

# THE DESERT MOON MYSTERY

BY KAY CLEAVER STRAHAN

"But there is," she said. "You all seem to have forgotten it, but Chad was a mimic and a ventriloquist. He could have stayed there in the barn alone, and with no trouble at all, made you think that Uncle Sam was there, too, and that they were talking together."

I stopped breathing. I think the others stopped breathing. Their breaths would have sounded noisy in that silence. John spoke first.

"Four cows got milked. Chad couldn't milk. He never milked a cow in his life."

"How do you know?" Danny said, and I was surprised that she should oppose John like that. "You know only that Chad said he would not milk. We all know that he was lazy. He was raised on a farm."

"How do you know that?" John echoed her own words.

"I don't know it. He told me that he was."

John said: "He told me that he was born and reared in Chicago."

"Shut up, John," Sam commanded. "Go on, Danny."

"That's all," she said. "Except, that if Chad could milk, that would have given Uncle Sam nearly all of that hour."

"Dan!" John's voice sounded as if he were talking to one of his meanest broncos. "Stop it! Sitting here and accusing dad, with no evidence—nothing but a crazy wild idea—"

"That is not true. I have evidence. I picked up Gaby's bag from the steps yesterday evening. Tobacco and pipe ashes were sticking to it. Only a few. I think someone had tried to brush them off, hurriedly, as a man might, and had made a poor job of it. No one else on this place smokes a pipe. No one else, anywhere, drops his pipe whenever he is excited." She turned to me.

"That is what I told you I dared not tell—" She hid her face in her hands.

Sam's pipe fell from his mouth.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### The Session Ends

It seemed to me that, when Sam's pipe hit the floor, it made a noise like doom cracking. We all sat still as stones. I suppose it could not have been more than a minute, but it seemed a long time before John left Danny's side and went and picked up the pipe and handed it to Sam.

"It's all right, dad," he said.

"Not by a damn sight, it's not all right," Sam came back to his senses vigorously. "But it is interesting—this thing. It is getting interesting, anyway. Let me see—If I had got Chad to help me—and I could have, by telling him it was some joke or other I had on hand—I could have sneaked out of the barn, met her and killed her, during that hour. When could I have got the body upstairs, though? That's the first missing link. My reason for killing her would be another, but—"

"Say! See here, dad," John cut in.

"You shut up, son. We are waiting to hear the rest of what Danny has to say. Come, Danny, can you supply either of those missing links?"

"No," she said, and sighed. It was easy to see that she was plumb tuckered out. "No, of course I can't."

"If," Sam went on, seemingly talking entirely to himself, "if I'd hurried like blazes, I might have done the deed, and carried her into the house during the time I was absent from the barn. I'd have had to pass Mary in the kitchen—I'd have been bound to sneak in the back way—but, if I asked her not to, more than likely Mary wouldn't tell on me. Or, I might have had a hireling

(that's what they call them, isn't it? There's another word, something like—marmot—no, never mind.) on the outside, who would have toted the body in for me, while we were at supper."

Written out, that sounds as if Sam had been trying to be comical. He was not at all. He was sitting there speaking his thoughts for all to hear, making out a case against himself, cool as Christmas. For my part, I had heard enough of it.

"Sam, you look here—" I began.

"You shut up, too, Mary," Sam said.

Mrs. Ricker spoke. She had her say out. Nobody, not even Sam, would any more think of telling Mrs. Ricker to shut up, than they would think of telling any other dumb object, that suddenly started to talk, to shut up. Leading a life of silence, I thought, certainly did not have its advantages, at times.

"I think," Mrs. Ricker said, "that the girl herself probably killed her sister. If Sam's pipe ashes were on the bag, she put them there, afterwards, to make trouble for him."

Sam said, "Shucks!"

I thought John would be the first to speak. I was mistaken.

It was Danny herself who said, "Make her talk, now, Uncle Sam. Don't wait for her turn. I—can't bear it. Make her talk now, and give her reasons for saying such a cruel, wicked, lying thing."

Mrs. Ricker, Sam put the question very solemnly, "have you any reasons for making this accusation?"

"My only reason is, that I believe it."

"Don't beat around the bush. Why do you believe it?"

"I have a feeling that she is guilty."

"This," Sam said, sternly, "is no time for feeling, nor for quibbling. You made a serious accusation—straight out. I want your reason, or reasons, for making it, and I want them just as straight."

"I have no reasons," Mrs. Ricker said. "That is why I suspect her."

"Ah-ah-ah! Women!" Sam said; and the way he said it, it was the blackest oath he had used that day.

I looked at Danny. I had not been feeling any too kindly toward her, for the past few minutes; but, just the same, seeing her there, white and pitiful, with her hands caught up to her throat, and with the echo of Sam's last blasphemy still in my ears, I had a woman feeling toward her. I knew then, as I know now, that Danielle Canneziano could no more have killed Gaby than she could have created her.

"I think," I said, talking fast to keep Sam from shutting me up before I could get anything said, "that if, in suspicioning an innocent girl like Danny, Mrs. Ricker is simply drawing on her woman's instinct, she'd better pass it up, for the present, and listen to some plain sexless sense."

"Gaby came downstairs at four. Danny called after her, right then; so Danny was in the house right then. Gaby went to the rabbit hutch and stopped long enough to give Martha the bracelet. Almost as soon as Martha was in the house with the bracelet Dan was downstairs with us, cool, collect, and undisturbed. Now suppose, as an idiot suggested this morning, that Gaby had come straight back into the house. I guess everyone would agree that it would take her five minutes to get back upstairs. That would leave Danny not more than ten minutes to kill her, and to come downstairs, as I've said, collect and

undisturbed. Come to think of it, Gaby could not have talked to Martha and got to the attic stairway in any five minutes. At the widest figuring, that leaves Danny about five minutes—"

As I had been fearing he would, Sam stopped me. That's all right, too, Mary. But there is no need to draw so long a bow. No need to count minutes on Danny. The note in Gaby's bag fixes her innocence better than all the minutes on the clock could."

"No, it does not," Mrs. Ricker said. "Gaby knew that she had reason to fear an enemy. She probably found that out from the code letter. She may never have suspected that the enemy was her own sister."

"I wish I knew," Sam said, giving Mrs. Ricker a long look. "what you are getting at, Mrs. Ricker. I'd give that," Sam Sam dangled out his right hand, "to know what any one of you was getting at. You, for instance, know that Danny did not kill her sister. I think that Hand knows that John didn't do it—maybe not. I'm beginning to suspect him of honesty in this; but a damn mistaken honesty, at that. I think that John knows that Chad is as innocent as—as—a new born babe, as Mary says. I think Danny would have to be pretty hard put to it, before she'd invent that story about pipe ashes—"

"Dad," John said, and high time he was saying something, "Dan didn't invent any story. I know that she was clear off about the pipe ashes, and I think she shouldn't have made such a mistake. Since they couldn't have been there, she couldn't have seen them. But Danny doesn't lie. She thought she saw the ashes there, or she would not have said so."

"All right, son," Sam conceded. "I'd a heap rather think that than not. But, see here, did anyone else think they saw my pipe ashes around there?"

I looked into my own blue voile lap. I imagined I could feel Hubert Hand's eyes boring into me. My face burned. I could feel the waves of red going up into my scalp and spreading out around my ears. I prayed a quick, private prayer to the Lord. But I have learned, through the years, that trying to instruct the Lord, through the pretense of prayer, is a supreme impudence that he usually punishes pretty promptly. My face burned hotter than ever. I raised my eyes. Sam was staring straight at me.

"Mary," he said, "you found the body. Did you see pipe ashes there, then?"

My only excuse is, that it takes longer than a minute or two minutes to betray a person who has been your best friend for twenty-five years.

I said, "No."

"I am going to ask you to swear to that. Somebody get the Bible."

Nobody moved.

"You haven't made any of the others swear to anything," I said.

"I haven't caught any of the others in what I was sure was a direct and deliberate lie."

I felt weaker than filtered water. It is one thing to tell a lie, offhand into the free air. I haven't much use for a person who can't do that, when absolutely necessary. It is another thing to put your hand on the Good Book and swear to a lie. I knew that I could not do it.

"Martha," Sam said, "run and get the Bible for dad."

Martha seemed to be sound asleep again. I did not notice anything queer about her appearance. Mrs. Ricker must have noticed something queer. She jumped to her feet and dashed across the room to where Martha was lying. A shriek went piercing through the house, splintering the air into quivering bits of agony.

Everyone has awakened from sleep, cold with the sweating terror of some hideous nightmare, but with

only the vaguest impressions of its detail. So it is with me, and that nightmare hour. I can not reconstruct it. It remains yet, in my mind as nothing but a horror of confusions.

We all ran about. I know that there was telephoning. That some of us made desperate attempts with restoratives. I remember Sam's crying, with his face uncovered like a child. I can hear him saying that he had given her the sleeping powder, had forced it upon her. I can hear plainest of all, Mrs. Ricker's voice, with all the pent up passions of years breaking forth in torrents of heart-break.

"My baby. My baby girl. My darling. Mother's life. Mother's heart. Speak to mother. My lamb. My baby..."

Her voice again, but cruel, now, as she shrieks at Hubert Hand. "Stand there, you beast! Stand there, dry eyed and look at your dead daughter. The child you deserted. The child you ignored—"

I remember the feeling of the fresh air as I walked beside Sam, who was carrying Martha, out of the house. I think that it was John who explained to me that the doctor, who had left Telko was going to meet us on the road, in order to save time. We must have walked slowly but I can not rid myself of the impression of Mrs. Ricker running beside us. I remember her scream, when—futile unnecessary horror—Sam stumbled with his burden as he went to step into the sedan.

As the car went dashing away, I remember looking out of its windows at the house—the great structure, with its wide expanses and its towers; and it seemed to me that it looked like some monster crouching there in the green; some grim, horrible monster waiting for its victims. Three of us had been caught in its clutches. Were any of us to escape?

## CHAPTER XXXII

### A Part of The Past

The doctor, who was younger and more cruel than even a doctor has a right to be, said that Martha had died from stoppage of the heart, undoubtedly induced by the strong drug in the sleeping powder that had been administered. In other words, Sam had killed her. He loved her. How deeply he had loved her, none of us had ever had sense enough to realize.

We had her funeral, and Chad's, two days later. They were buried in the second in the second grove of aspen trees, two miles beyond the cabin. All the people in the valley came. At first, I thought that they had come to honor the dead, and Sam. But, as I stood by the graves, and watched the faces about me, faces that held suspicion, horror, curiosity; sly faces, cruel faces, eager faces, I did not care to think why most of them had come.

Sam noticed it too. For, though I had not said a word to him, as we walked home from the grave, he said to me, "Don't blame them, Mary. What else could we expect? Decency breeds decency, and—filth draws filth."

There were only four of us around the table that evening. Mrs. Ricker had gone straight to her room, after the funeral. Danny, with no protest from Sam, had left the day before to take Gaby's body to San Francisco. It had seemed heartless to allow her to go alone; but I could not be spared, and there was no one else to go with her. John might have gone; but Danny refused to allow him to, saying, unselfishly, that Sam needed him.

"You people," Hubert Hand spoke suddenly, to John and Sam and me, as we sat there, looking at a supper that nobody pretended to eat, "have been awfully decent about not asking questions since the other afternoon."

## (TO BE CONTINUED)

## England Takes Up Idea

### of Trees as Memorials

A charming practice of planting trees in memory of those whose names it is desired to keep alive is now growing up in England. It was brought to public notice recently by a ceremony beside the Kingston bypass road, near the village of Kingston Vale, when an oak tree was planted and dedicated to the memory of a flying force officer who was killed in the World war. The planting of trees along new roads has been greatly assisted by the work of the Roads Beautifying association. If the work is linked up with the idea of commemoration, as in the case of "oaks of memory," it may be "speeded up," and, at the same time, people will be encouraged to care for trees and protect them in a new way because of their associations. Montreal, Canada, has such a tree-planted memorial boulevard many miles long. These trees are carefully tended and ornamented with flags each Armistice day.

## Convincing Evidence

Betty—I understand George has quit college.

Polly—Are you sure?

Betty—Well, I saw him in a haberdashery buying garters.—Brooklyn Eagle.

## Woman Takes High Rank

Dr. Maria Wedl, the first woman in Hungary ever to be appointed to a full university professorship, is a mineralogist by profession and for a number of years has been director of the mineralogy section of the National museum in Budapest. She is now professor of the same subject in Debreczin university.

## Added Fame to Old Device

The Lorraine cross was adopted as a shoulder-sleeve insignia of the Seventy-ninth division of the A. E. F. during the World war. The cross is described as the device which was originally the symbol of triumph of the house of Anjou of France, through Charles the Bold, duke of Normandy, in the Fifteenth century.

## Pilots Shot From Planes

Airplane pilots and their parachutes are hurled 30 feet clear of a falling plane by a new German compressed-air gun. The device is intended to save the danger that when a pilot jumps to save himself he may foul the parachute on the plane. Now he simply pulls a hand-trigger, and is shot free.

The inspiration for this safety gun is said to have been obtained from a pneumatic cannon used in a Berlin stage act that hurled performers from eight to a hundred feet in the air.

## Crop Rotation Ancient

The principles of soil cultivation, which are included under the term "scientific farming," were known to the farmers of the most ancient times, according to H. W. Warner, writing in the Farm Journal.

"The principle of crop rotation was known and practiced to some extent more than three thousand years ago," he says. "We find application of lime to the soil mentioned in writings dating well before the Christian era. The early white settlers of New England found the Indians fertilizing corn, and artificial fertilization with guano was practiced by the Incas in South America 20 centuries ago."

## She Lost 19 Pounds of Fat in 27 Days

During October a woman in Montana wrote—"My first bottle of Kruschen Salts lasted almost 4 weeks and during that time I lost 19 pounds of fat—Kruschen is all you claim for it—I feel better than I have for years."

Here's the recipe that banishes fat and brings into blossom all the natural attractiveness that every woman possesses.

Every morning take one half teaspoonful of Kruschen Salts in a glass of hot water before breakfast.

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If you want to lose fat with speed get an 85c bottle of Kruschen Salts from any live druggist anywhere in America with the distinct understanding that you must be satisfied with results or money back.

An ounce of prevention costs much less than a pound of cure.

A lot of men are mere hangers-on—in the crowded street cars.



## A New Shaving Cream That Soothes as It Softens!

You are familiar with Cuticura and its cleansing, antiseptic properties. Now comes Cuticura Shaving Cream, containing those medicinal properties. It produces a rich, creamy lather that goes right to the hair-follicles—softening the beard immediately. It remains moist throughout the shave. BUY A TUBE TODAY!

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## Hopeless

A certain motion-picture star was receiving the condolences of friends after his third picture in succession had "fopped." The reason, poor stories, was patently apparent. The star was inclined to take the matter philosophically. He shrugged his shoulders and said with mock gravity:

"Spare your pity, my friends. Everything in life eventually adjusts itself, except a bow tie."

## One Idea of Greatness

After hearing Daniel Webster speak, David Crockett said to him: "I had heard that you were a very great man, but I don't think so. I heard your speech and understood every word you said."

## More War Talk

A German scientist declares woman's "chattering" is physiological and not a defect in her character; that her jaw, larynx and vocal chords are set in motion easier than a man's.—Athenion Globe.

A man is unmistakably in love with his wife when he tells in company how many times he proposed to her before she accepted him.

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## Motor Ships

### Pass Steam

New Lloyds Register Shows Preference During Past 12 Months

London.—(UP)—The world's tonnage of motor vessels is increasing nearly 10 times as fast as steam tonnage, according to shipbuilding statistics just published in the new edi-

tion of Register Book, issued by Lloyds.

Lloyd's tables reveal that during the last 12 months the world's steam vessel tonnage has increased by only 148,176 tons, while in the same period motor vessel tonnage increased by 1,468,234 tons.

Norway easily heads the list of tonnage increase during the last year with 443,796 tons. Great Britain and Ireland come second with a total of 272,113 tons, while the United States alone of all the principal maritime nations has lost

ground with a decrease of 436,214 tons.

Although Great Britain is still at the head of the list in owning 29.9 per cent of the world's power-driven tonnage, this shows a great decline since 1914 when it owned 41.6 per cent, and a still greater decline from 1898 when 54 per cent of the world's power-driven vessels sailed under the British flag.

## TOO MUCH CAUTION

Chicago.—(UP)—After exercising great care so that their work would not sound a burglar alarm, burglars touched the alarm when

they made their exit from a dress shop here. In their fear, they dropped \$2,000 worth of dresses, escaping with but \$500 in merchandise. They had entered the shop by cutting a hole in the floor from the basement.

You Can Get Same Comforts and Still Stay at Home.

If you haven't time to go camping, put up a tent in the back yard carry your water from the neighbor's hydrant, cook on a smoky oil stove and drink warm water. The effect will be the same.—Chamberlain (S. D.) Register.