

THE DESERT MOON MYSTERY

BY KAY CLEAVER STRAHAN

CHAPTER XXXVIII Lynn MacDonald

On Friday afternoon, late, I went with John and Sam down to Rattail to meet the train. When it came thundering, snorting up, I thought of the last time that Sam and I had met a train together, and of how our entire world had changed in the two months. Was it going to keep on changing, I wondered. I could not bear to look into the past; I found that I did not dare to try to think into the future.

Just before the train stopped, with its usual roar of protest against Rattail, Clarence Pette swung off it. He came over to us with a timid air, like an animal just learning to eat out of a person's hand. He took no risks, until Sam had greeted him, real pleasantly, and politely.

"Miss MacDonald is on this train," he said to Sam and me. "Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"Not a thing, if you are positive that she is Miss MacDonald, except to take your fifty—here it is—and va-moose."

"I'm positive. Thanks. Here she comes now."

I looked up to see her coming. I could hardly believe my eyes. I don't know what I had expected; but I surely had not expected anything to get off that smoke-dirty train, in the middle of a Nevada desert, on a sweltering hot July evening, that looked as she did.

In the first place, in her pongee silk dress with coat to match, and perky little green hat, she looked as if she had been fresh picked, in the last nice California garden, and had been kept under glass, on ice ever since. But that was only a part of it. She looked, too, like linen sheets feel, at the end of a long hard day; sheets that have been hand-washed, and sun-dried, and dew-dampened, and ironed smooth as satin. She looked like very early on a September morning, in our mountains—that was the zip and the zest of her, combined with her comforting freshness and cleanness.

She was tall; taller than most women, and with weight enough to look durable and useful, but not a mite fat. She had eyes that were as gray as pussywillows, and that did no monkey-tricks of changing to green or blue; she had wavy carrot-colored hair, that was so full of life it looked as if it were trying to break the bonds of its neat, boyish bob and go floating off, on its own, to make maybe a tiny sunset cloud. Her nose was small; her mouth was a mite too large, showing freely in a smile her teeth, little and polished, white, like a puppy's.

Coming straight from San Francisco, she used no visible cosmetics; which is much the same as if I had said, rising out of the Pacific Ocean, she was as dry as a chip. But you could no more imagine Lynn MacDonald stopping anything, much less herself, to peer at her freckled nose in a vanity-case's mirror, than you could imagine a baseball player stopping between first and second base to take his temperature with a clinical thermometer.

All of this general satisfactoriness, coming through the alkali dust and offering to shake hands with a person, was, I might say, disarming. My impulses were all mixed. I felt like putting my old, muddled head down on that nice high chest of hers and having a right good cry. And yet, I felt for the first time in days, like a broad grin. I managed it, and forewent the other.

Her voice was low and pleasant, but there was something brisk and crisp about it, and about all of her, that seemed to say plenty and plenty of time for everything, but not one precious minute to waste.

In the background, during this meeting, John and Danny had been hugging and kissing, as if the rolling train right behind them, filled with staring people, were a peaceful, flowing river, and the people fishes that were swimming past. At last, to my relief, they came over to join us; Danny, looking paler and more snuffed out than usual, by contrast, maybe, with Miss MacDonald; John beaming with triumph at having her home again.

"But," Danny said, after Sam had introduced her to Miss MacDonald, and had explained why Miss MacDonald had come, "you didn't tell me that you were coming here."

"You girls get acquainted on the train?" Sam asked.

"We had breakfast together in the diner this morning," Miss MacDonald answered.

"Did you know who I was?" Danny questioned.

"It was my business to know that, wasn't it?" Miss MacDonald smiled.

"Only—why didn't you tell me?" Danny persisted.

"I don't wonder that you ask," Miss MacDonald said. "And I hope that you will forgive me for seeming unfriendly, secretive. It is, simply, that I never want my first history of the case to come from the nearest relatives. Of course they feel too deeply to see clearly. Mistaken impressions are so hard to eradicate, that I go to any lengths to avoid them. If I had made myself known this morning, Miss Canneziano, I should have had to seem more rude and ungracious than I seemed by acting as I did. Because, please," she included all of us in her glance, "I have to ask each of you not to talk to me about the case. I should have to refuse to listen. When I need to know anything about it—I shall need to know many things—I'll ask it, as a direct question. Until I ask for more, from you, if you will do that, simply answer my questions, you will help me immeasurably."

"That's easy," Sam said. "I am afraid," she answered, "that it won't be easy. And I have to make another request that won't be easy to fulfill, either. It is, that no one will question me. I am sorry to have to ask that. I am afraid that it seems as if I were trying to surround myself with a glamour of mystery—pretending to false wisdoms and acumens—"

"Not a bit of it," Sam interrupted. "He travels the fastest who travels alone."

"I have always questioned that," she said. "At any rate, I don't intend to travel all alone."

"You mean you are going to take a few days to size us up, and then get some of us to help you?" Sam asked.

"Question number one," she said, and laughed, too.

CHAPTER XXXIX
A Trap

We had got into the sedan, by this time, and were riding along the Victory Highway. I declare to goodness, a sound that was pretty much like a ripple of giggles went tittering around. It did us good, every last one of us. It was antiseptic, as laughs so often are. Just as I was thinking how much more wholesome everything felt, since I had shaken hands with Miss MacDonald, Danny who was riding in the front seat beside John, spoiled it all by emitting a shriek; it was not a very loud one, but it

was thick with horror and repulsion.

John talked to her for a minute or two in a low voice, and then explained, over his shoulder to us, that he had told her about "that man" being on the ranch.

"Uncle Sam," Danny pleaded, "do I have to see him?"

"Well, Danny," Sam apologized, "I'm right down sorry about it; but, you see, he is staying on the place. We'll keep him out of your way as much as we can."

"Why can't he stay, if he has to stay at all, down at the outfit's quarters?" Danny asked.

"We'll see what Miss MacDonald says. I kind of thought, maybe, she'd like to have him where she could keep an eye on him. I kind of wanted, myself, to keep an eye on him."

Danny put her head on John's shoulder and began to cry; weak, choking little sobs that hurt like having to watch a sick baby.

"Poor little thing," Miss MacDonald said to me, her voice lowered and rich with sympathy.

I thought she would ask me what the trouble was, and who the man was that was causing it. Instead, still speaking low, to me, she said, "So often I get completely at odds with my profession. And then I hear some woman crying like that, or something else as heart-breaking comes to me, and I know that I am justified. Not because I shall discover this criminal. That won't help this little girl, greatly; but because I am one of an army that is fighting crime."

I didn't say it, but I felt like telling her that she seemed like a whole army herself—an army with banners.

I leaned forward and tried to soothe Danny; told her that we would all do what we could to keep him away from her, and to make it easy for her.

"It can't be made easy," she answered. "You can't keep him away from me. I won't see him, I tell you. I've been so homesick—and now to come to this. I can't see him. I won't—"

Miss MacDonald, who the minute before, had seemed all pity for Danny, began, suddenly, to talk right through and over her sobs, to Sam; to talk in rather a loud voice about stock raising, paying no more attention to Danny's troubles than she paid to the humming of the motor.

I sat and sulked and nursed my disappointment. If I had been a man—which praise the Lord I am not—it would have been a case of love at first sight with me toward Lynn MacDonald. But now I told myself bitterly that I had been a fool to expect real womanly sympathy and kindnesses from a person in her profession. Ferreting out criminals would make anyone as hard as nails. I was right, in a way. That was not the last time I was to see her turn, suddenly, from a sympathetic woman into a crime analyst. It was sort of a pity, though, that I had to see that side of her so soon; so long before I could begin to understand it.

Not until Danny had quieted down, and had turned to us with stammered apologies and attempted explanations, did Miss MacDonald ask, "Who is this man?"

"Dreadful as it must seem to you," Danny answered, "he is my father. But he has brought sorrow, and fear and trouble to my mother, and to my sister, and to me, whenever he came near us. He is a wicked man."

"Wouldn't it be possible," Miss MacDonald turned to Sam, "to have someone go ahead of us to the house, and ask him to keep to his room, this evening?"

"Well—" Sam hesitated. "But Danny will have to meet him, sooner or later."

"Better later, in this case, I should say. She will be rested to-morrow. Possibly, too, it would be easier for her if their

first meeting could be in private. Shouldn't you rather see him alone, just at first, Miss Canneziano?"

"Oh, no!" Danny exclaimed. "I hope I need never see him alone. Please—don't any of you ever leave me alone with him, not for a minute, if you can help it."

For all the fuss she had made about it, I will say that Danny did very well when we all went into the house and she saw Canneziano, standing over by the east windows smoking a cigarette.

"What ho, Dan," he said, smiling his smooth, mirking smile at her. "You are looking seedy. Bad times around here lately."

She didn't go near him. She edged closer to John; but she answered, looking at him straight and lifting her chin in a pretty, dignified way she had, "Very, very bad times in deed." She and John walked through the room to the stairway, and up the steps, and out of sight.

Canneziano stood watching them, a dark, ugly look on his face. "There's filial affection for you," he said. And then with a half laugh, as he lit another cigarette, and shook the flame from the match "The girl is a fool."

CHAPTER XL The Missing Box

Miss MacDonald came down to breakfast in the morning trim and white as a new candle. She ate heartily, complimenting the food. She asked after Danny, who had not come down for breakfast. She talked about how splendidly the high altitude and the marvelous Nevada air made her feel. She told us, who had lived here all our lives and didn't know it, that the air in Nevada was supposed to be the best in the entire United States for growing things. And all the time, she was either not noticing, or pretending not to notice, how we were all hanging on her every word, and watching her every movement.

I guessed the others were doing as I was doing; watching for penetrating glances, and listening for catches in her innocent questions. But, at that, I blushed for them; particularly for John, who sat and stared at her as if she were something he had to learn by heart, before the meal was over. She caught him at it, several times; but, though he would then have the grace to blush, and go glancing about, he'd begin again, at the beginning, the minute she looked away.

When we had finally finished breakfast, she asked Sam if she might detain him I stayed on, when the others had left the dining-room. She said pointedly, though politely and to Sam, not to me, that she wanted to speak to him alone.

I took myself off. But the open window in the pass pantry was too big a temptation; so I went in there, softly, and stood far back and to one side. Her very first words took me right off my feet. "Mr. Stanley," she questioned, "do you trust your housekeeper?"

"Mary?" Sam drawled "Well, now, I don't know as to trusting—"

I don't know how to express what my feelings were when I heard Sam say that. Pulverized is a word that would edge it, I guess—as if I had been caught in a sausage machine and ground up into small pieces, each one hurting or its own hook.

"But," Sam continued, "if Mary were going on a long journey, to indefinite foreign parts, and felt the need of my right eye to take along with her, I'd loan it to her for as long as she wanted it—no questions asked. I can't say that I'd go much further than that, though."

I was whole again, and warm and glowing. Sam, the old innkeeper, getting his dander up, and to a beautiful woman like that, just because she had asked him a simple question

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Restoring Exhausted Soil

Prof. S. Kravkov, a Russian soil scientist, told his colleagues at the second international congress of soil science at Leningrad that he has developed a method for restoring fertility to apparently exhausted soils without the use of fertilizers. It consists of keeping the soil to be treated under optimum physical conditions, especially as regards temperature, moisture and aeration, while the natural microbiotic population builds itself up and captures nitrogen from the air. Professor Kravkov stated that he had increased the nitrogen content of "podsol," a poor gray soil, found in certain forest lands, approximately tenfold by his method.

Shetland Gets Lifeboat

The first lifeboat ever in the Shetland Islands was received recently with great enthusiasm by the people of Lerwick. Vessels blew their sirens and civic representatives were on the pier and a brass band was playing. The craft is a motor vessel capable of 1,000 miles cruising radius and will accommodate 100 persons in an emergency.

Real Thing

"Does he kiss nicely, Gladys?" "Oh, Ann, when you're in love you forget all about technique."

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Too Much to Hope For

"If we was as anxious," said Uncle Eben, "to get even for every favah done us as we is for every injur, dar woul'dn' be nigh so much fussin' an' back talk to listen to."—Washington Star.

The Answer

"Should political speakers address meetings, or talk over the radio?" "No!"

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WHAT a relief and satisfaction it is for mothers to know that there is always Castoria to depend on when babies get fretful and uncomfortable! Whether it's teething, colic or other little upset, Castoria always brings quick comfort; and, with relief from pain, restful sleep.

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Something—or Somebody?

Mrs. Bings—Just as sure as you are born something escaped my mind today.

Mr. Bings—Something? You mean somebody, don't you, Jane?

He Has Enough

Mrs. Maggs—Wot excuse does your husband make fer not lookin' fer a job?

Mrs. Dags—All of 'em.—Sidney Bulletin.

effective. It is almost certain to clear up any minor ailment and cannot possibly do the youngest child the slightest harm. So it's the first thing to think of when a child has a coated tongue, is fretful and out of sorts. Be sure to get the genuine; with Chas. H. Fletcher's signature on the package.

Ingenious Oregonians

Lumbermen in central Oregon have invented the "rubberman." One end of the saw is fastened to a portion of an old inner tube attached to an iron stake driven in the ground. The sawyer pulls the saw toward him and the rubberman pulls away.

A Lengthy Stay

"When is your wife coming back?" "I don't know. She is taking part in a vacation marathon!"

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Corporation Farming.

From The Redfield (S. D.) Journal-Observer.

A professor at State college has worked out a plan for the industry of agriculture which seems to us to get at some of the basic and inherent reasons for the condition of the industry as a whole and which would make an experiment worth trying out somewhere. He would join all the farmers in nine sections into one giant corporation leasing stock to each farmer to the value of his farm. The first and most drastic saving which this plan would effect, he says, is the concentration of farm buildings and feed lots it would eliminate the

duplication of a lot of equipment and afford more specialized types of buildings.

A second primary advantage would be in the corporation's ability to hire managerial brains of the first order as do the industrial firms of the east. Under the manager would be specialists in feeding and breeding cattle, in small grains, in dairying, in poultry. As far as possible those farmers who on their own farms had shown special aptitudes would be allowed to exercise them on the corporation farm.

A third advantage would be in the use and care of farm machinery. The average small farm must have a large investment in ma-

chinery which for the greater part of the year stands idle. On the corporation farm these would be utilized a maximum amount of time, thus making a relatively smaller investment for machinery. Specialists in the care of machinery would certainly be found among the 25 farmers who on the average now inhabit nine square miles.

The state college professor of course, recognizes that there is no panacea for any industry. And in agriculture in particular no group of farmers can band themselves together to bring rain when it is needed or consume a world surplus of such basic products as wheat. Even so we believe that much may be done co-operatively in agriculture that is now done individually and at cross purposes. The farmer is proud of his independence and individualism and rightly so. Yet we believe that he will come to be just as proud of his ability to work together where that course seems to be the better one.

Portland, Ore.—(UP)—The bride whom as left waiting at the church couldn't be much more chagrined than Miss Ethel Maranay, 19 years old, who reported to police that a thief entered her apartment and stole her wedding dress a few days before she was to be married.