

# THE DESERT MOON MYSTERY

BY KAY CLEAVER STRAHAN

"I would discharge one of my assistants like that," she snapped her fingers, "for such a mistake. Crime analyst! Confounded ass! Conceited amateur! Oh!" She went running out of the room, leaving me sitting there to do what I liked with that talk of hers.

"She was back in two minutes. She had Gaby's last note to Danny in her hands. 'I have been assuming,' she said, and her cheeks flamed up again, 'that Gabrielle Canneziano wrote this note. I have had a pleasant little assumption. Now I will get some facts. I must find a sample of her handwriting—'

"She began to search through Gaby's desk. I helped her. Gaby had made a thorough job of her burning. There was not a scratch of her writing to be found.

"Danny will have something," I said. "I'll see whether she is in her room."

Danny was in her room, sitting at her own desk, writing out checks and addressing envelopes. I told her I had come to ask her for a sample of Gaby's handwriting.

"I am sorry, Mary," she said, as she finished addressing an envelope, sealed it, and looked for a stamp in the stamp-box, "but I haven't anything, except, of course, the last note she wrote me, and Miss MacDonald is keeping that."

"Please, dear," I urged, "won't you search through your desk and your papers? It is really very important."

"But I have looked, Mary. Mrs. Ricker had the same idea, yesterday. She thought that Gaby might not have written that last note. I am certain that she did; but I searched and searched to satisfy Mrs. Ricker. I destroyed Gaby's letters to me, when we came to the United States. She has had no reason for writing anything to me since then. Hubert Hand had several notes from her; but he says he has not kept them."

She addressed another envelope, and added it to the pile beside her. "It isn't she said, noticing my reluctance to leave, "that I am not interested, Mary. It is only that I know that I haven't a scrap of her writing."

I turned to go. I had reached the door when she called to me and asked me to take her letters downstairs for the mailbag, when I went downstairs.

I returned to Miss MacDonald with my information.

"Dear me!" she said. "Mrs. Ricker indeed? If only they would work with me, Mary instead of by themselves, or against me. At any rate," she put aside the photograph, a ruler-like thing, and her magnifying glass, "the note to Danielle Canneziano, and the writing on the photograph were done by the same person. What are the letters you have there, in your hand, Mrs. Magin?"

"I told her they were some that Danny had asked me to take downstairs. She held out her hand for them. I had to allow her to have them. But first I read the addresses. They were the names of mail-order stores in Portland, Oregon, and in San Francisco, California.

Miss MacDonald looked at them closely. Then she took up a flat paper knife, from Gaby's desk, and deliberately opened the envelope by lifting the flap.

"She surely does not seal her letters carefully," she said, and took out a check, nothing else, from the envelope.

"It is dated today, the thirteenth of July," she said.

"Of course it is," I answered, tartly, not liking any of this. "She was writing them just now, while I was in there."

"Did you see her writing

them?" she asked.

"I certainly did."

She sighed and moved her head with an impatient gesture, rather like John's worried gestures. "Then that is that," she said, and returned the check to the envelope, sealed the envelope, and gave it with the others, back to me.

"Now for the code letter," she said, and sat down in front of the typewriter. I left her there, and went to look for Sam.

## CHAPTER XLIX New Suspicions

I found him in the living-room, playing solitaire. Mrs. Ricker was in the chair by the window, tating, "Lands, Sam," I said, sitting down across the table from him, "when did you take to sitting around and wasting good time like this?"

"I am helping Miss MacDonald," he said. "Making it easy for her to watch me and convincing her that I'm more or less of a nut, at the same time. Two birds with one stone—"

"She isn't watching you," Mrs. Ricker spoke up. "She is watching Hubert and me."

Queer that with all the years I had known Mrs. Ricker as a dumb person, now that she had begun to talk, her talking seemed only natural.

"I reckon," Sam said, "that she is watching all of us pretty closely."

"No," Mrs. Ricker insisted, "she is watching Hubert and me. Chiefly me. I can't stand it much longer. I am losing my mind. If I don't leave here, before long, I shall be quite insane."

I can't say that Sam's ears actually pricked up when she said that, but they gave that impression.

"I didn't know that you were thinking about leaving here, Mrs. Ricker," he said.

"I am thinking about it; because, if I don't leave here, soon, I shall have to be taken to an asylum."

"Now, now, Mrs. Ricker," Sam urged, "don't be feeling like that. It is just a case of watch and let watch around here, now—"

"It certainly is not a case of live and let live," she said. "I tell you, I can't stand it!" She jumped up from her chair, and went rushing out of the room through the front door. On the porch she dropped into a chair, and hid her face in her hands.

As I looked at her, sitting there, I remembered that it was she who had found the body. Her story had sounded straight enough; but, before she had told it, she had had plenty of time to make it a straight one. Perhaps she had had help in making it a straight one. . . .

Hubert Hand. He had, by his own admission, served a term in prison for forgery. He had had notes from Gaby, and had destroyed them. Was it possible that he might have written the farewell note to Gaby, and the inscription on the photograph? Sam could not swear that Hubert Hand had been in the barn the entire hour between five and six o'clock. That meant, then, that no one knew, positively, where he had been between five and six o'clock. I remembered how eager he had been, at first, to prove that John was the guilty person; how readily he had accepted the theory of Martha's guilt. That theory had been Mrs. Ricker's. Mrs. Ricker loved Hubert Hand. She had loved Martha, too; but Martha was dead.

Would it have been possible for Hubert Hand to have slipped into the house, through the front door, during that hour between five and six, without Danny's having seen him? Possible—that was all. Danny had cut the bread,

in the kitchen. She had emptied jelly from its glass to a dish; had cut the butter. Each task a matter of minutes; but coming through the front door and getting upstairs would be a matter of minutes, also. Mrs. Ricker, of course, would have seen Hubert Hand pass through the room; but Mrs. Ricker could keep a secret.

Again, what had he thought that I had overheard that day in the cabin?

What motive could he have had for killing Gaby? Suppose that Gaby had lied to Danny about the entire contents of the code letter, and that, after all, the money had been hidden on the place. That would be an explanation for Canneziano's coming to the ranch. But suppose that Hubert Hand had found it, or had known that Gaby had found it—

"Come home, Mary," Sam's voice, speaking extra low, cut in on my reverie. "I want to know what you think about this."

"I set Canneziano to mending the south clover fence this morning. I told him I was going to north clover. On my way there, I passed the house. I happened to remember how slick Miss MacDonald had cleaned the attic. It seemed a shame not to use it; so I went up, taking my field glasses with me, for luck. I'd watched about five minutes, out of the window, when I saw Canneziano leave the fence and make up toward the cabin. I came down, jumped on Bobbie Burns, and circled around the hill, back of the cabin. Just as I got my glasses trained, I saw Danny, walking to beat time coming away from the cabin. I don't know whether she had been in it or not. I didn't see her come out of it. I rode straight down. Before I had reached the cabin, Canneziano came out of it. He was carrying a fishing rod, and he went right down to the stream with it. What I'm wondering is, had he and Danny met at the cabin, and had a talk?"

"I know exactly what Mrs. Ricker means," I said, "about losing her mind on this place. It has come to the pass that no one can do any simple thing without being spied on and suspected. Danny always takes her walks in the direction of the cabin. We all do. It is the prettiest, coolest walk on the place."

"Does she always walk so fast, trying to keep cool?"

"Probably not," I said, "unless she has seen Canneziano, and is walking fast, trying to get away from him."

Sam rubbed the back of his head. "By Joe! I hadn't thought of that."

"Think about it now, for a minute," I advised. "When you get through, try to think whether you know of any place where we could get hold of a scrap or two of Gaby's handwriting. We have the last note she wrote to Danny, but we want something more."

"You've come to the right place, for once," he said, and took a long envelop out of his pocket.

"I guess I never happened to mention to you, did I that I fixed up a small checking account for the girls in the Telko Bank? It was just a matter of my own convenience—saved me the pesky trouble of buying orders at the postoffice. Their bank statements and canceled checks came in a few days ago. I was going to look them over, soon as I could get around to it. Here they are. Do you want me to take them up to Miss MacDonald?"

"I'll take them," I offered, "and save you the trip." I longed to see how much of Sam's money the girls had spent in one month, and what they had spent it for.

I don't know yet whether it was cunning, contrariness or courtesy that propelled Sam up those stairs, with the envelope tight in his hand, and without having allowed me as much as a peek at its contents.

## CHAPTER L Shovels

I went into the kitchen and put through a fairly good batch of baking, considering that I'd got a late start at it. I had intended only to stir up a sunshine cake for supper; but when a thunder shower came, washing everything cool and sweet, I opened the kitchen wide to it, and made an angle cake out of the whites of the eggs, and baked a big pan of ginger bread. Zinnia did the washing up; so I was all through and frosting the cakes when Miss MacDonald telephoned down to the kitchen and asked me to go for a walk with her.

Between times, I'd roasted three chickens and got a salad in the icebox. I wouldn't need to turn a hand to supper for an hour; so I told her that I'd like nothing better than a breath of the clean, sage-seasoned air, and that I'd be ready in ten minutes. I gave Zinnia a few directions, and went upstairs to change my shoes.

As I came down the front stairs, into the living-room, I saw Mrs. Ricker coming up the steps to the porch. She was toting a big shovel; carrying it out in front of her, and carefully, right side up, like it was a pancake turner and she had a pancake on it. I stopped in my tracks. There are some connections that the mind refuses: President Coolidge with a six-gun, for instance, or Chief Justice Taft with a saxophone, or Mrs. Ricker with a heavy, dirty old shovel.

She stopped to turn side-wise and open the screen door with her foot, and then she came straight along into the living-room, poking the thing toward Miss MacDonald.

"I want you to look at this," she said.

Miss MacDonald, all crisp in white linen, backed away a mite; but she looked, as directed.

I came hurrying to look too. I don't know what I expected to see—nothing less than a dead scorpion; but, certainly something more than I did see: an old iron shovel with dirt on it.

"Well?" Miss MacDonald questioned.

"I was going to Martha's grave when the shower came up. I stopped in the cabin. This shovel, and another one, were inside the door there. Look at that earth—it is fresh earth. Now I tell you, two people have been digging around this place; and they were at it not longer ago than yesterday, more likely this morning."

"My word!" said Miss MacDonald. It seemed to me there was more annoyance in her voice than there was interest or astonishment.

"Somebody," I pronounced, "still believes that there is money hidden around here."

Mrs. Ricker nodded her satisfaction.

"But surely," Miss MacDonald said, "around a farm, a ranch, that is, around a place of this sort there must be a great deal of digging going on. Gardens—vegetables, you know. That is—one thing and another." She fumbled it, like that.

"We don't make garden here in July," I told her. "The vegetable garden and greenhouses are about three miles away from where Mrs. Ricker found the shovels."

"To be sure," she puckered her brows. "But—Mr. Stanley spoke of fishing. Don't the men dig worms for bait?"

"Anyone," I told her, "who did bait fishing on the Desert Moon, would be about as popular as an S. P. C. A. convention at a roundup. Likely you'll learn our ways, in time. Bait fishing isn't one of them."

While I was getting this off my mind, Danny had come downstairs. I guess we must have looked funny, the three of us, standing there and staring at the shovel which Mrs. Ricker was still holding as if it were a pancake turner.

"But—what is it?" Danny inquired.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

stock and old issues at impossible prices on the theory that there was no limit to expansion now that the consumers had so much money. And when the money had gone for inflated stock, it wasn't there to buy the goods.

Q. Is the scene of the Boston Tea Party marked? W. O. L.

A. Griffin's wharf on Atlantic and Pearl streets was the scene of the Boston Tea party. The site is marked by a tablet on the wall of a building on the land site. Certain maps of Boston clearly indicate this site which now is some distance from the water.

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### Getting Fun Out of History

But the real sport must be found in getting hold of original stuff, a letter from Cleopatra to Antony, or a sketch map in Wellington's hand of the disposition at Waterloo, done before the G. S. O. I. told him that Quatre-Bras was there, or a chit from the younger Pitt to Joanna Southcott, thanking her for the flowers. The historian who is lucky enough to pick up a morsel like this immediately telephones to his bank manager and arranges for a further overdraft on the strength of the royalties and then proceeds to assimilate the document in the body of his work.—G. K.'s Weekly.

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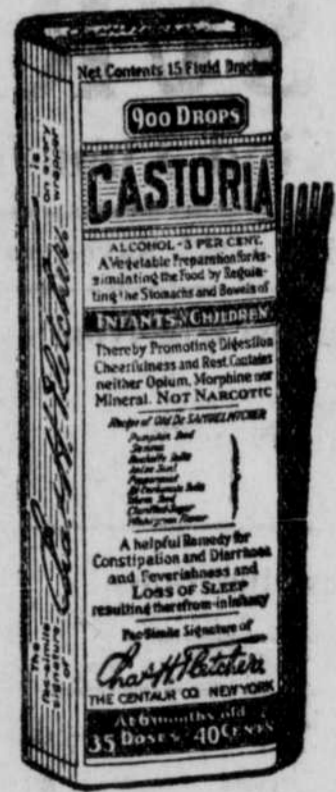
### Remaining on Earth

"Have you ever been up in an airplane?"

"No," answered Senator Sorghum. "An airplane is no good for politics. The pilot takes all the publicity."

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### The Hukom Experts.

From Milwaukee Journal.

Julius E. Barnes, chairman of the board of the United States Chamber of Commerce, tells the Canadian Chamber of Commerce at Toronto that governments are largely to blame for the present world depression. Governments have intervened with tariffs, Mr. Barnes explains, intended to be helpful, but in reality harmful. But he defends our own tariffs, which he disposes to his own satisfaction and doubtless to Canadian amusement, is not aimed at extortion.

We wonder if a good part of world depression and especially of our own

depression is not due to trying to have things both ways. Mr. Barnes would have it that foreign tariffs are hurtful and our own, which is based on exactly the same principle, is defensible. The principle is wrong, but the practice right! Mr. Barnes is talking bunk, of course. He is trying in international economics to play that political trick of saying a thing is wrong in principle, but you have to do it as a matter of expediency.

We have had so much of this kind of humbug that it is not unlikely that the perpetrators do persuade themselves there is something in it. We insist that Europe pay us her

debts, we wish to lend money to other countries, which calls for the return of interest at least; we further wish to sell goods abroad, which must be paid for. Now the world can pay only in gold or in kind. There isn't that much gold in the world. Of what there is we have the lion's share, and don't really want any more. And as for their goods—why, we propose to keep the American market for ourselves. Well, then, how do we get paid?

That is only one instance of having it both ways. Another that was literally all the rage until the break came last fall was to bid for people's spare money for new issues of