

THE DESERT MOON MYSTERY

BY KAY CLEAVER STRAHAN

I went and sat at the desk. She sat beside me, and handed me a pencil.

"Perhaps," I suggested, "the man who wrote this, signed some nickname. Did he have one?"

"Men called him 'Mexico,' and 'Mexie.' Gaby never used either of those names for him."

"What name did she use?" I insisted, though I felt like a brute.

"None, except 'Lewis,' that I know of. She didn't read the signature, when she read the letter to me. At least I don't remember—"

"She read it to you!" I exclaimed.

"I thought that she did. Now—I don't know. I can't be sure of anything. She read to me what she said was a copy of the letter; that is, she worked out code. She may have left out entire paragraphs. She may have changed it, in any way, in order to keep her terrible secret from me."

"Yes, but what did she tell you the letter contained?" Danny looked at her wrist-watch. "It is too long even to begin to tell, now. And—I don't want to tell it again; not to-day. I have told John, all about it, you see. Later, of course—Or you may ask John to tell you. It—it was an insult from beginning to end. An insult to her. I don't bear thinking of it, and more; not to-day."

"Mary," her voice changed suddenly as did her manner, "do you know why Uncle Sam asked me—almost commanded me to be in the living room at three o'clock to-day?"

"No, Dann. I don't. But he told Mrs. Ricker and me to be there, too. I guess he just wants to talk to all of us, together."

"Oh—talk! What good is talk going to do? Talk, in a place like this, now, where there is not one true, certain thing to get hold of anywhere; where not one of us can believe in another—"

She put a quick hand to her lips; her eyes widened; she turned, and hastily pushing aside the heavy curtain, went through the clothes closet into her own room.

I sat still, at the desk. The paper before me, and the sharp pencil in my hand, tempted me to make a list, as they always do in books, of the clues, to date. I wrote:

"Locked door.

"Key in my pocket.

"T. A. (I put only the initials of tobacco ashes.)

"Chad's suicide.

"Chad's note. What person was he trying to shield?"

"What did Hubert Hand think that I had overheard in the cabin?"

"Mrs. Ricker's threat.

"Q' cap for typewriter key.

"Contents of the beaded bag.

"1. Two cigs missing from full case.

"2. Empty match-box.

"3. Empty purse. Missing bill-fold. (Robbery?)

"4. Crumpled handkerchief. (Tears? Pleading?)

"5. Broken cig. holder.

"6. Hubert Hand's note.

"The code letter.

"Gabrielle's note to Danny."

"This, I submit as the world's worst list of clues. It is the best example I have ever seen of the saying that a person could not see the forest for the trees. The forest was there, right enough. All I would have needed to do, was to back off far enough away from the trees to look at it.

My face burns, even yet, when I realize that, at half-past two o'clock on the afternoon of the fifth of July, if I had been possessed of just one lick of sense, I could, instead of writing that list of clues, have written another one; a

list that, step by step, just as sure as straight ahead, would have led to the guilty person.

Why did I not take into consideration the fact that, for two months, the Canneziano girls had been searching for something on the Desert Moon; something which I was all but certain they had not found?

Why did I not give a thought to the fact that John, after a secret conversation with Gaby—according to Mrs. Ricker—had been clean and clear away off the place since early afternoon until evening?

Why did I not include in my list the fact that Gaby had given the gold monkey to Martha?

Why, instead of trying to puzzle out the code letter, did I not read between the lines of Gabrielle's last note to Danny?

However, at the time, since it was of my own making, I was quite well satisfied with my list. I took it to the table to check over the items. Sam had put the key, with which I had opened the attic door, alongside the other things there.

I picked it up, now, and looked at it for the first time. I had not looked at it, I had merely used it, the night before. My heart jumped up in my throat. It was not the key to the attic door. It was a rusty old pass key that had hung on a nail in the broom closet, off the kitchen, for more years than I could remember.

Whoever had put the key in my pocket, must have been well acquainted with the Desert Moon kitchen, to have found that old key, under the brooms, and mops, and dust-rags, and chamois skins, and the rest, that hung around it and over it in the broom-closet.

What had become of the key to the attic door?

CHAPTER XXVI

The Session

When I went down to the living-room, at five minutes before three, Danny, John, Mrs. Ricker and Martha were all there. Danny and John were sitting at the far end of the room. Mrs. Ricker was in a chair near the window, tating. Martha was on the biggest davenport, playing with the monkey charm. I went and sat beside her.

"I feel sleepy," she answered my question. "But I am happy, now. I am very happy."

"That's nice," I told her.

"But, if I were you, I wouldn't talk much about being n't talk much about being happy; that is, not to-day."

"I don't care. Gaby was hateful and mean, even if she did give me the monkey. She was good, then; but she was a good long enough for me to like her. I'm sorry because Chad died, though. I was awfully sorry, until I happened to remember about heaven. He is happy there now. When I die, I'll go to heaven and be happy, too. He'll love me then, won't he? I know he will."

"Of course, Martha," I said.

"And he loved you here, too."

"Only like a little girl. I wanted him to love me like a lady. He would have, I guess, if he hadn't shot himself. I am sorry he did that. But I'm happy, anyway, 'cause we are going to have the fireworks to-night."

"Tut, tut," I said. "We won't be having any fireworks to-night."

Her lower lip curled out.

"Daddy promised," she whimpered. "Yesterday, when it looked like rain, he said never to mind, that we'd have them the very first night it didn't rain. To-night is the first night. Daddy promised."

To my shame, I never, in all

the years, had gotten used to Martha. She looked like a big, healthy, strapping girl. And when, as now, I realized that a smart five-year-old child would have had a better mind, it shocked me all over.

Sam and Hubert Hand came into the room together. Sam looked around, counting noses.

"All here," he said, and locked the door he and Hubert had come through, and dropped the key in his pocket. He went all around the room, closing and locking the doors and windows. He moved a chair to the foot of the stairway, pulled a small table over beside it, took his six-gun out of his back pocket, put it on the table, and sat down in the chair.

No one had moved nor had said a word. I know that I was frightened. I was not afraid of Sam, and I was not afraid of that six-gun. It did not make me a mite more uneasy than a bouquet of flowers would have; that is, if Sam had carried the bouquet in and put it on the table with the same manner with which he had carried and placed the gun. Mostly, I guess, I was afraid of being made afraid; partly, I was afraid of myself.

Hubert Hand spoke first. "Cannon, ugh?" he sneered.

"That's all right, Hand," Sam answered. "This is here, mostly I think, for ornamental purposes."

"Daddy," Martha piped up. "aren't we going to have the fireworks to-night?"

Sam frowned at her. "Not to-night, daughter."

She opened her mouth and began making those dreadful noises she always made whenever she was crossed in anything.

Sam rapped on the table, "Shut that up, here and now," he said. "Not another whimper out of you. Hear me, Martha?"

She closed her mouth with a snap. I thought those immense eyes of hers would pop out of her head. I am sure that the others of us all felt the way she looked. In all the years we had lived together on the Desert Moon, it was the first time any of us had ever heard Sam speak impatiently to Martha. As for scolding her, being stern with her, up to this minute it had never been in the book.

"John," Sam said, "you and Danny come out of that corner, up here nearer the rest of us, and where it is light."

I tell you they came, straight, and sat on the small davenport beside Hubert Hand.

"I reckon," Sam began, "that all of you in here know that anyone could walk up to any man or woman in here and call him or her a murderer, and that not one of us could give him the lie, right now."

"I reckon that you know, too, as everyone in the country knows that, at this hour, the Desert Moon Ranch is rotten with the muck of crime and suspicion. Maybe you don't know that it is not going to stay that way for many more hours."

"We have called the law in, as was right and proper. And the law has been real polite, and blinked its eyes, and departed. 'Folded its tents like the Arabs, and silently stole away.' Well, that's all right. I didn't much care about having those fellows mix into my private business; anyway, not until I had found out that I couldn't attend to it myself. I am not going to find that out. I can attend to it. I am going to, right here and now. Later on, when we need the law again, we'll call on it. The innocent in this room will have their names cleared. The Desert Moon will be a fit place for a white man to live on."

"Now this gun here may look like I felt violent or something. I don't. And I'm not going to act violent. This gun is here for just one purpose, and I'm dead certain it won't be used for that. A word to the wise, though. No person, barring none and including the ladies, is to leave this

purged remains of the show.

No sane person will suppose that in punishing Carroll the police will "purify" the stage. That is beyond their power and beyond their duty. The punishment of Carroll, preferably in his pocket nerve, will serve just one useful public purpose. It will for a time discourage the too rapid advance of competitive smut. It will for a season or two decelerate, as the automobile advertisements say, the erotic pace and keep the Broadway stage from too fast a progress in catering to the too fast elements of the theater-going public. Police action of this sort does not really regulate the theater. It

room until I give the word. No innocent person in here will try to leave. Any guilty person in here—and, before God, there is a guilty person here; guilty, at least, of aiding and abetting—is going to have much sense to try to make a break. That is why I won't need the gun. Not, I mean, until we find the guilty person. When we have found him, it may be of some use until the sheriff can get here. That is all of that. Except that we are going to stay here, one and all, right here in this room, until we are ready to 'phone for the sheriff.

"If everyone does as I am going to tell them to do, we should be through with this session by supper time. But, if we don't get through until midnight, or until next week, we'll stay here until we do. All I'm asking, of everybody here, is that you all tell the truth. You'll have to, sooner or later. Better make it sooner."

During this speech my dander had been rising. It had got up pretty good and high by this time. "Sam Stanley," I spoke out, "you ought to know that you can't force truth out of anybody at the point of a gun, nor by keeping them locked up. We'll get hungry. We'll get thirsty. And when we do we'll eat and drink and go about our affairs. At least I will—unless you shoot me. I'm not fixed to put up with this kind of foolishness."

"Mary," Sam roared at me. "That's enough out of you. You be quiet. You are going to do as you are told. So are the others."

Sam had never spoken like that to me before. It left me limp as a drained jelly bag. Before I could get my breath for an answer, Hubert Hand was talking.

"Changed your mind since morning, haven't you, Sam? You were dead sure this morning that no one on the place had had anything to do with the murder; that Mary had locked the attic door herself, earlier in the day, and, absent-mindedly, dropped the key in her pocket."

"Never mind about my morning's opinion, Hand. You are right. Dead right. I've changed my mind. Now, since you are already going pretty good, I'll begin with you and work around the room, taking each one in turn. I want you to tell everything you know, concerning the murder."

"Sorry," Hubert Hand said, "but I don't know a damn thing except that, apparently, she was strangled to death sometime between four o'clock yesterday afternoon and eight o'clock yesterday evening. We saw her alive at four. We found her dead at eight. That's the extent of my knowledge."

"All right. Now go ahead with what you suspect."

"I can't see," Hubert Hand objected, "that suspicions have any place here. Beyond stirring up a rumpus and hard feelings, they wouldn't get any of us any place."

"That is for me to decide," Sam said. "You were mighty busy for a while this morning, throwing out hints and slurs. If this session doesn't do anything else, it can anyway clear out all this whispering that is going around. Just now, everybody here is busy suspecting everyone else here. Suspicions usually have some reasoning behind them. 'Where there's smoke there's fire.' It is only fair to give everyone here a chance to examine everyone else's suspicions, and disprove them, if they can. If you think that I did the killing, I want to know it. I want a chance to prove you wrong. Come on now, Hand. Come clean."

"Suppose I refuse?"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Progress in Forestry
Making Rapid Strides

A quarter of a century has brought an extraordinary change in the forestry-policies of the government, marking notable progress in conservation, says World's Work. In 1905, when the forest service was created, there were 60 reserves, with an area of 50,000,000 acres. The area today is 160,000,000 acres, embraced in 150 national forests.

The physical development of the forests has progressed continuously in the last 25 years. In 1905 there were no fire towers or lookout stations; today 831 are maintained. As many as 1,195 public camp grounds have been improved during the period. Since 1907 the mileage of national forest roads has been extended from 330 to 16,730. Forest trails have increased from 5,644 to 47,175 miles. Mileage of telephone lines built for fire protection and administration purposes has increased from 539 to 35,925.

Receipts of the forest reserves in 1905 amounted to \$85,600, all for timber sold. Receipts last year totaled \$6,299,892. Of this amount more than \$4,000,000 came from the sale of timber cut under forest service supervision on a sustained or continuous "crop" basis.

Restless CHILDREN

CHILDREN will fret, often for no apparent reason. But there's always Castoria Harmless as the recipe on the wrapper; mild and bland as it tastes. But its gentle action soothes a youngster more surely than a more powerful medicine.

That's the beauty of this special children's remedy! It may be given the tiniest infant—as often as there is need. In cases of colic, diarrhea or similar disturbance, it is invaluable. A coated tongue calls for just a few drops to ward off constipation; so does any suggestion of bad breath. Whenever children don't eat well, don't rest well, or have any little upset—this pure vegetable preparation is usually all that's needed.

Fletcher's CASTORIA

PARKER'S HAIR BALSAM
Removes Dandruff—Stops Hair Falling—Lustrous Color and Beauty to Gray and Faded Hair—60 and 120 cent Bottles. Druggists. Hixcox Chem. Works, Pathecoque, N. Y.

FLORESTON SHAMPOO—Ideal for use in connection with Parker's Hair Balsam. Makes the hair soft and shiny. 50 cents by mail or at druggists. Hixcox Chemical Works, Pathecoque, N. Y.

Oh, Doctor!—"You certainly have acute appendicitis." Fair Patient—"Oh, doctor, you flatter me."—Life.

Half the world doesn't know how the other half lives—but, oh, how it would like to find out!

KREMOLA SKIN BLEACH
Wonderful and sure. Makes your skin beautiful, also cures eczema, freckles, etc. Frank's Ointment removes freckles. Used over forty years. \$1.00 and 50c. Beauty booklet sent free. Ask your dealer or write Dr. C. H. BERRY CO., 2930 Mich. Av., Chicago.

Sioux City Ptg. Co., No. 32-1930.

Vacation Memories
March—What did you hunt mostly while on your camping trip?
Marsh—The way back to camp.

If Jonah had been after inside information he certainly would have got it.

Pope's Title Changed
The pope's title has been changed according to the last issue of the Vatican directory. Formerly, in addition to the numerous titles, the Roman pontiff bore the title "Sovereign of the Temporal Domains of the Holy Roman Church," referring to the papal territories taken from the Holy See by the Italian government. Now the temporal title is simply "Sovereign of the State of Vatican City."

Working Over Old Dumps
A Utah copper company is producing about 100,000 pounds of copper daily from the huge dumps of tailings that have risen in the course of years. The dumps are estimated to contain at least 1,000,000,000 tons of waste and oxidized ore.

Put to Real Use
Author—May I have some further details about this magnificent estate you offer for sale?
Agent—Do you wish to buy it?
"No, but I think I can use your glowing description of it in my new novel."—Stray Stories.

Out of Date
Artist—Now, what were dresses like three years ago?
His Wife (bitterly)—Like mine.

People like to be told they are "human," as if all of that were commendable.

Kill Moths

or They Will Cost You Money
Get Your Flit and The Special Flit Sprayer Today!

Spray clean smelling

FLIT

The World's Largest Selling Insect Killer

Flit is sold only in this yellow can with the black band.

Kills Flies, Mosquitoes, Beetles, Bugs, Roaches, Ants.

because its ethereal vapor KILLS QUICKER

© 1927 Hiramoid.

Independent Employer—"Are you a married man?" Sambo (applicant for job)—"Now, suh—Ah makes mah own livin'."

She Knew Henry Pansy—How did you get the truth from reading Henry's letter?
Violet—By reading between the lyn's.

How One Woman Lost 20 Pounds of Fat

Lost Her Double Chin
Lost Her Prominent Hips
Lost Her Sluggishness
Gained Physical Vigor
Gained in Vivaciousness
Gained a Shapely Figure

Take half a teaspoonful of KRUSCHEN SALTS in a glass of hot water every morning—do not overeat—and in 3 weeks get on the scales and note how many pounds of fat have vanished. Notice also that you have gained energy—your skin is clearer—your eyes sparkle with glorious health—you feel younger in body—keener in mind. KRUSCHEN will give any fat person a joyous surprise.

Get an 85c bottle of KRUSCHEN SALTS (lasts 4 weeks). If even this first bottle doesn't convince you this is the easiest, safest and surest way to lose fat—if you don't feel a superb improvement in health—so gloriously energetic—vigorously alive—your money gladly returned. Leading druggists all over the world are selling lots of Kruschen Salts.

Use Cuticura

A household preparation for over half a century.

Those who know the secret of skin health and beauty use Cuticura Soap and Ointment regularly to keep the skin and scalp in good condition.

They also find Cuticura Talcum ideal for every member of the family.

Soap 25c. Ointment 25c. and 50c. Talcum 25c. Proprietors: Potter Drug & Chemical Corporation, Malden, Mass.

Useful Restraint.
From New York World.
Earl Carroll raises quite clearly the question whether the public authorities will or will not intervene. There are no complicating issues in his case. His obscenity is deliberate and commercial; it is not incidental to or part of any desire to tell the truth, to change opinions, to create beauty. There is no limit except what the law imposes. His theater is open to the "sophisticated" and the unsophisticated; being a shrewd connoisseur of some parts of human nature, he knows that to keep the "sophisticated" interested and stimulated he must increase the

erotic dose each time. You have, therefore, not only deliberate and commercial pornography, but pornography which must in order to be effective reach out into new regions of provocation.

At some point in a career of this sort it is inevitable and necessary for the public authorities to accept his challenge. From all the accounts they have selected a good point at which to accept it. Having accepted the challenge, they must go through with what they have started by exacting a punishment which will outweigh the advantageous advertising they have conferred upon the ex-

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is plain enough that the police are very little more prudish than the mass of New Yorkers. They are merely attempting to put a brake upon the wildest driver among the producers, who would, if he is unchecked, force his competitors to follow his pace.

FARMERS' ELEVATORS SIGN
Bismarck, N. D.—(AP)—Nearly 100 farmers' elevator associations in North Dakota and Montana, representing more than 20,000,000 bushels of grain, have signed up as stockholders of the Northwest Grain association.