

# THE DESERT MOON MYSTERY

BY KAY CLEAVER STRAHAN

"Well," I said, "that means that I've got about half an hour to disguise a family meal as a company dinner—"

"Don't bother," she interrupted. "They won't be here for luncheon—dinner. I need to see them only about ten minutes."

I didn't bother—answering. If she didn't know any more about the ways of the people in this country than that, I didn't see why I should take it on myself to teach her.

But she was right. She talked to them a few minutes; and, though I insisted that they stay for dinner, off they went. It was an insult to the Desert Moon Ranch. Everyone on the place, but Miss MacDonald, knew it. Two weeks before, if a couple of friends had left the ranch at eleven-thirty in the morning, with no reasonable excuse for so doing, Sam would have blown up and burst with rage. That noon he was not even decently indignantly interested.

He had plenty of interest, though, concerning the finding of the attic key. He had had it all settled, and was satisfied that, since it had been proven that Gaby had been killed on the stairway, it also had been proven that no member of the household could have been implicated. Now this second key coming to light, the key that must have been put over back of the wood before the fire was lighted that night, and that must have been blackened in that one fire, because there had been no fire in that fireplace since, dragged, to quote Sam, not wishing to use such words on my own hook, "Every damn one of us back into the damn mess again."

"Sam," I said, and I guess my only excuse is that I was still angry at having my honest word doubted, "do you know what I think? I think that Miss MacDonald—though land knows she is a nice girl, and a living wonder as help in the kitchen and around the house—is going to be a flat fizzle from start to finish when it comes to discovering the murderer."

"That's kind of the way I got it sized up, too," Sam said. "But if she's good help to you, she's worth a lot more than her expenses."

"It isn't the cost of her," I said. "I'm afraid she is going to do a lot of harm around here."

"Good-night, Mary!" he said. "If anyone can do any more harm around here than has been done already—why, leave 'em do it."

"Ngt much with your 'leave 'em do fis,' I said. "My idea is that we've had about enough trouble. What I'm getting at is this, Sam; I think that fool girl, at present, is suspecting you more than any other one of us."

"That's the way I had that sized up, too," he said. "But let her go ahead. If she can prove I'm guilty, I'm willing to hang for it."

"Don't be a fool, Sam," I snapped. "Did you ever happen to hear of circumstantial evidence?"

"You bet. But they can't hang more than one innocent person on circumstantial evidence, and there's enough of that stuff around here now to hang about five or six of us. I'll take my chances with the rest of you, Mary."

"Lands, Sam," I was taken aback, "do you think she suspects me?"

Something pretty close to the old twinkle came into Sam's eyes. "Well, Mary, Gaby was one extra to do for and she came late to meals and pestered you quite a lot. Furthermore, though it hasn't been made a point of, you

were all alone in the kitchen for the hour between five and six o'clock. You might have slipped up and have done the deed between the time you put the meat on and took the biscuits out."

I knew that he thought he was being funny; but I didn't like it. "See here, Sam," I began, "Danny was going back and forth all the time—"

"Now then," Sam interrupted, "Did Miss Canneziano have any particular reason for watching you? No. I see. Then I am afraid, she can not be positive that you were not out of the kitchen. Twenty minutes often seem like two hours and sixteen minutes—"

"I'll tell you what, Mary," Sam got suddenly serious. "I'm going to wait a few more days, and then if this lady isn't progressing a deal faster than she is a present, I'm going to pay her off, full amount, of course, and wire to Frisco for a plain, ordinary, he-man detective to come up here and take hold of things. By the way," he went on, "does it seem to you that Danny and Canneziano are getting along all right?"

"I judge it isn't a case of their getting along, much," I said. "So far as I know, she hasn't spoken a word to him since she greeted him the evening she came home."

"Well," he hesitated, "Well—I know a mite further than had it all settled, and was that isn't dinner time—maybe."

He went into the dining-room, and I followed him.

All during the dinner, and the same had been true of every meal since the first breakfast I've mentioned, John hardly took his eyes off of Miss MacDonald. I made a way to speak to him about it, alone, right after dinner.

"John," I said "For Mercy's sake, what do you want to sit and stare at Miss MacDonald for, during meals, like she was the place where you had lost something?"

He blushed. "Gosh, Mary! I haven't been doing that, have I?"

"You certainly have. It doesn't look nice, John. Why do you do it?"

"I didn't know that I did. But, on the square, did you ever see anything as pretty—I mean, as clean and—well, kind of comforting looking? She changes so, too; like a diamond, or a desert, or a sunrise, or—something. Did you ever see anyone as interesting to look at, Mary?"

"Never mind asking me," I said. "Just you go and ask Danny some of those questions."

"Danny," he answered, "is—well, Danny is Danny, of course. She's different."

"Better take to watching how different she is," I advised, and left him to think it over, and went into the living-room.

Canneziano was loafing around in there. "Mary," he said, "I'll make a dicker with you."

## CHAPTER XLVI

### A Dicker

Not with me," I said, and started up the stairs.

Curiosity like mine is a curse. I'd gone about four steps up when it caught me. "What's your old dicker?" I said.

"If you'll persuade Sam to give me the ten thousand for producing the murderer, I'll split it with you."

I am tired of apologizing for myself. I will state, merely, that I managed to say the one thing, under those circumstances, that I should not have said. "Do you know who the murderer is?" Thereby proving that I was possessed of

about as much diplomacy as an alarm clock.

"Certainly not," he answered. He had not hesitated; he had looked straight into my eyes. But I knew that he believed that he had lied.

"See here," I said. "I take it that one five thousand dollars is as good to you as another. If you know who committed the murder, and will produce him, I'll give you the five thousand dollars myself."

"Don't say that, Mary," Danny stepped out from behind the long curtains at the end of the south windows.

Canneziano jumped like a spurred bronco. "Spying, eh, my lady?"

She spoke directly to me. "Listen, Mary; don't ever, for any reason, enter into any sort of an agreement with this man. If he knows, or thinks that he knows, who the murderer is, he can be forced to tell without a bribe. If he had known for one day, one hour, and had withheld the information, he is, in effect an accomplice—there is a legal term for it, but I have forgotten it. I am going out, now, to find Uncle Sam, and bring him here and tell him that this man says that he knows who committed the murder. Mary, you telephone to the sheriff in Telko—"

"Just a moment, please," Canneziano spoke smoothly and smilingly. "I have said, definitely, that I do not know who killed the Gaby. And—I do not know. I am bored, un-speakably bored. I should like to try my hand at detecting this—er, villain. But," he shrugged his narrow shoulders, "with no impetus—"

"The fact that she was your own daughter—" I began, hotly.

"Don't, Mary," Danny interrupted, with a sigh. "There is no use. You and he do not speak the same language."

"How is this?" Canneziano said, and went on speaking, very rapidly, in some foreign language.

Danny stood and stared at him without a mite of expression on her face. He paused for breath. She said, "I have forgotten my Italian. I do not understand you, and I am glad that I do not. Come, Mary, shall we go upstairs?"

In the upper hall she said that she wanted me to go with her to Miss MacDonald, because she wanted to tell Miss MacDonald what had just happened.

We knocked on her door. She greeted us pleasantly enough, but there was a pucker between her eyebrows.

"You have asked us," Danny began at once, "to tell you nothing about the case. Does that mean that you do not wish to have us tell you of day by day developments, which seem to have a direct bearing on the case?"

"As, for instance?" Miss MacDonald questioned.

Danny told her about what had happened, from the time she had stepped behind the curtains, until she and I had come upstairs together.

Miss MacDonald's first question was, "Why were you watching him?"

"Because," Danny answered, straight, "I think he came here with some evil purpose. I should like to find out what that purpose is."

"Why were you so eager to prevent Mrs. Magin's making a pact with him?"

"Miss MacDonald, a woman who has dealt with criminals, as you must have, should not need to ask that question."

"But," Miss MacDonald persisted, "you have not dealt with criminals."

"I have dealt with this man. I know that he is bad and crafty. For five thousand dollars he would perjure himself over and over again. He would produce witnesses who would perjure themselves. You know the ways of criminals better than I do, Miss MacDonald. I know, as Uncle Sam knows, that it is unsafe to deal with them."

"Has this man approached you with offers similar to this one, Miss Canneziano?"

ered. "Both parties making move to leave." "Direct information that subject will leave Canada." But with all this secrecy as to who was being shadowed and the concealment of names, one of the sluths wires: "Dill here. Nye, Dale, Moses, Patterson, Wagner not registered. Wire instructions."

It was thrilling business, but there will be interest in ascertaining whether Mrs. McCormick got her money's worth. To be disclosed as stealthily pursuing a committee of the senate for months, apparently in hopes of "getting the goods" on its members, and to wind up

"He has had no opportunity."

"You are sure of that?" Danny's chin went up a trifle. "I don't understand."

"I think you do."

Danny turned to me. "Mary," she said, "yesterday afternoon that man came to my room when I was alone. He slipped in, closed my door, and locked it. I ran into Gaby's room, but I could not get out of it because the doors were locked. I went into Gaby's bathroom and locked myself in. I stayed there for half an hour, or longer, until he left Miss MacDonald evidently thinks that he and I were in conversation during that time. I have no proof that we weren't. Do you believe me, Mary?"

"I do, with all my heart," I said.

Miss MacDonald persisted. "You told no one about this?"

"I did not dare to tell. If John thought that that man—"

"Yes?" questioned Miss MacDonald.

"I mean that John would fight with him; would whip him within an inch of his life."

"Why should you care?" Danny looked at me.

"She'd care, I said, answering the appeal in her big, hurt eyes, "because she is a woman, Miss MacDonald. It may be hard for you to understand; but women, who aren't crime analysts, don't want their men fighting."

"Thank you, Mary," Danny said, and walked hurriedly out of the room.

## CHAPTER XLVII

### An Aid

"Mrs. Magin," Miss MacDonald began, right off, the minute the door had closed behind Danny, "I want to ask you to help me with this case."

"I couldn't be any help to you," I said. I guess I was rather tart about it.

"Why not?"

"One reason is," I said, "that anybody who doesn't know any better than to suspicion Danny, in this affair, would need a lot more help, to get anywhere, than I could give them."

"My only suspicion concerning Miss Canneziano," she answered, "is that she knows more than she is willing to tell. I may be wrong about that. Have you any other reason for refusing to help me?"

"Only that you don't believe a word that I say. If you would consider that I am, anyway, trying to be honest and if you'd do the same with the others, until you are sure that you have reason to do otherwise, I'd consider it an honor to help you, and I'd thank you kindly."

"I am afraid that I don't entirely understand."

"Crime and wickedness," I told her, "aren't the general rules of the world. If they were, all the good people would have to be locked up, for safety's sake, while the criminals ran loose for lack of space to confine them. Why, instead of doubting my simple word, this morning, when I told you how Sam always lighted a fire, for any excuse, couldn't you have believed that I was telling the truth, and that whoever put the key in there knew that Sam would light the fire, and so throw suspicion on himself?"

"That is possible," she admitted. "But the key, there, leads me to suppose that whoever put it there, to hide it, would be too stupid for much subtle reasoning. Keys, you know don't burn."

"They don't," I agreed. "But we never take the ashes out of the fireplace as you did this morning. We open the ash-dump and shoot them down into a barrel in the basement. Every few months the ashes are emptied in starvation field, eight miles or more away from here. Not a bad way to get the key off the place, if that was what he wanted. Not a bad way, either, to throw more suspicion on Sam, if the key was found."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

with a water haul, is calculated to distract considerably from her reputation as a "wonderful woman."

### GOOD HOG FEED

Hogs fed what are said to gain an average of one and a quarter pounds a day for 120 days. Hogs fed corn gain one pound a day.

### The Test.

From Tit-Bits. "What's the difference between dancing and marching?" asked the girl of her clumsy partner.

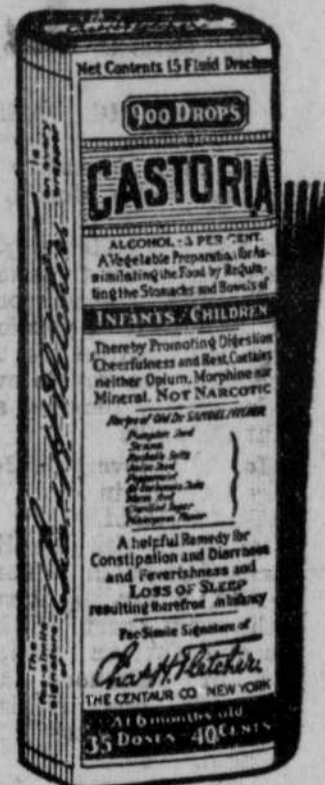
"I don't know," he replied. "I thought so," she said. "Shall we sit down?"

## For TEETHING troubles

FUSSY, fretful . . . of course babies are uncomfortable at teething time! And mothers are worried because of the little upsets which come so suddenly then. But there's one sure way to comfort a restless, teething child. Castoria—made especially for babies and children! It's perfectly harmless, and the formula on the wrapper tells you. It's mild in taste and action. Yet it rights little upsets with a never-failing effectiveness.

That's the beauty of this special children's remedy! It may be given to tiny infants—as often as there is need. In cases of colic and similar disturbances, it is invaluable. But it has every-day uses all mothers should understand. A coated tongue

calls for a few drops to ward off constipation; so does any suggestion of bad breath. Whenever older children don't eat well, don't rest well, or have any little upset, a more liberal dose of this pure vegetable preparation is usually all that's needed. Genuine Castoria has Chas. H. Fletcher's signature on the wrapper. Doctors prescribe it.



## Shampoo Regularly with Cuticura Soap

Precede by applications of Cuticura Ointment

This treatment will keep the scalp in a healthy condition and the hair thick and lustrous.

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

Habits Hard to Break  
Blinks—How do you like your new electric refrigerator?  
Jinks—It will be all right after I can break myself of the habit of going out there every night just before turning in to empty the ice pan. —Cincinnati Enquirer.

# ASPIRIN..

Beware of Imitations



DEMAND this package

Genuine Bayer Aspirin has been proved safe by millions of users for over thirty years. Thousands of doctors prescribe it. It does not depress the heart. Promptly relieves

Headache Sore Throat Rheumatism  
Colds Neuralgia Neuritis

SAFE

Leaves no harmful after-effects. For your own protection insist on the package with the name Bayer and the word genuine as pictured above.

Aspirin is the trade-mark of Bayer Manufacture of Monocetacidester of Salicylicacid

## For Housekeepers



LYDIA ORLOSKI  
425 So. Washington Ave., Scranton, Pa.

"I took Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound for run-down condition before my baby was born. Now I eat better, have gained in weight and have more strength to take care of my four children. I can do my housework and not get a bit tired. My mother and my sister, also several of my women friends are taking your medicine now, because I believe that this medicine will help any woman that will take it regularly."—Mrs. Lydia Orloski.



MINNIE E. HICKS  
R.R. #2, Rushville, Indiana

"When I started taking Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound I could hardly do my housework. I was so nervous and weak from Change of Life that I had to lie down very often. I heard about the Vegetable Compound through a pamphlet which was left at my door. I am doing all the housework for a family of four and it keeps me on my feet. I have taken six bottles and I have gained strength and flesh."—Minnie E. Hicks.

## Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound

Lydia E. Pinkham Medicine Co., Lynn, Mass.

### Ruth Hanna Rather Wild.

From Baltimore Sun.  
Ruth Hanna McCormick has a good deal of her father's boldness but lacks much of his judgment. If Mark Hanna had ever started out to trail a political enemy he would have kept his hand more carefully hidden than Mrs. McCormick has done. And he would have employed a more dependable set of sluths. What must be thought of the skill of detectives who follow a senator to get something on him and make a mystery of his traveling with "another man and two blond women," without ever having taken the trouble to recognize the sena-

tor's wife? The blonds were Mrs. Nye and the wife of an assistant attorney general, who was the other man in the case. And having "mash" notes sent the senator by the alleged purpose of entrapping him into what is called "a compromising position" seems to be rather crude stuff.

The seizure of the detective agency's telegrams throws further light on the Hawkshaw business. They bristle with such mysterious messages as "Want both parties covered throughly. If either leaves town wire registration and car number with description." "Third subject is here. Keep other two cov-