# Trail Drive

Zane Grey’s crossdressing story "The Trail Driver" retold

By Maryanne Peters

It was getting dark. The sun had already dropped below the horizon but on the plains the twilight lasts a little longer, so the stranger, drawn by the light of a fresh fire, could easily steer a horse through the low scrub.

The cattle were well settled in a basin where there was a small watercourse and some green grass alongside as well as tender tips on some of the brush. They would settle well and could be easily watched from just above the campsite where the water flowed out.

The trail boss Joe Shipman was already seated by the fire, and the cook Alabama Moze was warming a pot and cutting dry bacon. He had been soaking a bucket of beans and that would be added to the pot when the water was boiling, with the bacon and some Mexican pepper, and that was it. It was the same every night, along with some damper bread if he could be bothered. And grits every morning, with sweet coffee. It was cattle drive food, and if they didn’t like it, they didn’t have to eat it.

Coffee made everything taste better, as did a little corn liquor, so there was a pot on and a bottle out. The Uvalde brothers, all five of them, were bring the last of the strays in, and Hal Bender was digging a latrine because he liked to be thanked.

Adam Brite and Panhandle Smith walked into the light of the fire and put their saddles down reserving a spot each by way of claiming seniority.

It was Brite’s right. The cattle belonged to him – 2,500 head to be driven along the Chisolm Trail by this band of riders, his second drive of the year but with a new group of cattlemen. The wagon belonged to Shipman, and had seen many drives before this. There were 32 arrow heads in the boards underneath – the wall of their redoubt if needed in the Indian Territory ahead of them. There were scorch marks too, but Shipman made sure the wagon was solid and sure with extra steel where needed.

Smith claimed the right to be close to the fire only because nobody would ever argue with a man like him – good with a gun and a knife, and his fists as well. He looked it too – not tall and good looking if you are drawn to violent men. He was wanted in some states, it was known to all, but he never seemed to care. He said that if there was a price on his head, he might collect it himself.

He was no cowboy, but he knew horses. In addition to his own mount he rode to take care of the extra 10 horses taken on the drive, and because he had his own reasons to stay out of towns, and because everybody on the drive received a payout that the end. He set down his saddle on the ground.

But the fifth person to join them at the fire was a stranger, astride a horse, pulling up at a polite distance but in the light of the flames now well established.

They turned to look. Astride the horse was a young woman, as far as they could see. She was wearing a blue dress with lace around low neck and high sleeves, and a bonnet with chestnut curls visible. She was straddling the horse so the skirts we partly amassed in front of her, yet she wore women’s shoes as if she should be walking down a city street. The nearest such street may well have been 100 miles from this spot on the Chisolm Trail.

“Excuse me Gentlemen,” she said. It was not the voice they might have expected from a mere girl, but it has a special quality to it. “I wonder if I could impose on you and request some hospitality for the night. I find myself a little lost and abandoned out here.”

“It would be our pleasure, Miss,” said Brite, walking over to her. He looked up and immediately saw that she was in distress. He seemed hardly surprised when she seemed to faint slightly, slipping off the saddle and into his waiting arms. She smelled of lavender and rose petals, and she was light as a feather. He carried her to the others, asking for Shipman to get a blanket.

She was conscious but groggy. He called for coffee and hardtack to soak in it. The four men gathered around her scratching their heads. Where had she come from? It was as if a young woman had been plucked from a night at the opera in Baltimore and deposited by magic on the Staked Plains north of Texas.

Shipman decided that he should remove her bonnet that was tied around her chin. Her was short by the standard of all but a very young girl, but it was in volume and shone like burnished copper in the fire light, the curls bouncing as she shook her head back into consciousness.

“I am sorry,” she said. “I don’t want to be a burden.”

“You are no burden, Little Lady,” said Shipman. It was a long time since he had met the real thing, as the whores of Waco and Fort Worth and Abilene could never carry the title.

“We are here to assist you in any way we can,” said Brite, mindful of his manners. He had money and had mixed with polite society but he needed this drive to go through, and he was already worried that he might lose somebody to escort this woman back to civilization. “Where are you headed?”

“Away from death,” she said, with a look of real fear on her face. But she corrected herself – “Away from danger”.

“Where are your travelling companions?” said Brite.

“I have none,” she said. Again she added what might have been a correction – “They are all gone. I am alone. I am alone in the world.”

“Indians?” Shipman’s eyes narrowed. He had lost good men to Indians. He had only heard about what they did to white women. It even sent a shiver down his spine that carried the burden of a long experience in the Western Territories.

She just hung her head and wept. The question had been answered.

We had best post a watch tonight, Adam,” he said. They had only been together less than two weeks but he respected a cattle owner who rode with his stock, in the company of men like those on this drive. “That would have to be you, Panhandle,” said Shipman. “The word is that you never sleep.”

“That is why I am alive,” said Panhandle Smith with a brooding sneer. “I’ll find a spot after everybody else has bedded down. But we will need to get this lady to safety in the morning. It’s a long way back to Red River Station, so maybe Caldwell west of the trail?”

“I don’t know anyone there,” said the woman. “Where are you all headed.”

“We’re headed to Abilene, Kansas,” said Shipman. “But we are 20 days into a 50 day cattle drive, so we have 30 days of hard riding ahead of us. It’s no place for a woman.”

“I understand,” she said, wiping away a tear. Her moist eyes looked fearful and wide, and it seemed as if all 4 men were affected by it. But it was the cook who broke the spell. The pot on the fire was boiling and the beans and bacon was thrown in together with broken hardtack to thicken the stew.

“What is you name, Ma’am?” asked Adam Brite.

“Rachael Bayne,” she replied. “People call me Reddie. My hair is not that red, but that is what they call me.” Reddie was her name. Rachael was an invented moniker, but not a new one.

She was wrapped in a blanket when Hal Bender returned with his shovel and the five Uvalde brothers wandered in. Bender was big and friendly, and the Uvalde brothers were Mexican Texans named after the county they came from because their family name was too difficult to pronounce. They were good riders and handlers of livestock, but their grasp of English seemed limited, although that mayhave been deliberate. The all viewed to young woman in their midst with curiosity, and some with a little more than that.

Brite felt he needed to lay down the rules – “This Lady is a victim of an Indian massacre. I have taken responsibility for her safety but she is in the care of all of us, do you understand. Treat her with respect … as you would your mother. Any misbehavior will be dealt with by me, and harshly.”

The bacon and beans was ready and Alabama Moze dished it out in the manner it deserved – with a snarl. Reddie was hungry but she found it hard to eat. It was truly awful.

“Don’t you like it Missy?” said the cook. He regularly surveyed the faces of those eating his fare, looking for an excuse to throw down his ladle and take to the saddle again.

“You maybe should have soaked the beans with the bacon,” she said. “And if you look here, we have chickweed growing right here beside the wagon, which is delicious raw or cooked. And here is lamb’s quarter too, which goes well with beans. And I saw wild sorrell on the hills, an pepper grass and sage, and meadow Garlic by the stream…”. She stopped because the cook was staring at her accusingly.

“Well, I guess you will be doing the cooking tomorrow, Missy and every day after,” he said.

“I just want to help,” insisted Reddie.

“Now just a minute Al,” said Shipman. “You are still the cook.”

“Does it look like my bottom lip is on the ground, Boss? I may not be as good as I was since that back problem put me in the wagon seat, but I can do a half day as an outrider. I am happy to let Curly locks here try her hand at trail cooking since she seems to know the local greenery, and I can help but useful elsewhere. It’s no skin off of my nose, I tell you.”

“You can cook, Rachael?” said Brite.

“I just want to help,” she said. “I want a reason to stay with you all, right the way through to Abilene if you will let me.

What you are wearing may not be suitable, but maybe Panhandle can help. He seems to be the same size?” Brite turned to their most mysterious member.

“I travel light, as you know, Mr. Brite,” he said. “But I will see what I can do. And Cookie keeps spare aprons and canvas pants.”

“I don’t want to wear men’s clothes,” insisted Reddie. It seemed an odd thing to say, but none of these men truly understood women, or would never admit that they did.

“Do what you can to fill your belly with what we have and get some sleep,” said Brite. “We are on the lookout for Indians tonight, and every night until Wichita. Panhandle will arrange the night watch.”

They all took to their beds, unrolling their rough blankets, while Reddie produced from under her saddle a patterned quilt to roll herself up in.

In the morning she had found a griddle pan and was making sweet cakes that the men could smell when they rose. They swore that even the coffee tasted better when she made it. A few days later Hal suggested that she might have peed into the coffee pot, because – “Surely on angel’ piss could make the coffee taste this good.”

That first dinner was bacon and beans, but cooked “Reddie Style” with wild herbs and greens and paste of wild peppers that could be added as the men liked, if they wanted extra spice. By the day after that was a turkey that she herself had trapped, and then she had Alabama shoot a deer which they prepared together. The men were eating like kings.

And she respected mealtimes as well. She insisted that even if they all sat around the fire with bowls in their laps, they wait until a short prayer of thanks was said before a morsel entered their mouths.

“We are a family,” she said. “And a family eats together and thanks the Lord for food and for brotherhood. And we also pray for protection from the Indians in these parts, and for the days when these poor savages can be brought to God.”

She did not seem overly religious except for at mealtimes, and to the bots on the trail drive that seemed right, because mealtimes had become almost a religious experience. Hal’s talk about them as having - “been sent an angel to bring us manna from heaven to feed us” seemed to ring true.

She could not wear the dress she had arrived in, but she had found a gingham tablecloth strangely out of place in the wagon, and she had fashion that into skirts and a bodice with an apron over, and she could wear a of what Panhandle called his “Bordello Shoes” around the wagon and the fire. With Alabama helping to gather the stock it was up to her and Panhandle to venture ahead and find a camp for the wagon and the horses, so they were closer than others who were often beyond shouting distance from one another among a noisy herd/

So it was Panhandle Smith who discovered Rachael Bayne’s secret before anybody else.

Reddie insisted on cleanliness. She found supplies of carbolic soap in the wagon that had barely been touched and she used it to wash the boards in the kitchen that folded down from the side. And she kept herself clean and in the absence of perfume she used sweet wild herbs and flowers to soften the soap. She attended to her toilet in private, but the glance that Panhandle took was hardly accidental as he claimed.

“I’m sorry, my mistake,” he said, even before his eyes saw what maybe they wished they never had. “Well fuck me drunk, you’re a boy!”

“Please Pan, don’t tell anybody,” she said, with tears welling up in her pretty eyes. They were alone setting up a new campsite. She was at his mercy as if she was one of those poor fools who was staring at the muzzle of his gun while theirs had not yet been pulled from its holster.

“Tell me your story,” he said.

“I was my mother’s child,” she started, choking back the tears and composing herself. “I had two older brothers and a father who worked them hard, but he left me as a gift for his wife – the runt of the litter who could help her around the house and listen to her tales of the life she used to lead. She was a woman of class, my mother. She married for love. I never doubted that. And he loved her. But he brought her to Texas and life was hard. She put away her dresses, like the one I wore when I first met you boys. But she talked to me about life as a lady. I adored her. I wanted to be her. The crazy thing is that I think that is what I always wanted, ever since I was a small child. I wanted to be like my mother – not like my father. And then she died – the consumption. It seemed like my life was over. My father said that it was time for me to grow up and cut off my curls. He wanted to burn my mother’s dresses. It was like any memory of her was too sad for him to bear, and I was that memory I think. Anyway, I ran away. I just put on her corset and her fine clothes and I rode into the desert. It was better for me to die as I am than live a life like somebody I was not. I didn’t care whether I lived or died. I rode and I rode … days, I think. And then I saw your campfire. I just wanted some warmth. Then I met you all and it seemed to me that I had something I could give you for saving my life. I don’t not what the future holds but I think I have one. If you can think of me as a woman then perhaps the world can?”

“I can think of you as a woman,” said Panhandle Smith. “In fact, I can’t think of you as anything else. I have already forgotten what I saw, but it was anything the it must have been the cutest little muff that a man ever laid eyes on.”

She ran to him and hugged him, still only in her slip and corset.

“Thank you,” she said. “Anything I can do for you, you just ask. Anything.”

Some men may have taken advantage at that moment, in particular men who had chosen to ignore what they had seen the way he had done. Such men may have draped a girl like Reddie over a saddle on the ground and mounted her like a stallion. But understanding her had left another thought in the mind of Panhandle Smith. 2906

Some may have expected the unsleeping outlaw to have been disgusted by what he saw, but if anything this man was seen to have become more attentive to Reddie, and even flirtatious. This drew the attention of both Brite and Shipman.

“You have earned your place on the Drive, Mr. Smith, but please do not embarrass the lady and raise the envy of the other men here, with your excessive attentions in her directions,” said Brite.

“You mistake a friendly working relationship for romance, Sir,” said Panhandle, showing a respect reserved for only a few. “Reddie and I have become firm friends, but I have no intentions beyond that.”

If any, it was Joe Shipman who was wrestling with his desires. The truth was that his relationship with women was generally 10 minutes by candlelight, concluded by the passing of a coin or two. Over the weeks that Reddie had been with them he had experienced the presence of a woman in his life for the first time since the death of his sainted mother when he was still a youth. Here was somebody who cared for him as for others, and was a beacon of goodness and faith among the coarse and Godless … and her food was truly amazing. And she seemed to love the trail. For the first time he wondered if his life had to be womanless.

Adam Brite could not get out of his mind the first image of her in that dress. Here was a woman of class and refinement, yet somebody who knew who he was and what he faced everyday, in his labors to become a wealthy man. But what is wealth is there is no woman to spend it, or spend it on? A woman like this was all that he ever wanted.

Simple but honest Hal Bender loved her too, but he knew that he was so far below her that she was somebody he only dreamed about. Even at least two of the Uvalde brothers lusted after her, despite a preference for darker maidens. To them the chestnut-haired beauty was something truly exotic and captivating.

And through the stares and heavy breaths Reddie Bayne glided through dispensing her food and her favors – in the form of a hand on theirs, or a word or a smile – it all seemed like gold coins being thrown in their direction.

A cattle drive avoids towns and the roads between them except to cross them, but when Reddie was told that Wichita was to the East by only a few miles she asked whether she and Panhandle could take two of the extra horses remaining as pack animals into town for provisions. Shipman agreed on the condition that she also secure a pouch of tobacco. He would take the wagon forward to a known campsite, and they would meet there.

She wore her camp clothes but brightened with a silk scarf from Italy and another (both taken from her mother’s things) tied around a straw cowboy hat from the wagon stores.

But when they got to the edge of town, Panhandle urged her to go in first, saying – “Just go to the sheriff’s office and see whether my name and image is on the board. If it is, I May have to wait for you here.”

People stared as she rode in, which seemed to be what she wanted. She arrived at the sheriff’s office and stepped onto the porch, taking off her hat and shaking her curls.

The sheriff could see her through the window and was drawn to rise from the seat where he spent most of day to step outside.

“Good morning Ma’am. Is there something I can help you with.

“I was looking at the wanted poster here” she said. “I know this name, don’t I? He sounds like an evil man.”

“Fate makes many a man wrong even if they ain’t evil,” the grizzled sheriff said. “I know this young man. He was quick with his guns and people who look for those skills ain’t looking to preach the gospel. It don’t matter that he had no hand in the robbery or the killings. He rode with that crowd and that makes him accessory to those crimes – no doubt about it. If caught this man will hang. I hope you don’t know him well. I hope no more tears will be shed for him.”

“No Sheriff,” said Reddie. “I think that you will find that this man is dead – lost in the dust of the Chisolm Trail. You will never find a body is my guess.”

She went to the store and placed her order, and then went to the new store specializing in selling women’s garments. She spent the money Panhandle had given her there, including a good sum on a blonde wig arranged with bangs and spiral curls.

She collected her order from the general store and caught up with Panhandle in his hiding place behind the livery stables. He looked at her with that question on his face.

“Dead or alive,” she said. “But the image makes that tiny mustache of yours look big, so that will have to go.”

“You know it will,” he said. “I won’t be chased all my life.”

They rode at a good canter to get to the camp early and set up for dinner including fresh victuals. Brite was there but soon rode off, so it seemed they had time before preparations to work on a disguise for Panhandle before the crew returned.

So when Shipman returned early to collect that tobacco he had ordered, he was surprised or even shocked to find two ladies at the wagon, practicing walking.

“It’s just a disguise,” said Panhandle. “A reward is up for me and any one of our crew would turn me in. I have to duck out before we hit the yards at Abilene. You can give my cut to Reddie and she will get it to me. She has been my teacher in the ways of womenfolk.”

“I never thought I would see a man make such a convincing woman,” said Shipman.

“He is not the only one,” said Reddie. I have a confession to make. But please keep it secret. Only you and Mr. Brite should know the truth about me …”.

Of the 2500 cattle that left Texas the drive delivered to the stock yards of Abilene 2378 steers and heifers to the market at the railhead in Abilene. They only lost 7 horses on the way, and that is a good figure too. But they found a woman, and then lost a man and found another woman you might say.

Every cowboy knows that only steers and heifers earn the money. The meat is sweet, just as bull meat is tainted, so every cowboy knows how a steer is not a bull, and that is to be done. And as Hal Bender said, it works just as well for a man as it does a beast. And you can’t make a steer a heifer, but when it comes to humanity, it seems it is all in the eye of the beholder.

Reddie got to live her life as the wife of a rich man, and Pan (as she is now known by all) ended up living a life instead of hiding. Joe Shipman had given up the hope of ever finding a woman to warm his bed on the trail. No such women existed until she was created before his very eyes. And here was a woman whose hands were always soft from handling nothing more than a gun or a pack of cards, or a horse brush. From the time that she appeared as Pandora she always lived her femininity, and yet could ride with him, and she is handy with a gun to boot.

The End



Pandora Smith Shipman and Rachael “Reddie” Bayne Brite taking tea together

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