

THE DESERT MOON MYSTERY

BY KAY CLEAVER STRAHAN

CHAPTER XXII The Pact

All the while I was getting a make-shift dinner ready, that first thought of mine kept bothering me like the smell of something burning. So, as soon as dinner was over (I need not have bothered with it; everyone straggled in and straggled out again, without doing any justice to good food. Mrs. Ricker and Martha did and even come down.) I told the Indian girl, whose name was Zinnia, to manage the dishes the best she could, and I went off up to my room.

I took up some dinner on a tray with me, for Mrs. Ricker and Mr. Ricker. When Mrs. Ricker opened her door, I managed to get the information that Martha was awake, at least, and that Mrs. Ricker had just been helping her with her bath.

"Is she all right, now?" I questioned.

"I suppose so." She edged the door shut, in my face. I went into my room and combed my hair. I can always think better when I am doing some absolutely unimportant thing like that. But, to-day, it was as if someone had put an egg-beater into my mind, and was beating it to best time. My thoughts whirred, tossed, and foamed.

Sam's pipe ashes. The key in my pocket. Chad's suicide. Chad's note of confession. Gaby's fear. Mrs. Ricker alone in the house. What it was that Danny knew and dared not tell? Not all plainly, and separately, as they look in writing; but all jumbled, and each one seething with its own details and complications.

Sam's pipe ashes—Lands alive! What had been the matter with me? Sam was the only member of our household who smoked a pipe, but he was not the only man in creation who did; nor was his the only pipe. I supposed, that had ever dropped and spilled its contents. A very nice and comforting thought, if I could have fooled myself into believing it.

Try as I might, I couldn't keep from thinking that part of Sam's talk was bluff—that is, soon as I got away from him I thought that. Did it mean that he was trying to shield Chad? No. It could not mean that. Besides, Chad himself had surely been trying to shield someone. Sam? Gaby had feared someone, when she had left the house. No woman had ever feared Sam.

Mrs. Ricker had hated Gaby. But, so had John hated Gaby. Mrs. Ricker had said—John had said—

I jumped to my feet, holding my head in my hands. It seemed to me that the only decent thing I could do, since it held my brainpan, was to wrench the disloyal thing off and sling it away. How dared I think such thoughts of people with whom I had spent the best part of my life? They were the only friends I had in the world. I had never seen one of them do an unkind thing. Never. Mrs. Ricker was as queer as Dick's hatband, but she had always been gentle and patient. She was always the first to spread crumbs on the snow for the birds in winter. Though, of course, she had said to Hubert Hand—I was off again.

I could not endure the thinking of such thoughts. I must stop it. I must find work to do; someone to talk to. I ran across my room and pulled open the door, just in time to see Hubert Hand straighten from where he had been stooping to my keyhole. He brazened it out. "Sorry, Mary. But I guess it will be dog kill dog around here, from now on."

"Hubert Hand," I said,

"what I want to know is, why are you listening at my keyhole?"

"I wasn't listening. I was looking, or trying to. This keyhole peering is the bunk, Mary. You might as well cut it out yourself." With that he turned and walked on down the hall.

I stood watching him, trying to account for an odd sense of relief that had come to me. In a minute I understood. Since he had been at my keyhole, he must have had some suspicion of me, for something. Possibly he had a good reason for that suspicion. As good a reason as I had, for suspecting Sam, and John, and Mrs. Ricker. He was clear off the track with his suspicion. Probably, I was just as far off with mine.

He turned, quickly, and came back to me. He looked up and down the hall. He lowered his voice to just above a whisper. "Mary," he said, "I've gone at this all wrong. I'm off my nut to-day—that's all. I've discovered that I—Well, I guess I cared a lot more for the girl than I thought I did. By God, I believe I loved her. It is hell—having her clear gone. But my hanging for her murder isn't going to do her any good; not now."

Horrified, I backed away from him. For one wild moment I thought that the man was confessing to me.

"No," he said. "Not that! I swear to God I'm innocent. But they are going to try to pin it on me, and they may not have much trouble doing it. I want to make a bargain with you. You'll get the best of it, for I know damn well that I'm innocent, and I don't think that you are—entirely. It is this. If you'll keep your mouth shut, I'll keep mine shut. Fifty-fifty. Will you do it?"

"Hubert Hand," I said, "I don't know one solitary thing about you that would be of any importance if I told it to the world. Anything that you think you know about me, I'm glad and willing to have you broadcast, or publish in the papers."

"Sure of that? Sure you are willing to have me broadcast that you found the body; that you didn't scream; that you stayed there, quiet and alone with it for ten minutes, before you gave the alarm?"

Fool that I was, I said, "It wasn't nearly ten minutes. It wasn't more than four or five."

He smiled. I saw what I had done. "It took me that long to discover the truth. I thought she was asleep. I had to run up the steps—"

Double fool, to try to explain.

"Say it took you a minute to run up a few steps. Another minute to discover that she was dead. Should it take you three or four minutes to run down again, and give the alarm?"

"I was sick, dizzy with horror."

"Probably any jury would believe that, all right. Just the you a lot of trouble, now and same, I'll bet it would save later, if no one knew anything about your lonesome five minutes, or longer. I'll tell you how I know. I came out of my room at the minute you opened the attic door. I saw you leave the hall to run up the steps. I went on downstairs. Chad was kidding around down there, collecting keys. I didn't know what he wanted with them, fortunately for you, or I'd have said you'd gotten the door open—"

I interrupted with a new, and it seemed to me a clever idea. "What you are forgetting," I said, "is that I fainted dead away."

"Gosh, Mary, but you are a rotten liar. Don't try it. Sam and I both saw you totter and go down, just as we got to the top of the stairs, after Chad had shrieked the news down at us. That was close to fifteen minutes after I'd seen you open the door."

"And—and," I couldn't keep my teeth from chattering, "you think I killed her, then?"

"Rot! She had been dead for hours. Rigor was complete. No, all I think is that you were—trying to cover someone, maybe. All that I know is, that you know more than you are telling."

"I did tell you. I was frozen, stiff, with horror."

"All right. Tell the jury. Tell them, too, why you came rushing out of your room, as you did just now, white and trembling. Don't like your thoughts, all by your lonesome, do you? Come on, Mary. Be a sport. We are both innocent. But—Fifty-fifty? Shut your mouth for shut mouth?"

His talk about telling a jury scared me. I had heard of third degrees. I knew that if I ever told anyone but Sam himself, about those pipe ashes, the words would choke the life out of me, as I would want them to do.

"Dog kill dog, then?" he asked.

"Hubert Hand, I'm going to be honest with you. I don't know what it is you want me to keep my mouth shut about."

"Don't? Well, I want you to keep still about that conversation you overheard between Ollie Ricker and me in the cabin. She went back to her parasol and saw you coming out. We know you had been hiding there in the closet, listening."

With the sense I had been showing, it is a wonder I didn't speak right up and tell him that I had not been in the closet, but in the chest. I did not.

"Lands alive!" I said. "I'd had no idea of telling that, anyway. It was none of my business."

"Fine! I didn't have any idea of telling anything, either. It was none of my business. Shake on it."

I let him take my hand. I said yes, when he made me promise. I felt like I'd been associating with a sidewinder.

I went on down the hall, wracking my brain to remember exactly what I had heard in the cabin. Mrs. Ricker's threat. That would incriminate her, not him. And, though the threat had proven, of itself, that she was in love with him, I had certainly come away with no idea that he was in love with her. His mention of a previous attempt at murder, made by her. Again, that was nothing against him. No; what he was afraid of having told, must have been said in the room with the closet. I found slight, but some comfort in realizing that, though I had probably been a fool to make the promise to him, he had probably been a worse fool when he made the one to me.

CHAPTER XXIII

An Omen

As I was trying to hurry past Gaby's door, Danny opened it, and asked me if I would come in and sit with her for a while.

I should have been there, long before. I went right in, apologizing, and trying to explain. But, when I saw that she meant for us to sit in Gaby's room, I suggested that we go somewhere else.

"No, please Mary," she said. "I don't want to be alone; but I do want to sit here. I feel as if here, with all her things around me, I might—get in touch—I mean—something might come to me. They say, you know, that people who have died—violent deaths, do not leave the earth sphere at once. I don't know whether I believe that or not. But, it could be true. If she is still on earth, she would come here. Wouldn't she? And she would try, I am sure, to give me a sign. Something to help me—to help all of us. If it should

come, I want to be here to receive it."

"It won't come, Danny, dear," I said.

"No. I suppose not." She leaned back in her chair and sighed, and her arms dropped straight down over the chair's arms—a position that showed how tuckered she was. The engagement ring that John had given her slipped from her finger and came rolling over toward me. I scrambled to pick it up. When I rose from the floor she had jumped to her feet. She was ashy, shaking and trembling as if she had a chill.

"Mary! Promise me that you'll never tell that, not to anyone. It didn't—it couldn't mean anything."

"It means," I said, handing her the ring, "that you are wasting away. You'd better let me go down and bring you up some god, hot soup; or an egg-nog."

She clung to me. "Don't leave me, Mary. I am afraid. I am dreadfully afraid. Promise that you won't tell about the ring. It—didn't mean anything."

I will admit that I did not like it any too well myself. There, just as she was asking for a sign, the ring, which had fitted snugly enough, I had thought, had dropped off. But, of course I had to put up a brave front to her.

"Nonsense," I said. "I won't tell anybody, because it is nothing to tell. All that it means is that the ring is too large for you."

"It is too large," she agreed. "I've been losing weight lately. I have meant to ask John to send it to have it cut down—but I hated to be without it. Still—just as I was asking for a sign, I shouldn't think it meant anything, this particular time, should I?"

"Of course not, dear," I said, relieved to hear that it had dropped off before. "You had your hand hanging straight down, that's all. You are all overstrung, and no wonder. Anyway, what could it have meant?"

How a person will babble, along, seemingly for no reason. I had paid no attention to what I was saying; but the minute I had said it, the question needed an answer.

It could have meant that Gaby did not want Danny to marry John. Or, since nothing in the house could have signified John's name as plainly as that ring could, it might have meant—I refused to go on with it.

Danny must have been answering the question to herself, as I had been doing. She sat down in a deep chair, opposite me, her hands clasped on her knees, and leaned forward, and looked into my eyes.

"Definite things, Mary," she said, "are always so wise. A definite answer to your definite question proves, as nothing else might have, that this was a silly, futile little accident. The ring has dropped off, I suppose, half a dozen times this week. Gaby's last note to me was all affection. Living, if Gaby could have taken John away from me, for herself, she would have done it. Dead—she wants us to marry. I know that. As for any other implication—"

As I had done, and in spite of her talk about definite things, she refused that. "If only Sam finished."

"Heartless!" I spoke sharply. Creator ever made a man with a bigger heart than Sam Stanley's, nobody ever saw him."

"He has been good to you," she said. "But you give him his own way about everything."

"Well, after all," I said, "he does own the Desert moon."

"And everyone on it, body and soul," she said. "Sometimes I think he owns everyone in this country."

I did not want to know what she meant by that; so I only reminded her that Sam was John's father.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

speaks of Indian nationalism with the deepest respect.

Thus laid before India and England for study, the plan may yet be largely reshaped. It will go to an Anglo-Indian conference, to a joint parliamentary committee, and then to parliament itself. Perhaps the solution it offers comes too late; Britain would be in a happier position if she had started this machinery 10 years earlier. But it is a sincere approach to a colossal problem.

Q. How many Canadians have the Victoria Cross? G. A.

A. The names of 65 Canadians are on the list.

Giant Beasts of Prey

Once Roamed England
In the Pleistocene period an animal known as the cave lion was common in England, south of Yorkshire; this was larger than the African lion, and its remains have been found in nearly every English county it must have been well distributed. But there was a great mammal somewhat similar to the cave lion in appearance, but infinitely stronger; this was the megalodon, and probably represented the carnivorous mammal brought to its most amazing development. Remains of this catlike animal have been found in the eastern counties.

At the same period swarms of hyenas were seen. Their remains have been discovered in incredible quantities in caves, and in the same layers of the cave lion and other large mammals have been found. Probably these hunters shared the same home, whence they emerged to prey upon the vast herds of deer.

God and Life
I think God is equally concerned with man and all the animals to whom he has given life, but that, perhaps, he has a special leaning toward dogs.—Dumas.

Unending Struggle
Among the most annoying of life's ups and downs is keeping expenses down and appearances up.—Life.

How to be happy, though selfish, may not be altogether hard, hurt the recipient.

At home or away

Feen-a-mint is the ideal summer-time laxative. Pleasant and convenient. Gentle but thorough in its action. Check summer upsets with Feen-a-mint at home or away.



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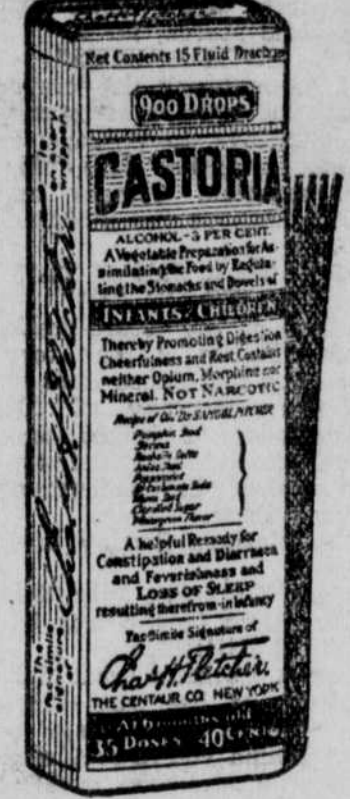
"Give till it hurts," sometimes does hurt the recipient.

When BABIES are upset

Baby ills and ailments seem twice as serious at night. A sudden cry may mean colic. Or a sudden attack of diarrhea—a condition it is always important to check quickly. How would you meet this emergency—tonight? Have you a bottle of Castoria ready? There is nothing that can take the place of this harmless but effective remedy for children; nothing that acts quite the same, or has quite the same comforting effect on them.

For the protection of your wee one—for your own peace of mind—keep this old, reliable prepara-

tion always on hand. But don't keep it just for emergencies; let it be an everyday aid. Its gentle influence will ease and soothe the infant who cannot sleep. Its mild regulation will help an older child whose tongue is coated because of sluggish bowels. All druggists have Castoria; the genuine bears Chas. H. Fletcher's signature on the wrapper.



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Kills Flies Mosquitoes Moths Bed Bugs Roaches Ants

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Costs 85 Cents A Month To Lose Pounds of Ugly Fat

Thousands of Women Know This Is True

How would you like to lose 15 pounds of fat in a month and at the same time increase your energy and improve your health?

How would you like to lose unhealthy fat that you don't need and don't want, and at the same time feel better than you have for years?

How would you like to lose your double chin and your too prominent abdomen and at the same time make your skin so clean and clear that it will compel admiration?

How would you like to get your weight down to normal and at the same time develop that urge for activity that makes work a pleasure

and also gain in ambition and keenness of mind?

Get on the scales today and see how much you weigh—then get an 85 cent bottle of Kruschen Salts which will last you for 4 weeks. Take one half teaspoonful every morning in a glass of hot water and when you have finished the first bottle weigh yourself again.

Now you can laugh at the people who pay hundreds of dollars to lose a few pounds of fat—now you will know the pleasant way to lose unsightly fat and you'll also know that the 6 vitalizing salts of Kruschen (Salts that your blood, nerves and glands must have to function properly)—have presented you with glorious health.

After that you'll want to walk around and say to your friends—"One 85 cent bottle of Kruschen Salts is worth one hundred dollars of any fat person's money."

Leading druggists America over sell Kruschen Salts.

United States of India.

From New York World.
The second part of the Simon commission report is conservative in temper, but it proposes a plan of bold magnitude. It recommends that the future India shall be a federation of provinces, eight at first and more later, and that authority be divided between the provincial governments and a strong federal government at Delhi. It proposes that during the present system by which the Indians are granted powers in certain governmental fields while others are reserved to be exercised by the British, the mechanism of government be unified. It con-

templates giving the Indians enlarged powers and an enlarged franchise in the provinces, which are to be their training ground. It would also give them larger scope in a new central assembly, federal in basis. But at the top it would keep the Federal Council of State and the Executive under strong British control—for the present.

This plan is already being attacked by Indian nationalists and British radicals. But it is at least clear that its main principles have been well tested in other lands. A country so large, populous and diversified as India cannot be properly governed except on the same

federal principle that has worked so successfully in the United States, Canada, Australia and Brazil. The use of the provincial governments as training fields is logical. The American colonies had more than a century and a half of training in provincial government before they embarked on national self-government. The Australian and Canadian provinces went through a long tutelage before achieving federation and dominion status. It is to be noted that the Simon report lays emphasis on what it calls "the healthy method of growth," and that it

speaks of Indian nationalism with the deepest respect. Thus laid before India and England for study, the plan may yet be largely reshaped. It will go to an Anglo-Indian conference, to a joint parliamentary committee, and then to parliament itself. Perhaps the solution it offers comes too late; Britain would be in a happier position if she had started this machinery 10 years earlier. But it is a sincere approach to a colossal problem.