

# Riches Beyond Dream

by Louis L'Amour, 1908-1988

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It was June when they arrived at the adobe on Pinon Hill. There had been little change since Kirby Ann had last been there ... the trees Tom Kirby planted the year before he died were taller, and bunchgrass grew where the lawn should be.

Kirby Ann got out of the jeep and looked at Bob. The ride had tired him ... a serious wound and a year in a Red Chinese prison camp had wrecked his health. He needed the sun, they told him, with rest and quiet. Well, he could get that here. Maybe it was all they could get here.

„It's a roof, honey," Bob said quietly. „We can fix up the place." He took her hand and they walked to the edge of the hill. „I always loved it here," she said.

Before them lay the long valley, dotted now with cloud shadows, and beyond the valley a rugged hill, and beyond more hills, more valleys, more peaks and ridges.

„Tom built for the view," Kirby Ann said, „and would you believe it? When he was declared mentally incompetent, this was one of the reasons. Because he built

an expensive house in a lonely place, and then wouldn't allow a road to be built leading to it."

"He was a good old man," Bob said. "I liked him."

Long after Bob was asleep, Kirby lay awake, remembering. This place had been left to her by her great-uncle Tom. It had been written into his will before his grandchildren had him declared incompetent and took over the handling of his affairs.

They had taken his house in town, the orchard he planted with his own hands, the ranch, and the mine. It was the silver they really wanted, and Blake, his eldest grandson, believed it came from the long-unworked Kirby Silver Mine on the edge of town.

There was never any argument about the adobe. Nobody wanted a house in such a lonely place. Yet when she came for her first visit she found they had been there, too, spading up the yard and blasting rock in the hill, feverishly searching for the silver lode. For the source of the fabulous planchas de plata he had sold to the bank in Topa.

Blake Bidwell had been coldly furious after the funeral. "The old fool! He should have been declared incompetent years ago!"

"He was always soft in the head," Archie Moulton said sourly, "but I never dreamed he'd die without telling us."

"And not even to tell Kirby!" Esther was aghast. Esther was always aghast. "And she did so much for him!"

Kirby Ann had sat very still, her coffee growing cold. Not a thought for the poor old man who had died in that narrow windowless room that smelled of disinfectant, died still dreaming of the hills he loved so well.

He had given them all so much. Blake his first car. Archie and Esther a restaurant business. Jake a start in the bank.

And that was to say nothing of the other, intangible things he had tried to give them. His love of wild things, of trees, flowers, of the lonely desert and the enchanted hills. Of them all, she alone shared his love for these. He had, because of this, wanted her to have the adobe.

He never tired talking of the desert. Only at the end had his thoughts turned more and more to mining. Again and again he told her how to stake a claim, build the cairn, post the notices, and register it.

"A staked claim is property, Kirby Ann," he said, winking at her. "Lucky I didn't have one or they'd have taken that, too."

"Now don't you forget what I've told you. Like me, you love the desert. Someday you may find something ... someday when you need it worse than now."

Had there been a hint in that? There would never be a time when they would need it worse than this very day. The money Bob would get from the government would help only for a while. It would be months and months before he could work. She searched her memory but could find nothing in the old conversations but the nostalgic wanderings of an old man nearing death.

He had loved the desert, and he knew the lines of ancient beaches where seas and lakes had been. He knew where lay the best beds of agate, jasper, or garnet. He had followed the old, mysterious trails of prehistoric Indians marked by

forgotten piles of desert-varnished stones. He had known the plants of the desert, the cacti, the flowers, the herbs and grasses.

She remembered the town's excitement when he first brought in the ore, the sheets and balls of almost pure silver. When men failed to track him, and when his own grandchildren failed to probe his secret, they began to believe he had uncovered a rich vein in the long abandoned Kirby Silver Mine ... and he let them think so. Not long after, the twins, Blake and Jake, working with Esther and Esther's husband, Archie Moulton, began the move to have him declared incompetent.

They took over the mine and they spent thousands on engineers who probed and estimated and explored to no purpose. And the old man would have no more to do with them.

When she had received the deed to the house, there had been a note inside that she was to keep. Remembering it, Kirby Ann got it out of her overnight bag to show to Bob in the morning.

*You been good to me, Kirby Ann, patient with a tired old man. Marry Bob and spend your June honeymoon here—never sell it or give it away. Enjoy the flowers, and remember what I taught you about them. They ask only care, and they give so much in beauty, and in riches beyond dream.*

Sitting before the kitchen window, they ate their first breakfast in the adobe. „*Mighty purty sight*, Great-uncle Tom used to say,“ she told Bob. „*Come June the purtiest I ever did see.*“

„If we only had the money to fix it up,“ Bob agreed. „I'll work around, but I'll have to take it slow at first.“

Bob lifted his coffee cup, nodding toward the far hill. „Honey, what's the yellow over there across the valley?“

Kirby Ann looked. „It's buckwheat. It blooms in late June...“

„Bob,“ Kirby Ann said, her eyes narrowing, „we were never here in *June!* We postponed our wedding, and our honeymoon was in September.“

He chuckled. „I know that. I didn't have any money in June, and not much more in September.“

She got to her feet. „Bob, get the jeep. We're going over there.“

Twenty minutes later they stood in the patch of buckwheat, golden and beautiful in the morning sun. It was all about them, and at their feet, thicker than elsewhere, it cloaked and disguised an old mine working. Bob held in his hand a chunk of ore, seamed with silver.

„When I was only a child he told me,“ she said. „It's an old prospector's saying: *Look where the buckwheat grows—it has affinity for silver.*“

