggy out. "Thank you, Lieutenant," she said, smiling.

"You're welcome, Miss Winslow."

McHenry looked up at the driver. He was still sitting in place, the reins held tightly in his hands. He was looking off into the distance straight ahead. The shotgun guard had climbed on top of the coach, still holding a Winchester, and was squinting in the same direction.

McHenry followed their stare, but he saw nothing. He quickly scanned the horizon all around. They were surrounded by low hills and desert for miles, and well beyond that in the east were mesas and canyons. There wasn't a tuft of parched grass or a sagebrush clump more than two feet high in any direction, though there was plenty of sagebrush in many places. It was as if they were adrift in a vast sea of yellow, tan, and gray, all shimmering in late-afternoon summer heat.

McHenry was confused. "Just what am I supposed to be seeing, driver?" he asked.

"It's what you don't see anymore," the driver told him.

The shotgun guard said, "The stage station's been burned."

McHenry's ears twitched. He heard Peggy gasp. Totten muttered something and wiped his lips. He climbed back into the stagecoach.

The shotgun guard added, "You can just see a little smoke risin' from where it used be. Straight ahead."

"Apaches," Falwell said.

"Apaches is right," Mitch agreed. His hand slipped to the butt of his pistol in its holster.

The driver said to the guard, "Billy, your eyes are sharper than mine. See any of 'em?"

"Nope," Billy answered. He made a slow, complete circle on top of the stagecoach, shielding his eyes from the sun low in the sky. "Nothin', Al," he reported.

McHenry noticed that Billy looked younger than Peggy. But the Winchester he carried was all grown up.

"Humph," Al said. He kept staring toward the burned-out station.

McHenry settled the holster on his hip, drew the pistol, and flipped open the loading gate. He knew perfectly well that each chamber was loaded, but he went through the check, anyway. It gave him a feeling of security that he knew at the same time was an illusion. He noticed that Mitch was also checking his pistol. Winslow and the lieutenant were not wearing pistols.

"Billy," McHenry said, "I've got a Winchester in my roll up there. Toss it down. And my box of cartridges in the pack."

"You bet," Billy replied eagerly. He pulled the carbine from the bedroll and tossed it down to McHenry. Then he rummaged through McHenry's small pack of belongings, found a box of cartridges, and tossed that down too.

"Thanks," McHenry said. He turned to Mitch. "You bring a rifle?" The Apaches would have rifles, and a pistol wasn't much good until you got real close—if they let you.

Mitch shook his head. His brow was furrowed. "No, because I thought they'd be more likely to need it at home. Ain't heard of Apaches in this direction for years."

"Me, neither," McHenry said. "Maybe it's a renegade band raiding north of the border. Maybe the Mexicans have been hard on them lately."

"Hm."

Falwell called up to Al, "Driver, I have a sidearm in my trunk in the rear boot."

"Right." Al climbed down from his seat and walked to the rear of the stagecoach. He started undoing the tarp in back.

McHenry and Mitch walked forward slowly for a short distance. McHenry slipped cartridges from the box into the Winchester's magazine through the loading gate while they walked. They reached the leader span of horses. McHenry patted the horse on the neck, and the horse whickered and turned to look at him. The animal was breathing hard and rapidly, and his flanks were wet.

"These horses are beat," McHenry told Mitch. "This heat is killing them."

"Well, there won't be any fresh ones at the station this time," Mitch said. "The Apaches will have run off with 'em for sure."

Al joined them, saying, "But at least there's still water at the station. You can see my horses need water bad, so we gotta go on down there, no matter if it burned. And the road goes past there anyway." He pointed to McHenry's Winchester and then to the top of the stagecoach. "McHenry, you suppose—"

McHenry nodded. "I'll ride on top with this."

"Much obliged. Billy's a good shot, but two of you will be a lot better. Just in case."

“Right,” McHenry said. “Well, let’s go have a look.”

They walked back. McHenry climbed atop the stagecoach. He shoved the baggage around until he could sit down on the edge of the top with his feet stuck in between Al and Billy. The other passengers got back into the coach. Mitch sat at a rear window and looked forward, and Falwell sat on the other end of the seat at that window. Both of them held their pistols in their laps. The other three passengers sat on the seat opposite.

“Heeyah!” Al shouted. He snapped the reins and the tired horses started off.

The coach rode easily on the slight downhill slope, and Al kept the team at a moderate pace until they got within about half a mile of the station. Then he slowed the team and they actually walked the rest of the way. Al kept squinting from the station ruins to the sagebrush on either side of the road. He was ready to bolt the horses at the first sign of an Apache.

The station had been leveled. The wooden parts of the building had burned away, leaving low adobe walls and foundations about three feet high. The stable had crumbled to charred ruins, and even part of the corral fence had been pulled down. Wisps of smoke drifted up from the wreckage of the station.

Al brought the team to a halt in front of the station. He set the brake, secured the reins to the brake handle, and pulled a Winchester carbine from the front boot. “Billy, you stay up here and keep your eyes open.”

“Right,” Billy said.

Al climbed down. He headed slowly for the ruins.

McHenry climbed down from the top of the stagecoach, “I’ll come with you, Al.”

“I’ll come, too,” Mitch said. He exited the vehicle and joined McHenry.

Falwell, Peggy, and Winslow disembarked but clustered near the stage. Totten stayed in the coach. Falwell remained close to Peggy, keeping his pistol in his right hand but dangling it at his side.

McHenry said to Al and Mitch, “This probably happened yesterday.” He looked around. “The fire’s pretty well burned out.”

Al said, “Yeah.” Mitch didn’t say anything.

McHenry scanned the surrounding desert. “I doubt the Apaches are nearby. They don’t like to stick around after a raid.”

“Maybe, maybe not,” Al said. “Maybe they’re waitin’ to see who comes to investigate. Or maybe they’ve been waitin’ for this stage.”

McHenry shook his head once. “Not like them. Unless they had reason to expect us.”

Al shrugged. “Apaches sure don’t read schedules, but if they’ve been around here for long, they’d know that a stage comes through every couple of days.”

“Who lived here?” Mitch asked.

“Bob Harrington and his boys, Austin and Jeremy. That’s what I’m looking for—their bodies. I hate to say such a thing, but I hope I find their bodies.”

The other two men nodded. They knew what the alternatives were. “Any womenfolk?” Mitch asked cautiously.

Al shook his head. “Emma caught a fever a couple of years ago. Her grave’s in the back.”

They circled all the way around the station and even examined the stable. They spread out and walked the perimeter of the station, searching the sagebrush.

Al let his carbine droop. “Nothin’. Not Bob or the boys. Damn.”

Mitch said, “Guess maybe the Apaches carried ‘em off.”

The three men looked at one another, but not one of them spoke of what was running through his mind, for the pictures were unspeakable.

Al ran a hand over his face to wipe off the sweat and dirt. "I'm goin' over to the well to get water for the horses," he said. "We'll have to give 'em a good rest before we do anything else."

McHenry and Mitch watched him go. They also glanced at the other people. Totten was still in the stagecoach. Winslow had gone to talk to Al as he neared the well. Billy stood on top of the coach, and Falwell stuck close to Peggy.

"Wish she hadn't seen this," McHenry said.

"Yeah," Mitch agreed. "Guess her pa had her see more than he wanted her to see."

Al shouted suddenly. McHenry and Mitch saw him standing at the side of the well, looking down into it. Winslow was looking down into the well too. He had a hand over his mouth.

"The Harringtons, I'll bet," McHenry said. "Come on."

He and Mitch jogged over to the well. They felt compelled to look down even though they knew they wouldn't like what they would see. They just had to know.

Enough light reached into the well for them to see a bloated, mutilated body floating face-up in the dark water.

"It's Bob," Al said. "At least I think it's Bob."

"And the boys?" McHenry asked with a grimace. "Do you see them? I think there's only one body down there."

Al shook his head. "Just looks like Bob alone."

"How old were the boys?" McHenry asked. He noted that he had automatically spoken of them in the past tense.

Al shrugged. "Don't know exactly. 'Round ten or so." He used a hand to measure off a height against his own chest. "About so high."

"The Apaches might have taken them along to adopt," McHenry said. He was looking for some hope.

Mitch shook his head. "Nah. Seems too old to me. You've never had a ten-year-old boy, Jason."

Winslow's face was ashen. "This is horrible. We must do something immediately. Those boys have to be found."

The three other men at the well looked at him.

"Like what?" Mitch snapped angrily. He shot a glance over at the stagecoach. "That's a job the Army should be doin'."

"You mean Lieutenant Falwell?" Winslow asked.

Mitch snorted. "That puppy wouldn't scare an Apache squaw, much less a whole raidin' party. There's nothing we can do." He spit into the dirt.

McHenry said, "You're right." Then he turned to Al. "Do we go on or do we go back? Is the next station a small one too? Easily attacked?"

Al took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "The next station is just like this one, small with just a few fellas there. It would be mighty temptin' to the Apaches. I think we should go back, but the horses are dead on their feet and the water's no good anymore. We just have to give 'em some rest. And it's almost dusk already. We should wait until mornin'."

McHenry nodded. "Makes sense to me."

Mitch said, "Yeah."

McHenry added, "And if the Apaches are watching us, they might not want to stick around till tomorrow to hit us. They could clear out tonight."

Billy yelled from the top of the stage, "Al, company's comin'!" He lifted his Winchester and pointed east.

The four men at the well followed his pointing. Coming slowly through the sagebrush, three riders were heading in the direction of the station. McHenry and Al got good grips on their Winchesters.

"Those men don't look like Apaches," Winslow said, squinting. He sounded relieved.

"Bandits, I'd say," McHenry suggested. "From the way they've spread out."

Winslow said, "Oh, no. Really?"

Mitch said, "Mexicans, from the looks of 'em. Every one of 'em a cutthroat and lookin' for booty north of the border, just like the Apaches. No better."

McHenry turned to Winslow. "Sir, you'd better get your daughter out of sight. Take her around behind the stable. The adobe walls are still tall enough to hide a couple of people there."

Al nodded slowly. "I think that's a real good idea, Mr. Winslow. Them three will probably just ride off when they see how many we are, but that pretty daughter of yours might be too temptin' to pass up and make 'em bolder. They're far enough away at the moment, and they might not have seen her yet."

Winslow's jaw clenched. "I understand." He turned quickly and strode toward the stage.

Al called toward the stage. "Billy, get down from there."

Billy jumped right off the top of the stage and rolled on the ground. He got to his feet quickly and scampered behind the coach. He stood there using the stage as a shield, watching the three horsemen approach.

"Fellas," McHenry said. "I suggest we spread out so's to cover them from a wide angle. Mitch, you stay here by the well. If it comes to a shoot-out, they'll go for our carbines first and you can use the well wall to steady that Colt of yours and maybe get a couple of them while we keep them busy with our Winchesters."

The other two men agreed and they spread out. Mitch leaned casually against the well. McHenry sauntered over to a spot near the corral. Al went to the head of his horses. There really was no cover for either McHenry or Al, but the approaching bandits didn't have any cover, either.

McHenry checked the stage. He could see no sign of Peggy or Winslow; her father had hurried her to hide behind what remained of the stable wall. Totten must have been crouching down in the stage, because McHenry couldn't see him through the windows. Falwell stood near the stagecoach door. His gun hand drooped at his side, but McHenry thought the pistol was already cocked. All McHenry could see of Billy were his boots and legs on the other side of the stagecoach.

The three horsemen stopped just short of effective pistol range. McHenry didn't like that.

"Buenos días, amigos," the one in the middle called. His horse was slightly ahead of the other two, a clear sign that he was the leader of the group.

"Howdy," Al answered. "Where you men headed?"

The leader looked surprised. "Aquí," he said. "We come here. Right here." He pointed with a finger to the spot they stood on.

"What's your business?" Al asked.

The leader waved a hand around toward the ruins of the station. "You have trouble, no? Maybe we help."

"We don't need any help," McHenry put in.

The bandit leader looked at McHenry. “You not worried about Apaches? They burn this place. They still around too. Maybe they come after you.”

“We can handle them,” McHenry called.

He watched the Mexican leader. The man stopped talking and sat motionless. McHenry was sure the man was calculating odds. There were three of the bandits, whose horses would jump and spoil their aim if shooting started. But the three bandits would be facing five men steady on their feet with three carbines and two pistols among them. Who would call that good odds?

“I think maybe the three of you should just ride on,” McHenry said.

Al added, “Aren’t you worried about the Apaches yourself?”

The leader turned his gaze on Al. “No, señor,” he said slowly. “I not worried.”

McHenry felt uneasy. This didn’t seem to be going right. The bandit seemed to be waiting for something. The other two horsemen seemed downright calm and relaxed.

Finally the leader spoke again. “We are not just three, amigos,” he said. He pointed past McHenry.

McHenry turned and his ears twitched. There were eight more horsemen spread out in a line slowly coming up the sagebrush from the west, with the blinding sun behind them. “Damn,” McHenry muttered to himself. They’d been tricked.

Mitch started to back around the well, but then stopped. He knew the well would be no cover now. And Billy started to edge around the back of the stagecoach. He, too, knew that he was completely exposed now.

Five of the eight horsemen coming from the west halted. The other three started to circle around to the side.

The bandit leader leaned forward on his saddle horn. “You carry gold with you, señor driver?” he asked.

“No, no gold,” Al answered. “Just passengers.”

“Hm. Maybe passengers carry gold?”

“Nope.”

McHenry thought about the pitiful number of gold coins in the small pouch in his pack on top of the stagecoach. Now he wished he had just stuffed the coins in his pocket. Somehow, that would have seemed safer. But he knew it didn’t really matter.

The Mexican fell silent again. McHenry could tell he was still calculating. No man is in a hurry to die. The odds were eleven to five now, but McHenry figured that he and the others still did not look like easy pickings. And the leader knew he would be the first one shot at. That was how he kept his leadership—by leading, even into danger.

The Mexican doffed his sombrero. “Well, adios, amigos,” he said. He whistled and started to turn his horse.

McHenry let out a sigh of relief.

Then Peggy screamed.

Everyone spun around. The three bandits going around the side of the station had discovered Peggy and Winslow. One bandit had dismounted and he had lifted Peggy clear off the ground by throwing an arm around her waist. He had a big smile on his face and was jabbering wildly toward the bandit leader. He started walking forward as Peggy thrashed in his grasp.

Another bandit was manhandling Winslow, who struggled hard but was really no match for the tough outlaw. The third bandit was still mounted but was laughing and crowding his horse forward.

McHenry jerked his head around to look at the bandit leader. The man was now standing upright in his stirrups, his mouth agape. The other two outlaws with him were pointing toward Peggy and smiling and exclaiming to their leader.

Without moving another muscle, still standing in the stirrups with his mouth open, the bandit's eyes shifted toward McHenry.

McHenry saw it in the leader's eyes—Peggy had tipped the calculation the other way. The Mexican went for his gun.

Everyone else followed. McHenry fired his carbine from his hip. He got off three quick shots at the leader, but the man's bouncing horse made every bullet miss.

Al's carbine was closer, and the outlaw next to the leader was slammed from his horse. The third man opened up on Mitch behind the well, and Mitch returned the fire.

The five outlaws on the west side of the station charged in a thunder of hooves. They opened up on Billy behind the stagecoach. Billy gave as good as he got. He plucked two of the bandits from their saddles before the fusillade of bullets tore into his body and dropped him to the ground. A hail of bullets thudded into the back and side of the stagecoach, and the stage horses, terrified at the sudden crash of gunfire, bolted despite the brake.

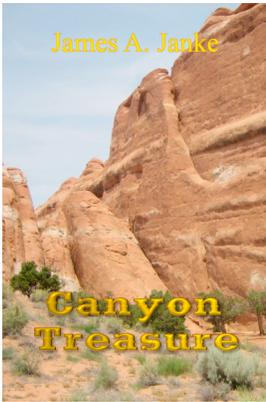
Peggy screamed again as the bandit dropped her and went for his pistol. McHenry turned toward her screams and dropped to one knee. He snapped the carbine to his shoulder, but before he could fire, Falwell put two big slugs into the bandit's chest and knocked him flat. The lieutenant's third bullet missed the bandit on the horse, but the fourth bullet caught him in the head and pitched him from his saddle. Falwell might have gotten the third Mexican, who had let go of Winslow and grabbed his own pistol, except the large hub of the rear wheel of the rushing stagecoach smashed into Falwell's leg and spun him around to topple over on the ground.

The third outlaw took a shot at Winslow, but he missed because the railroad man took a flying leap to land on top of his daughter. McHenry shifted his aim and fired off a quick shot. The bullet ripped into the bandit's arm and jerked him around. McHenry's next bullet hit him squarely in the chest and knocked him over a low wall.

Satisfied that Peggy was safe for the moment, McHenry whirled around again. The bandit leader and the remaining horseman with him were racing off. Al and Mitch were firing at the three bandits still charging from the west. McHenry joined in, levering in new cartridges and firing as fast as he could. When the carbine was empty, he drew his pistol and started using that.

The heavy fire from the three of them halted the rush of the outlaws. They milled about and gestured toward their leader, who was heading off in a cloud of dust. They turned and raced after him.

The six stagecoach horses also galloped after the bandit leader, and the stagecoach, with its brake smoking, disappeared in a cloud of dust.



*Rancher Jason McHenry sells his ranch and heads for Chicago to work in the stockyards. The first leg of his journey is in a stagecoach with five other passengers: a fellow rancher heading for Flagstaff, a railroad executive from San Francisco with his pretty young daughter exploring the area for business opportunity, a mining salesman, and a young cavalry officer heading for Washington.*

*They are all tested. McHenry learns much about people. And he finds something he wasn't looking for. But he doubts he'll be able to get any of them out of their ordeal alive.*

# Canyon Treasure

by James A. Janke

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