

THE DESERT MOON MYSTERY

BY KAY CLEAVER STRAHAN

"No," she smiled, "it is tempting—now. But that desire of mine to give up my profession is a phase that I always pass through at the beginning of each difficult case. In a few days, when I begin to get hold of something, and when things begin to take shape, all my love of the work will return. It is only at first, when I seem to be in a maze of mystery, like this, that I get so discouraged. I always do it, right at first; and I always think that here is the case of which I am going to make an absolute failure."

"Have you ever failed on a case?" I asked.

"Indeed I have, on several. It is queer, though; in each case that has been a failure, it has seemed that the solution was written plainly from the start. It was—written all wrong. Judging from that, I should be unusually successful in this case."

Poor girl, no wonder that she was discouraged. She has given me leave, now that it is all over, to use any of her notes that I care to use in the writing of this story.

"Far be it from Lynn MacDonald," she said, when I asked her about using the notes, "to refuse advertisement of one of her banner cases. My rivals will say that I succeeded in this because, as often happens, my luck stood by me. But you and I, we understand about luck don't we, Mary?"

"If you aren't afraid," I said, "that your notes may give away some of the secrets of that luck of yours, so that your rivals will be able to lay their hands on some of the same brand?"

She laughed. "I never write down a secret. That is a safe enough rule for an honest person, who plans to remain honest. For a dishonest person, or for one who contemplates any sort of evil, or admits the possibility of such a course, the safe rule would be: 'Never, under any circumstances, put pen or pencil to paper.'"

As Sam would say, "It is a poor rule that won't work both ways."

The notes that Miss MacDonald had made, before this conversation of ours, that day in the kitchen, and on the evening of that same day, July eleventh, are as follows.

CHAPTER XLIV The Notes

July 7. Saw body in crematory late tonight. Cause of death, strangulation. Probably work of expert. Look for Japanese on ranch. Broken fingers on right hand. Beautiful, costly gown, lingerie, etc., indicating wealth and good taste.

July 8. Rose, who has shadowed twin sister reports nothing verging on suspicion. She attended services at crematory. Evidence of genuine grief. Returned to hotel. One telegram sent to Desert Moon Ranch. Received no company. Mailed no letters. Did no shopping.

I received telegram from Desert Moon Ranch engaging me on case. Explicit directions concerning train probably due to inconvenience of meeting trains in rural community, and not due to a desire to have me on the same train with Miss C. However, note.

Telephoned to coroner and undertaker, requesting them to give me conference in Telko. Also, had coroner verify list of names, as published in "Examiner" of all persons present on ranch at time of murder. Note—absence of all ranch employees at the time. Note—extreme reluctance of both coroner and undertaker

See Tug Coming.

Philadelphia Public Ledger (Dry Rep.)

Senator Fess and others have been pointing out that prohibition is not a national issue this year in the elections to the Senate and House, and, indeed, in only a handful of States has been raised, either in senatorial or gubernatorial contests, as an issue between the parties. Only in Massachusetts, Delaware, Illinois, Colorado, Montana and Oklahoma is prohibition a party question in senatorial contests. It is even less prominent as a party issue in gubernatorial elec-

to give information, or to meet me in Telko.

July 9. Spent day in shadowing Miss C. myself. R's observations, as usual, excellent.

Rose's research through back files of Nevada papers provided following information.

Samuel Stanley, ranch owner. Very wealthy. Exemplary character. High standing throughout state of Nevada. Philanthropic.

John Stanley, adopted son of S. Stanley. Distinguished himself on University of Nevada football team, 1916, 1917. Enlisted in air service for war, 1917. Mather's Field when armistice was declared.

Hubert Hand. Winner of chess tournament held in Reno, 1914, 1915.

Mrs. Ollie Ricker. No report. Chadwick Caulfield. No report, except mention as guest at Desert Moon Ranch.

Mary Magin. No report. Dannielle Canneziano. No report, except mention of her arrival with sister, Gabrielle, at ranch last May.

Inspection of Miss C's room in hotel after she had turned in her key revealed no clue. Unusually neat and orderly person. Wastebaskets empty. Newspapers folded on table. Magazine, "Ladies Home Journal" on table. No heavy perfume. Hotel soap unwrapped. Fastidious. Silver dollar left on table for chambermaid.

Rose reports: Miss C. Went from hotel to Ferry Building in taxicab. Crossed alone on ferry. Spoke to no one. Boarded train at eight thirty o'clock and went at once to her berth.

July 10. Afternoon. Breakfasted with Miss C. this morning. No conversation. All the evidence of good breeding.

Had conference with coroner and undertaker. Think that they strongly suspect John Stanley because of their repeated efforts to keep me from sharing the suspicion.

Information gained from them: Girl murdered on attic stairway. Position of body and marks on throat prove an attack from the rear. Members of household declare that rigor was complete when body was discovered at eight o'clock the night of the fourth of July. Amateur testimony, however. If fact, death must have occurred at least three hours before discovery of body.

July 10. Night. Allowed sudden "hunch" to betray reason and common sense. Usual silly mistake at beginning of case. Set a trap to catch a hawk. Got caught myself. Luckily, no harm done. Met members of household. First impressions, before hearing history of case other than gained from newspapers, coroner and undertaker.

Dannielle Canneziano. Impressions previously noted sustained. Charming, lovable character. Innocent.

Samuel Stanley. Honest. Likeable. Kindly. There is a slight chance that he might be involved, unwittingly. He is not stupid; but, decidedly, he is not clever.

Mary Magin. Intelligent. Imaginative. Honest. Innocent.

John Stanley. Too handsome, but unconceited. Bashful. Likable. Judgement suspended.

Ollie Ricker. Life has treated her badly. She has put on armour against it. Stupid. Perhaps sly. Judgement suspended.

Daniel Canneziano. Criminal type. Alibi proves him not guilty of the murder, but he is probably involved. Why did he come here?

July 11. Evening. Heard case history to-day from Mr. S. and Mrs. M. Tempted to destroy all first

impressions as recorded. Remember, however, the value of mistaken impressions is usually important.

Multiplicity of clues most amazing in my entire experience. Would seem to indicate that many of them are false clues.

Most Important Clues. (Definite.)

1. John's unnecessary errand.
2. Victim's evident fear as she walked through room.

A. Unusual costume for short walk on the place.

3. Miss C's calling after sister.
4. Coufield's suicide and confessional note. (Probably most important of all clues.)
5. Victim's note to Dannielle Canneziano.

- A. Proof of her fear.
6. Death of Martha Stanley.
- A. Missing box containing sleeping powders.
7. Canneziano's presence on ranch.

Clues of Less Importance (Definite.)

1. Contents of beaded bag.
 - A. Empty purse.
 - B. Missing bill-fold.
 - C. Crumpled handkerchief.

- D. Broken cigaret holder.
- E. Note from Hubert Hand.
- F. Cigaret case with two cigarets missing.
- H. Empty matchbox.

2. Code letter.
 - A. Destroyed caps for typewriter.
 3. Pipe ashes on bag and carpet.

- A. Not necessarily Mr. Stanley's.
- B. Probably fixed false clue.

4. Tattling shuttle. (Doubtful.)
- ## Clues of Most Importance. (Indefinite.)

1. Entire story concerning the money from robbery being hidden on Desert Moon Ranch.
2. Victim's peculiar actions after receiving code letter.

- A. Quarrel with Mr. Stanley.
3. Mrs. Ricker's story.
- A. Her reason for telling it.

- B. Did she believe it?
4. Mrs. Magin's desire to remove pipe ashes.

5. Miss C's reluctance to tell of them. Mer final complete confession of her suspicions concerning Mr. Stanley.
6. Hubert Hand's unnecessary confession concerning his past life.

Clues of Least Importance. (Indefinite.)

1. C. Coufield's powers of ventriloquism.

- A. Probably greatly overrated by members of household.
2. Playing of radio between two and four o'clock that afternoon.

3. Martha's reference to a surprise in which she and Chadwick Caulfield were involved.
- A. Possibly untrue.

4. Mrs. Magin's evident antagonism toward the victim.
5. Mr. Stanley's prompt action in locking the attic door and his refusal to have the body touched until the arrival of coroner.

6. Reason for victim's having given bracelet to Martha Stanley at that time?

- Negatives.
1. No clues of any sort discoverable in victim's room.
2. No clues of any sort discoverable in attic.

3. Lack of motives for crime by persons at present instinctively suspicioned.
4. No dogs on a ranch of this size.

Now, as I read over these notes, my good opinion of myself rises until it runs over the pan. I declare to goodness, the list of clues made out by Lynn MacDonald, Crime Analyst, is not much better than the list made out by Mary Magin, Cook and Housekeeper. She has done hers in better form, and she has included a few things that I left out. But, most of the included things were unknown to me at the time I made my list. Many of the other included things did not amount to snucks. For instance, we have no dogs on the ranch because the dogs in northeastern Nevada have a habit of running out and associating with

rabid coyotes, contracting rabies, coming home and biting whoever is conveniently to hand. For instance—but never mind. As I said before, poor girl, no wonder she was discouraged.

CHAPTER XLV Another Key

As indicated by her notes for July eleventh, on that afternoon Miss MacDonald had cleaned the attic thoroughly, and had found nothing to pay her for her trouble. Keeping me in the dark, as she had, I supposed when she said early the next morning that she wanted to clean the living-room, that she had got at least a hat full of clues from the attic.

Land knows, the way I had been neglecting things, the living room was badly in need of a good cleaning. I wanted her to allow me to help her but she would not. It was luck that I happened to come in with the floor wax just as she was looking at something that she had dug out of the ashes in the fireplace.

"What's that?" I questioned.

"I believe," she answered, "that it is the missing key to the attic door."

She got up, shook out her skirts, and went straight upstairs. I trailed along. I stood by and watched her while she fitted the blackened key into the lock. It turned both ways, as smoothly as you please.

Without bothering to say anything to me, she went up and down the hall, trying the key in the locks of the other doors. It fitted none of them. She went downstairs again, with me trailing after her, and tried the key in all the locks downstairs. It fitted none of them, either.

"Do you know," she asked, showing at last that she was conscious of my presence, which I was beginning to doubt, "when you last had a fire in that fireplace?"

I thought a minute, and then told her on the night of the fourth of July, during the storm.

"Do you remember who kindled the fire?"

"It had been fixed there, ready for the match, for weeks. Things have gone to rack and ruin here lately; but I always used to see to it that the fire was set in the fireplace, ready to light when needed."

"Do you happen to know who applied the match to the fire that night?"

"Sam did."

"But surely, even though the rain had come up, a fire on the fourth of July could not have been necessary?"

"We don't have fires here when they are necessary," I told her. "We have them when they are possible without absolute suffocation. Half a pint of rain is plenty of excuse for Sam to light a fire at any time, even if he has to open all the doors and the windows to cool off."

What I was saying was the honest truth; but I had a mean feeling that she didn't believe me.

Right here, with apologies to Miss MacDonald and others of her profession, I want to say that if they would just remember that nine times out of ten a person who pretends to be telling the truth is telling it, it would save them a lot of mistakes, and a lot of worry. The man who spends his time biting his money to see whether or not it is genuine doesn't, usually, have much of it to bite; to say nothing of the wear and tear on his own teeth, which would be considerable.

I was standing by the living-room windows, trying to keep my temper down with some such consoling thoughts as these, when I saw a car drive up and the coroner and the undertaker getting out of it.

I told Miss MacDonald the news, and asked her what in the world she supposed they were coming here for, at this time in the morning.

"I needed to see them again," she answered. "Mr. Stanley telephoned to them last evening."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

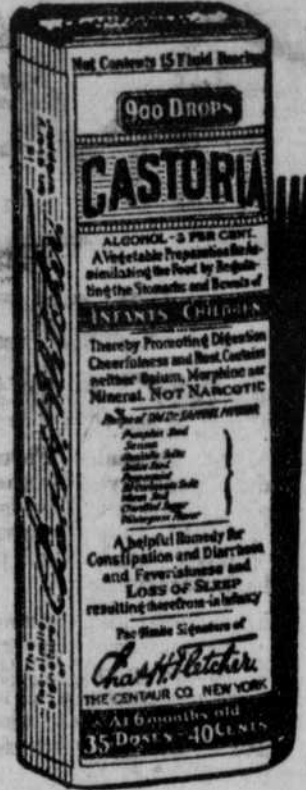
Ohio, Illinois and Delaware. Whatever the status of prohibition as an issue today, it means a real tug-of-war in both national party conventions in 1932.

A HEAT STORY

Johnson City, Ill. — It was so hot here recently—well: Six motherless baby chicks waddled about the home of John Hobbs after being hatched by the intense heat. The eggs were hatched, Hobbs says, three days after he had placed them in a shed where he hoped to keep them cool.

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"Well, she's made over \$100 out of it already!"—Fraternal Magazine.

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Soviet Buying Rabbits
Large numbers of commercial fur-bearing rabbits are being purchased by the Soviet government, and the British Rabbit Farmers' association, a co-operative organization of England, has sent big consignments to

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Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound
Lydia E. Pinkham Med. Co., Lynn, Mass.

Advice about making money is good, but no one can give a literary man any advice on his calling. He either knows how or he doesn't.

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