



Joshua's Gold

It's a honey of a gold mine. But how can the 16-year-old get the fortune home without others stealing his find?



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JOSHUA CARLISLE, a man grown at 16, was three days on the trail and high in the Rocky Mountains when he began panning for gold. It was early January 1859 and the gold in the creeks around Denver City had played out. Mr. Schermerhorn had been right.

"Come spring," the old store keeper had told him, "every prospector's gonna rush up in them mountains. You want gold, Josh, you gotta be first."

Now, at every stream, Josh filled his flat-rimmed pan with ice-cold silt and water. He stirred it, letting the lighter sand float up and wash over the rim, then looked carefully for gold. The heavier gold particles and nuggets were supposed to stick to the bottom of the pan, but Josh found nothing.

"Where are you, gold?" Josh shouted, his lonely voice echoing from snow-covered peaks. After a week he had nothing to show for his hard work but cold, chapped hands and a sore back.

A quiet snow began to fall.

"I'll give it another day," he told himself one night, "then I head for Denver City and get my old job back at Schermerhorn's."

About noon the next day, Josh, atop his horse and pulling a pack mule, reached a mountain pass and looked into the valley beyond. A wide, shallow creek meandered through it.

"Perfect," Josh muttered.

He rode down into the valley to the creek, dismounted and stuck his hand into the cold wet sand. As the sand trickled through his fingers it glittered.

GOLD," HE WHISPERED, then shouted: "G-O-O-O-O-O-O-L-D!"

He heard his voice echoing around the mountains, and froze. He wanted no prospectors, outlaws or Ute Indians finding him or his gold.

"No noise," he whispered. "From now on we stay quiet."

Josh unloaded his pack mule and horse, rubbed them down and picketed them near water. Then he

cleared snow from a patch of grass where they could graze. Chores done, Josh went back to the stream.

Each pan yielded gold in tiny grains. By evening he had half a pouch full, about \$100 or a year's wages working at Schermerhorn's.

The winter wind blew sharply. Josh shivered as he built a fire.

"Tomorrow I'll find a better camp."

NEXT MORNING Josh explored the valley and found a cave that would shelter him and the animals. He chopped wood and killed a deer for its warm hide to use as a winter blanket and for meat to feed him through the harsh season. With camp secured, he went for the gold.

The short winter days settled quickly into a routine. Up before dawn, Josh built a small fire, cooked breakfast and cared for his animals. He panned all day, with only a short lunch break. After supper he measured and weighed his gold dust, storing it in small leather pouches.

Then one morning the routine changed.

"Look at that," Josh whispered, holding a small gold nugget up to the sun. "Imagine. Twenty-five dollars in one little pebble."

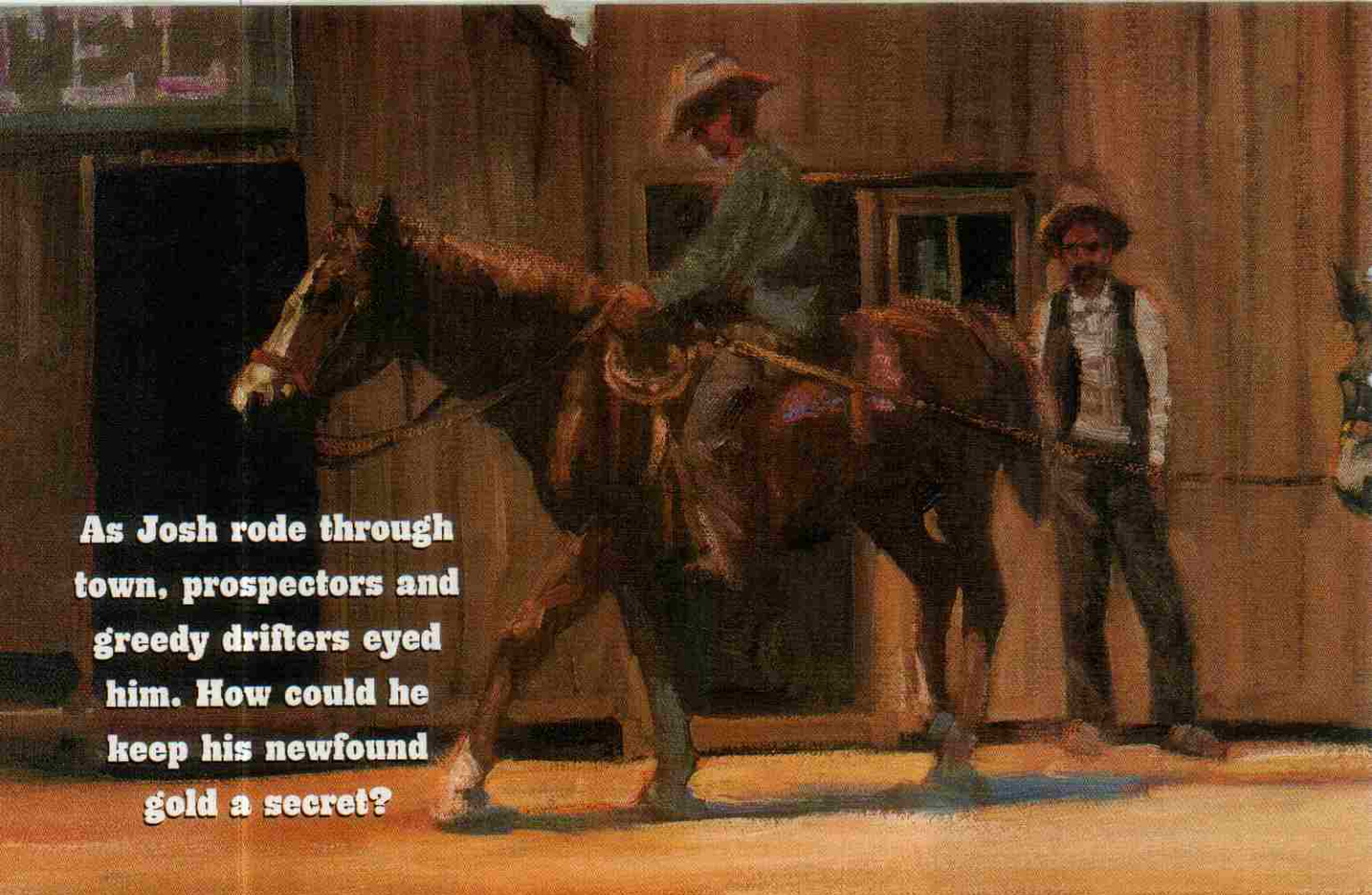
Pan after pan produced more nuggets.

"Fifty-two nuggets, boys," he told the animals at supper. "About \$2,500. Not a bad day's work, I'd say!"

For 34 days, Josh worked the stream and filled pouches with gold dust and nuggets. Finally, in March, with supplies about gone, he headed to Denver City. Hidden in his packs was \$27,000 in gold.

DENVER CITY WAS BOOMING. As Josh rode slowly down Main Street toward Schermerhorn's General Store, he could hear an old piano in one tent. Raucous laughter filled the night air. A chair crashed through the swinging doors as a fistfight spilled out of one establishment. Prospectors and drifters watched as he rode by.

"They're wonderin' 'bout my luck," he thought. ▶



As Josh rode through town, prospectors and greedy drifters eyed him. How could he keep his newfound gold a secret?

Suddenly Josh realized that he couldn't use his gold in Denver City if he wanted to keep the strike a secret. But how could he buy new supplies or ship the gold without using it? He needed a plan.

MR. SCHERMERHORN came out to the porch of his store and greeted Josh as he dismounted.

"Look who finally showed up! You look a bit down on your luck, son. You're welcome to bed down in the storeroom again, if you want."

"Thank you, sir," Josh said, with relief. "I'll need a job too."

"No gold, huh?"

Josh shrugged his shoulders, not wanting to speak a lie. "Got to eat and sleep," he said, "and buy more supplies." This was no lie.

"Well, come into the Honey Hut when you're settled. We'll talk."

Soon Josh joined Mr. Schermerhorn in his workroom. He started helping pour honey into large gallon crocks and sealing them with wax.

"Everybody's building, so carpenters are in demand," Mr. Schermerhorn said as they worked. "People will remember you buildin' this workroom onto the store last fall. I'll spread the word."

"Sounds good. Thanks."

"Yep, Denver City's growin', all right. It's 'cause of Gregory's strike up at Clear Creek. Happened in January, just after you left, and now the gold rush is on again. We're getting a newspaper in April and a telegraph office opened last week."

MR. SCHERMERHORN began searching his pockets. "Just plum forgetful, Josh. You got a letter. Come in February from Texas. Here she is."

Josh opened the letter, began reading, then chuckled.

"It's from my brother, Baker. Remember the crock of honey I sent home last fall? Baker says to send more. His wife, Sarah, is expectin' a baby and cravin' your honey. Says he can sell honey to the neighbors too."

"Looks like you're in business, Josh. Better than huntin' for gold." Mr. Schermerhorn looked thoughtful for a minute, then said, "Tell you what. You help me in the Honey Hut and I'll go partners with you. We'll ship your brother as many crocks as we can and split the cost and profits. A carpenter's job can pay for your supplies. What do you say?"

"I say shake, partner, and thanks."

JOSH COULD HARDLY believe his luck. *That honey will be golden*, he thought. *Pure golden!*

While working out his plan, however, Josh discovered two obstacles: first, keeping the gold and honey separate; second, deciding how much gold to put into each crock. If the crocks were too heavy his secret would be out.

After several nights of experimenting, the formula was set. Josh fit four small glass jars of gold, sealed with wax, into each crock, then filled the crocks with honey and sealed them.



HE PACKED 27 CROCKS into hay-cushioned crates, tucked a letter explaining the gold to his brother inside one crate, then helped load them carefully onto Wells Fargo freight wagons. As he watched the wagon train pull out, he crossed his fingers. Robbery or one cracked crock could foil his plan, and he began worrying whether he should have sent all the gold at once.

Before heading back to his carpenter's job, Josh sent a telegraph message to Baker: 27 CROCKS GOLDEN HONEY SHIPPED. SCHERMERHORN NOW PARTNER. READ LETTER FIRST. J.

Two weeks later, Josh bought supplies, said goodbye to his partner and headed for the mountains, careful no one followed.

First day back in his valley, Josh began walking upstream, searching for clues.

"Those last nuggets I found were rough. They can't have washed very far down stream. The source has to be close by."

Five days into the search Josh

spotted an old rock slide that had spilled into the stream. Scrambling up the slide, he found a wall of glistening quartz laced with gold.

"It's a jewelry store," Josh murmured. The old quartz broke apart easily, leaving only nugget-sized gold in his hands. "Could be the strike of a lifetime or just a pocket, but it will do!"

After two months Josh returned to Denver City with four times the gold as before. A telegram waited: SELLING HONEY IN SMALL JARS. JUST GOLDEN. SEND MORE. BAKER.

The gold had arrived.

TWICE MORE JOSHUA went into the mountains and came out with gold. Each time his secret remained safe. Then in early October, Josh set out again. By noon he knew he was being followed.

"Three men, no pack animals," he muttered, watching the distant riders follow his trail. "They want my gold, they'll have to find me first!"

For a week Josh led the chase

through valleys, over mountains, changing directions, marking false trails. Finally, he doubled back and watched. The riders had lost his tracks and their way.

Satisfied, Josh followed an ancient trail over the next ridge and headed for his valley.

He also made a decision. With one last shipment he would go home; \$200,000 in gold was enough.

IN LATE NOVEMBER, Joshua headed for Texas. He left one crock for Mr. Schermerhorn. That crock contained a jar of nuggets, a letter and a map.

In the spring, Wells Fargo delivered a crate to the now greatly expanded Carlisle Brothers Ranch Inc. Inside Josh found a crock of honey, a jar of nuggets and a note: "We'll call it The Honey Plot Mine. Schermerhorn."

Carlisle & Schermerhorn, a partnership based on trust and the ability to keep a secret, prospered—a sweet deal if ever there was one. ♣

