

THE DESERT MOON MYSTERY

BY KAY CLEAVER STRAHAN

Mr. Bicker knew it, too. Her excuse was, that she had chosen Martha because she was no pretty; that she had had no opportunity to judge her other characteristics. She insisted that she thought, with proper care, Martha would develop normally.

I knew better. Sam knew it, too. But, when I begged and besought him not to adopt her, he brought out an argument good and conclusive for him. "If I don't adopt her, and take care of her," said Sam, "who the heck would?"

So adopt her he did. And he spent a small fortune on doctors, specialists, for her. None of them could do anything. It was, they said, a hopeless case of retarded development. So, at twenty-one years of age, Martha, though the care and doctoring had given her a fine healthy body, had the mind of a child of five or six years—not too bright a child, either. That was at best. At worst—Well, no matter, entirely harmless, the doctors said; but I always had my doubts.

Sam tried all sorts of teachers for her, too; bringing them from back east and paying them sums to stagger. But, in the end, we found that Mrs. Bicker was better with her than anyone else. She never pretended any particular love for Martha, but she took care of her, and kept her sweet and clean, and put up with her tempers, when many a better woman than Ollie Bicker would have gone away in disgust. I am not saying that, if there is a Judgment Day, as many say and some believe, I'd care to be standing in Ollie Bicker's shoes, if she is wearing them at that time; but I do say that her gentleness, and her patience, through all those years with Martha, should be counted to her credit, whether or no.

CHAPTER III
HUBERT HAND

It was three years after Mrs. Bicker came to the ranch, bringing John and Martha, that Hubert Hand put in his appearance. He had got Mr. Indian Chat Chin, as everybody called him, to bring him up from Rattail in his old surrey. Hubert Hand, was something of a dude in those days, though he has well outgrown it since, and I remember yet how comical he looked, sitting up there so stiff and fine in his light gray overcoat and gray Fedora hat, with that big Roman nose of his protruding out and up, disdainfully, above his little moustache, and apparently above all consciousness of dirty old Mr. Indian Chat Chin and the rattle-trap rig.

Mr. Indian Chat Chin stopped his old nag at the entrance to the driveway, and Hubert Hand climbed carefully down and came up the road, swinging a walking cane like he was leading a parade.

Sam and I, as was our custom, went walking down to meet him.

He took off his hat to me, and said to Sam, "I wish to see the owner of this ranch."

"Nobody ever mistook me for a fairy before," Sam said. "But go ahead. Your first wish is granted. What are the other two?"

Hubert Hand got out his card then. Besides his name it had "Clover-blossom Creamery," and the San Francisco address printed on it.

"Now Mr. Stanley," Hubert Hand went on, after the embarrassing minute of general introductions, "I am going to be honest with you—"

"Hold on stranger," Sam interrupted, "you're not. You are going to be as dishonest as

heck. Otherwise, you wouldn't bother to tell me you were going to be honest. Go ahead."

Hubert Hand laughed, but he didn't like it. He went ahead, though, and explained that he had an up-and-coming creamery business in San Francisco, but that his physician had told him that he had to live in a high, dry climate with plenty of sunshine and no fog. He had, after inquiries and investigations, decided that the Desert Moon Ranch, altitude seven thousand feet, sunshine three hundred and sixty-five days in the year, to say nothing of the marvelous view of the Garnet Mountains, the hunting, the fishing, and the pure snow water, would fill all his requirements.

"Thanks," Sam said "When I get ready to start a Gold Cure Sanatorium, I'll drop you a line."

"You won't do business, then?" Hubert Hand questioned.

"I hadn't heard anything about doing business," Sam said.

Hubert Hand's proposition was that he start a creamery, on the Desert Moon Ranch, and supply the valley with ice-cream, butter, and other dairy products. Sam had the ranch, the cows, and the big ice plant. Mr. Hubert Hand had the knowledge and the equipment. They could divide the profits.

Next to sheep men, I guess there is nothing that cow men hold in lower contempt than they hold dairy farms. Sam was too much disgusted to swear very long.

"But do you realize, Mr. Stanley," Hubert Hand insisted, "that this entire valley has to depend on Salt Lake City, or on Reno, for its dairy products?"

"Listen stranger," Sam said. "I wouldn't turn the Desert Moon into a place to slop milk around in if the entire valley had to depend on Hong Kong, China, for its ice-cream cones. Forget it, and come in now and have some supper."

To my knowledge, Hubert Hand, from that day to this, has never again mentioned, on the Desert Moon, anything that had to do with creameries. Neither, from that day to this, has he been off the ranch for more than a couple of weeks at a time.

"By the way," he began, trying to make it sound unimportant, when we had finished supper, "I heard, in Telko, that you were something of a chess player."

"I am, when I can get a game," Sam said. "But chess players, in these parts, are as scarce as hen's teeth. My neighbor, thirty miles east of here, and I used to play regular, two nights a week. But the son of a gun struck it rich, and like most loyal Native Sons of this state, he moved to California to spend his money. I'm teaching my boy, John—but he is just a kid. Here, lately, about all I've done is work out the puzzles by myself."

"I play a little," Hubert Hand produced, right modestly. Sam jumped and got out his chess table, inlaid ebony and ivory, made special, and his ebony and ivory chess-men.

Hubert Hand beat him the first game in about half an hour. They set up their men again. It took Hubert Hand over an hour that time to beat Sam, but he did it.

"Heck!" Sam said, at the end of that game. "You're hired."

"Hired for what?"

"For whatever you want to call it, except the slopping of milk around. Send for your

trunk and name your pay. Why didn't you say, in the first place, that you were a blankety-blank crack chess player?"

I realize, right here, that I am not going to be able to get through with this entire story, with Sam in it, and continued to modify his vocabulary into hecks and blankety-blanks. Wrong, I think it is; but it is true, that men out here do not talk like that. Sam curses, swears and damns, just as naturally and as innocently as he breathes. The only real trouble about Sam's profanity is that he uses up all his strong words day by day in ordinary conversation; so, when occasions arise that call for something really emphatic, Sam hasn't any words to do them justice. If the demands are not too serious, he reverts and finds a little "Pshaw!" or, "Shoot!" unusual enough to meet the need. If it goes beyond that, he opens his mouth in silence and keeps it open, hoping for a word, until his pipe drops out and scatters ashes and burned and burning tobacco all over everything. I pay no attention to his profanity and small attention to his "Pshaws," and "Shoots." But when his pipe drops, I get right down interested.

To return to Hubert Hand: he accepted Sam's offer then and there. The next day he titled himself assistant ranch manager, and named his salary at two hundred and fifty dollars a month. Sam paid it without blinking; and kept right on managing the ranch, and everything on it, except, perhaps, myself, without any assistance, the same as he had always done.

CHAPTER IV

Chadwick Caulfield

Chadwick Caulfield, the other member of our household, who was present on the Desert Moon Ranch at the time of the first murder, came only two years ago last October.

It was way past bedtime, after ten o'clock, but the radio was brand-new then, and we were all sitting up, listening to a fine program given by the Hoot Owls in Portland, Oregon, when the doorbell rang. Sam answered it. Chad stepped in. He was wearing white corduroy trousers, a long yellow rubber raincoat, and a straw hat tethered to its buttonhole with a string. He was carrying a ukelele under his arm and a camera in his hand. He took off his hat, displaying a head full of pretty yellow curls. He smiled, displaying a sweet, gentle disposition. (If there is any better index to character than the way a person smiles, I have never found it.)

"How do you do?" he said. "I have come to visit you."

By the time Sam got his pipe picked up, John had got down the forty-foot length of living-room and had Chad by both hands, and was introducing him as a friend he had told us about, the friend he had made at Mather's Field, during the war.

The way of that was, John had saved his life for him down there, and had never since been able to get out from under the responsibility of it. John had found a job for him, after the armistice, and when Chad lost it, John had loaned him money to start out in a vaudeville act. He did fine with that for three years, and was making good money on the Orpheum circuit, when he got into an automobile accident in Kansas City and was laid up for months in the hospital there. He went back to work sooner than he should have, and spent three months in an Oakland hospital with influenza. John had wired money to him there, and had asked him, again, to come for a visit to the Desert Moon. But, since he had had a standing invitation for years, and since he had sent no word that he was coming, John was as much surprised as any of us that evening.

He had walked over, he explained, from Winnemucca, a distance of a couple of hundred miles. He had had money to buy a ticket no further than Winnemucca. He had a job there, for a while, dish-washing—a fine job he made of it—I'll warrant—and had used his earnings to get into a solo game, hoping to win enough money to pay for his ticket. He had lost his money, his watch, his coat, vest, and shirt. The landlady at Winnemucca, he said, wanted his trunk worse than he did; and anyway, he never argued with ladies. She had allowed him to take the raincoat—a raincoat in this part of Nevada being about as much use to anybody as a life preserver to a trout—and the funny straw hat—he had worn both in his vaudeville act—and the ukelele. Who wouldn't be glad to let anyone who wanted to take a ukelele anywhere, take it? The camera he had found on the road between Shoshone and Palisade. He had named it, "Unconscious Sweetness," and called it "Connie" for short, and he was always plum daffy about it, taking expected and unexpected pictures of all of us at all hours and in all places, and pasting them in big albums with jokes and such written underneath.

It is hard to give a fair description of Chad. He was a little, pindling fellow. Around Sam and John and Hubert Hand he looked about as dainty and trifling as the garnish around the platter of the Thanksgiving turkey. He seemed kind of like that, too; like the extra bit of garnishing that makes life's platter prettier and nicer—absolutely useless, maybe, but never chattering. Until after he came, I had not realized how little real laughing any of us had done. We had been happy enough, and content; but we had never been much amused. He amused us. He made us laugh. He took the mechanical player off the old grand piano, and played it as we had never before heard it played. He spoke pieces and sang funny songs until we held our sides with laughing. He was a ventriloquist, and a mimic besides. He could imitate all of our voices to a T.

Agonies of Contract.

From St. Louis Post Dispatch. If something isn't done about contract bridge pretty soon nobody will be speaking to anybody else. That is what a writer in the Saturday Evening Post foreshadows. Auction was no mean performer in the preceding acid controversy, blaspheemies and tears, but such diversions were mostly restricted to the family. Not so with contract. Perfect strangers bandy epithets across the table right off the reel in which such terms as idiot and imbecile are mere preliminary gestures.

Even the discussion so ballistically headed "Clubs and Daggers," we gather that there are 3,379 recognized contract authorities, no two of whom agree as to what the original bidder imparts to his partner. The authorities themselves, it seems, are "variable as the shade by the light, quivering aspen made."

Conventions sealed with finality in a book published, say this afternoon, are hanged, drawn, quartered and cremated in the volume completed the next morning. And since contract is nothing short of war, pestilence and famine, except partners understand literally and precisely what every bid means, the present confusion is necessarily spreading desolation over the heartstones.

We indulge the hope that we are no stony-hearted visitor from Mars looking disinterestedly at the irate, profane men and haggard, witted women entangled in the coils of contract bridge. We feel that we can bleed as quickly and freely for the sorrows of humanity as anyone. But the agonies of the contract addicts leave us unmoved. Why any rational person ever tries that abominable game a second time is beyond our intellectuals. Once is enough, it seems to us, for any wayfarer who desires to live on a note of amity with his contemporaries during the brief fiftal fever.

INGRATITUDE.

An open foe, his sharpest thrust
In battle's fierce throng,
I'll ever meet whenever I must,
To do the best I may.

Who strikes in anger, reason fled,
And then repents him well,
To such I'll ever extend a hand,
Even in his prison cell.

But ever as the starting of
A never-ending feud,
Shall I regard discovery
Of base ingratitude.

The meek are blessed, it is said,
Inheritors of earth;
A saying which but filleth me
With quite unholy mirth.

We're taught, I know, in every case
To turn the other cheek;
A teaching only fit, I deem,
For captive men, or slaves.

Such doctrines follow, ye who will
But let me play the role,
Ingratitude doth e'er invite
From out a shallow soul.

For meaner than base enmity
Can this degraded thing;
And nothing but reprisal may
For me remove its sting.
—Sam Page.

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Youthful Canvassers.

From the Boston Globe. A painful state of things has been turned up by the Travelers' Aid societies. Reports have been pouring into these various bodies, which are organized to help stranded and suffering folk, on their way of young people, scarcely more than boys and girls, who have belonged to traveling magazine crews. These are periodical crews which make a specialty of house-to-house subscriptions. For this purpose they recruit young people, sometimes not more than 15 or 16 years of age, to sign up for canvassing.

The crew is carried about in a motor truck, lodged at a cheap boarding house and turned loose on the community, the boys being sent to the housewives and the girls to the business men. The story they are made to tell is that they are trying to earn money for college education. Those who organize such things feel that is a persuasive line.

From more than 30 cities scattered through 13 different states, upwards of one hundred different complaints have come to the Travelers' Aid societies of young people, usually girls, stranded and at the end of their resources. Those who hang on to the crew are sometimes in a state of virtual peonage, earning just enough to pay their keep. No doubt the societies will do what they can to discourage such exploitation, but it will be just as well for people in homes and offices to help out by withholding patronage from a system not very much removed from the ways of organized mendacity.

Q. How can I make indelible some autographs that are written in pencil?
N. T.

A. The Bureau of Standards suggests spraying with the fixative used by artists for preventing the smudging of crayon and charcoal drawings. The fixative is a weak solution of bleached shellac in alcohol. The color is so pale, and the film of shellac left on the paper is so thin that it can not be noticed. Be careful not to close the book or turn the pages before the alcohol evaporates and the shellac loses its tackiness. Artists' supply houses sell a cheap tin sprayer, but an old atomizer for spraying the throat can be used. The solution should be well rinsed out of the tubes with alcohol if you wish to use the atomizer again.

Q. Where is the largest electric light in the world?
W. L.

A. It is in the Metropolitan Sound Studios in Hollywood. It has a fifty-thousand watt globe in it, containing enough tungsten filament for 156,000 ordinary sized tube lamps. It is said that it can throw a concentrated beam of twelve million candle power.

LETTER ON RICE GRAIN

London—A letter of greetings was recently received by P. O. Roberts, minister of pensions, written on a single grain of rice. It came in a glass tube, accompanied by a magnifying glass, from Delhi, India. On it was inscribed: "May God bless a long, happy, and prosperous life."

Odoriferous.

From The Humorist. Waitress: Don't you like your college pudding, sir?
Diner: No, Miss. I'm afraid there is an egg in it which ought to have been expelled.



When Food Sours

Lots of folks who think they have "indigestion" have only an acid condition which could be corrected in five or ten minutes. An effective anti-acid like Phillips Milk of Magnesia soon restores digestion to normal.

Phillips does away with all that sourness and gas right after meals. It prevents the distress so apt to occur two hours after eating. What a pleasant preparation to take! And how good it is for the system! Unlike a burning dose of soda—which is but temporary relief at best—Phillips Milk of Magnesia neutralizes many times its volume in acid. Next time a hearty meal, or too rich a diet has brought on the 'east discomfort, try—



Popular English Novelist

Sir Henry Rider Haggard (1856-1925), English novelist, was born at Bradenham Hall, Norfolk. At the time of the first annexation of the Transvaal (1877) he was on the staff of the special commissioner, Sir Theophilus Shepstone, and then became a Master of the High court here. After the cession of the Transvaal to the Dutch he returned to England and read for the bar. Haggard was knighted in 1912. He died in London on May 14, 1925.

"Oh Promise Me"

At some time in her life Cupid pleads to every attractive woman. No matter what her features are, a woman who is sickly cannot be attractive. Sallow skin, pimples, sunken eyes, lifeless lips—these are repellent. DR. PIERCE'S GOLDEN MEDICAL DISCOVERY is just the tonic a rundown person needs. It enriches the blood, soothes the nerves and imparts tone and vivacity to the entire system. In liquid or tablets, at drug stores. Send 10c for trial package of tablets to Dr. Pierce's Clinic, in Buffalo, N. Y., and write for free advice.

Puppy Has Ostrich Meal

An Alsatian puppy with the ambitions of an ostrich has been saved from the consequences of his appetite at the Royal Veterinary college in London. From his stomach were recovered 67 nails of various sizes, two screws, three bolts with nuts, one bolt, 16 brads, one stud, a piece of steel drill and a lump of coal, the whole weighing 15 ounces.

As Bobby Saw It

Plumber—I came to fix that old tub in the kitchen.
Bobby—Mother, here's a man wants to see the cook, I guess.—Capper's Weekly.



My thirteen-year-old daughter is Healthy Now

"My thirteen-year-old daughter Maxine was troubled with backache and pain when she came into womanhood. I knew Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound would help her because I used to take it myself at her age. Now she does not have to stay home from school and her color is good, she eats well and does not complain of being tired. We are recommending the Vegetable Compound to other school girls who need it. You may publish this letter."—Mrs. Floyd Butler, R. #3, Gridley, Kansas.



Minding $2\frac{1}{2}$ Ma
From Answers.
Small Boy: Will you light a cigarette for me, mister?
Old Gentleman: Light your cigarette for you?
Small Boy: Yes; me muvver doesn't allow me to play with matches.

Mercury Dates from Old.
From Chemical Markets Magazine. When mercury was first used is but conjecturable. A small vessel containing mercury was found in a grave at Kurus, which indicate that it was valued as early as the 16th century B. C. Certain

it was known to the Phenicians in the seventh century B. C. and Aristotle in 329 B. C. specifically mentions it. Theophrastus in the third century B. C. prepared mercury from cinnabar by means of copper and vinegar and called it liquid silver. Also at this time there are records of the Almaden mines of Spain—still the richest in the world. Pliny used mercury for the purification of gold. Vitruvius allied his gold so greatly that he gave a recipe for its recovery from worn draperies by amalgamation with mercury.

There is little record of the use of mercury down through the early

centuries, except for the extraction of gold and silver and for the gilding of ornaments. We soon find, however, a record of its medicinal properties and Paracelsus used mercury (probably in the still commercial form of mercury and chalk) as "grey salve." He knew calomel, corrosive and white precipitate, using them for skin diseases.

Q. Please give a biography of Jane Addams. V. W.
A. Jane Addams, the American philanthropist, was born in Cedarville, Ill., September 6, 1869. She was graduated from Rockford college in 1891, following which she

studied in Europe and in the United States. In 1899 Miss Addams established Hull House, a social settlement in Chicago. For a time she acted as inspector of street cleaning. Miss Addams is well known as a lecturer and an author.

Q. Are stocks sold on stock exchanges taxable?—L. L. P.

A. The seller of stock always has to pay the state and federal tax of 2 cents per share. There are no other taxes except an income tax on the earnings of the holder as to ownership such as a tax on tangible property.