

THE DESERT MOON MYSTERY BY KAY CLEAVER STRAHAN

"Because," she went on, still unconcerned, "if it didn't hurt too much, I'd much rather confess to the murders, and get it over, than to keep on living like this. I am going insane. I think that I can't stand another week like this one. Every hour, now, is worse than a quick, painless death. Too, I'm afraid of what I might do, if I go clear mad, with all these horrors in my mind. Though, perhaps, I have already gone mad. Do I seem to you to be insane, right now, Mary?"

"I told her no. But it was a flat lie. At that moment I was certain that everyone on the place was more or less insane, especially Miss MacDonald. I think yet that I was right about the others. I know, now, that I was wrong about Miss MacDonald; but she had certainly given me plenty of reasons for thinking either that she had lost her senses entirely, or else that she had never had any to lose."

Apparently, after Sam had agreed to keep her on the case, she had at once given up all interest in it. She had a short talk with me, and told me that she would no longer need my help, and expressly instructed me to stop watching Danny and the others.

"As far as it is humanly possible," she said, "I want you to go about the business of living as if nothing at all unpleasant, even, had happened. I don't want this to be an appearance. I want it to be a fact."

Then, as if she knew I couldn't follow those fool instructions, and as if she were bound to have them followed at any cost, she began to follow them herself. She got sort of childish about it.

On Tuesday evening she produced a bunch of paper and some pencils. When we had all thought that something important was going to happen, she suggested that we play that old, silly game of "Consequences." And when we one and all had other things to do, she was none too pleasant about it. Said that she was tired of reading, every evening, and that the radio made her nervous. She fussed about, until Danny, feeling as she did, got John and Hubert Hand to make up the four to play Bridge.

All week I could see Sam watching her and growing more and more impatient. On Thursday he said to me that she was too busy flirting with John to have time for anything else. That was not fair. She didn't flirt with John—she wasn't the sort who would flirt with anyone. But she surely did begin to notice him, and his attentions to her. It was not that she treated him too well, in any way. It was, only, that she did not treat him quite according to our standards for the way unengaged girls should treat engaged or married men. Not once did she encourage him to neglect Danny; but after John had neglected her, Miss MacDonald seemed to be, usually, right on the spot, ready, waiting and willing, to be pleasant and friendly to him.

I tried to make excuses for John. Poor little Danny wasn't, I tried to admit, much like the girl he had fallen in love with. She had lost practically all of her prettiness, and she looked, all the time, too white and wan and generally dragged out to seem quite wholesome. Like the rest of us, the strain of fear and suspicion was too much for her; but she was trawler than any of us, so the strain told harder on her.

She had explained to John about the reference to her and to her doll in the code letter. He had taken it all right, and

had been, as she said to me, "sweet" about it, and about never doubting her word at all. Still, I sort of thought that a grain of suspicion might still be bothering him. And I knew that he had not been quite able to forgive her, not for telling of her suspicions concerning Sam, but for suspecting Sam in the first place.

Yes, I could make some excuses for John. But the process of trying not to blame him, personally, resulted in my opinions of men in general being forced down several degrees. As I may have suggested, that took them just about to where the thermometer stops registering.

On Friday morning, when Sam came zigzagging into my kitchen, ordered Zinna out of it, his voice all thick and husky, and fell down into a chair, I did not doubt for a minute that he was dead drunk. I knew that he had not touched a drop of liquor for forty years; but what men could do, men might do, and worse.

"Mary," he said, "we've got the report from the 'Frisco chemists."

CHAPTER LV

The Third Murder

Miss MacDonald had thought it necessary to have Martha's body exhumed and sent to San Francisco. That is what the coroner and the undertaker had been about on their second trip to the ranch. Sam had not wanted any of us to know about it, particularly he had not wanted Mrs. Ricker to know. That had suited Miss MacDonald better, too; so they had had the men do the work while we were all at dinner that day. They had been careful to fix the grave so that it would not show that it had been disturbed; and then, being men, they had left their shovels right here in the cabin for the first person to find. As you know, the first person had been Mrs. Ricker.

We had been waiting ever since for the chemist's report. Sam's looks and actions, now, kept the question from my lips. I thought that the report must have contained some new horror. In a way, it had; but Sam's first words were reassuring.

"It is too good to be true," he said, and repeated, dazedly, "too good to be true. Miss MacDonald had her assistants trace the prescription from Doctor Roe. The powders were harmless. I didn't cause my girl's death. The report proves—Miss MacDonald says—The report proves—"

"Take it easy, Sam. What does the report prove?"

"Somebody gave her a deadly poison. The chemists found two traces. One they can't analyze. That's why they've kept us waiting so long for the report. They are still working on it, hoping for results. The other was nitrobenzene. Miss MacDonald says that, in small doses, induces coma and takes as long as twenty-four hours to act. But it is apt not to be deadly by itself. It was combined with this other drug—the one that must have made death certain."

Miss MacDonald came hurrying into the kitchen. She was holding the monkey charm bracelet in her hand. "See here," she said, "this bangle thing opens. I think we can be certain that the poison she took, or was given, came out of it. There is a trace of the odor. Smell it."

She handed it to me. It smelled a little like shoe polish, with sort of a faint almond flavoring, underneath. I gave it to Sam, who had been reaching out his hand for it. He smelled it, and then knotted it up in his fist.

Remembering, I can't think of anything that he said which

would do to quote. The gist of it was, that if Gaby had given Martha the poison, he was not sorry that Gaby had been killed, because justice had been done. He went on to say that, if she had not given it to Martha purposely, but only carelessly, forgetting its deadliness, he reckoned that things had turned out for the best, as far as Gaby was concerned, anyway. Not satisfied with that, he expressed, violently, his regrets that vengeance had been taken out of his hands.

"It isn't vengeance you want, Mr. Stanley," Miss MacDonald reminded him, pretty sternly, "but justice. That is within our reach. I am practically certain that the person who poisoned Martha, who strangled Miss Canneziano and her father, is right here on this place—"

"Hold on," Sam interrupted. "Considering that this person is a poisoner and a strangler, and that he is around loose and careless, and that we may all be murdered in our beds, or out of 'em, or poisoned at our meals, it seems to me the next move is to telephone to the sheriff, and have him out here in a hurry, with some men—"

"Nothing of the sort," Miss MacDonald snapped at him. "I have told you before, and I tell you again, that as matters stand now I am the only person on the ranch who is in the least danger. I did not say that I was certain. I said that I was practically certain. I can't be certain until I have some proof, some evidence. At present, I have not one scrap of either—"

"Then you can't know who the guilty person is."

"Exactly what I have just said. My work from now on is to get that proof. If you would help me, instead of—"

Sam interrupted, his whole body straining forward with his eagerness. "Tell us who he is, and where he is, and we'll help you, right enough."

"I can't tell you. Not unless you want to have still another murder on the Desert Moon Ranch. But you can help me. First, by keeping the discovery of the poison a secret. Second, by allowing everyone else on the place to suppose that I am still in a state of entire bafflement concerning the crime. Third and most important, perhaps, by having patience with me."

"Ye'a," Sam said, "and while we are sitting around, having patience, this bird will walk off to some green hill far away. I think the boys are doing their best to guard the place, but this bird's a slicker. What's to keep him from, say, dressing in my clothes some night, and riding merrily away on Bobbie Burns or Wishbone? All he'd have to do is to give the boys a high sign and they'd let him ride to hell, if they thought he was me. Another thing—I can't trust all my punches. Some of them are greasers, some half-breeds. Money, and not much of it, talks pretty loud to some of those boys."

"At present, the person I suspect has no intentions of leaving the place."

"When you don't know anything else, how can you know that?"

"I didn't say that I didn't know anything else."

"Do you know, and will you tell me, why you can't put this fellow where the dogs won't bite him, while you are collecting the proof, evidence, and so on that you think you need?"

"For one reason, because I am not a police detective. Sometimes it is necessary to use their methods of arresting each suspect and getting the evidence afterward—third degrees, so on. That method, by the way, accounts for the number of criminals who are able to make complete escapes. It is a stupid, bungling method—and a brutal one. I detest it. I have used it only twice in the seven years that I have been in this work. I used it then because it was necessary. I will not use it

now, because it is not necessary. This case will come to the grand jury complete, with indisputable proofs. If I had known—suspected I mean, before Mr. Canneziano was killed, what I now suspect—She stopped short, evidently afraid of saying too much.

"Ye'a," Sam argued, "but nothing has happened since then. What I can't get, is how you think you are ever going to find the proof—the evidence."

"Well—" she began. "Because," she finished, quite tartly, and walked out of the room.

"'Because,'" Sam mimicked, almost before she was out of hearing distance. "It was a black day for me, and for the Desert Moon, when I put this thing up to a 'because' woman."

I more than half agreed with him, but I was not going to let him know it. "Did you notice," I questioned, chiefly to turn his mind from the subject of "because" women "that she kept saying that she thought the person she suspected was on the place? I mean—she didn't say that he was living in the house."

"House! Hell! Of course she didn't say house. Why should she say house? Haven't we been over and over it? Aren't we fair frazzled out, every last one of us, from climbing up those front and back stairs with our minds, all day long and half the night? Counting minutes, counting seconds, going to the barn and back, over and over. Nobody who lives in this house could have done it. That is settled. That is fact. Not unless some one of us was able to be in two places at the same time between four and five o'clock that day."

Something clicked in my mind. I declare to goodness, I felt the click, plain as a twinge of toothache. It scared me. I put both my hands over the place in the front of my head. I felt as dazed, and as shaken, as if I had been sleep-walking, and had bumped into a door, in the dark, and wakened to find myself in a strange, brightly lighted room.

"No sir-ee," Sam went on, too busy with his own ideas, I suppose, to notice my actions which must have been peculiar, "if the murderer is still on the place, he is skulking around here in hiding. It is that strangler fellow, all right. I'll bet my last dollar on it. For some reason, he is trying to clean out the Canneziano family—all of them I'll bet he told Martha to give the poison to Danny, not knowing what a child Martha was—or, maybe, knowing it. Martha, supposing the poison was candy, or something nice, ate it up herself. I tell you what, I'm going to do some proof hunting, now on my own hook. If I find some stranger hiding out on this place, that will be good enough proof for Sam Stanley, and for any jury in Nevada."

"Of course, Mary, it hasn't been so hard on you—not having to feel the responsibility the way I have. But I've come to the end of my rope. I'm going to use my own head now. I've got to get an expert here, for one thing, to watch and guard over Danny. . . . Say, what's the matter with you, Mary? You look so funny. Do you feel sick, or something?"

"Something," I said, "but at that, I suppose it isn't near as bad as feeling responsibility. If I'd stayed there listening to him for one more minute I'd have burst. I left him, and went running, like the crazy thing I was, up the back stairs to my own room."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

**CONTROLLED BY HAND**  
Berlin—A new plane to appear in Germany is the "Arado" which, it is said, is entirely controlled by hand. Two pilot seats are arranged side by side in the plane. A dual set of controls is provided in the single cockpit and these are all hand-operated, there being none of the regulation foot controls found on planes of today.

Isn't it time that the American business man and worker made use of common sense to check pessimism? There are obstacles to be overcome, but difficulties have been magnified out of all proportion. Unfavorable news has been exaggerated and good news thrust into the background.

**A Painful Request.**  
From Der Brummer, Berlin. Harold (dancing): I wish I were in your shoes. You're such a clever dancer.  
Girl friend: Perhaps so! But I wish you would refrain from attempting to get into them now!

**YOUTH WINS TRIP TO CHICAGO EXPOSITION**  
Walthill, Neb. — (Special) — Rex Barada, son of Mr. and Mrs. J. T. Barada, living in Daves precinct between Rosalie and Decatur has been selected as the best all around 4-H club member in Thurston county for 1930. He was in the pig club this year and was a member of the Progressive Pig club of which Rowland McCleerey is leader. As a reward he gets a free ticket to Chicago to attend the National Boys and Girls Club congress the first week in December. His ticket is donated by the C., St. P., M. and O. railroad. This was his second year in club work. He is an enthusiastic breeder of Hampshire hogs.

METEORS SEEN BY NEBRASKANS

**Members of Norfolk Orchestra Witnessed Unusual Sight in Skies**

Norfolk, Neb. — (Special) — While returning from Spencer, in early morning, Lewis Bishop and his orchestra witnessed a sight of aerial fireworks seldom seen.

They saw about 200 outriders of the Leonid meteors, which are said to visit the earth three times in every 100 years.

The meteors seemed to fall in clusters of five, said Bishop. He also stated that the sky put on a pale green color during the time that the Leonids were putting on their exhibition.

AN OIL FIELD NEAR LINCOLN?

**Oklahoma Drillers to Work in Field Pointed Out by Geologists**

Lincoln, Neb.—(UP)—With geologists confident there is an oil pool beneath the soil of four Lancaster county precincts, south and east of Lincoln, an Oklahoma oil concern, headed by John Simms of Oklahoma City, is leasing thousands of acres of land in that vicinity.

Nearly 4,000 acres of land already has been leased and the George W. Plumb Oil company, also of Oklahoma, is making plans to begin drilling December 1.

According to E. J. Burkett, Lincoln attorney, who is drawing the leases for the various land owners in that locality, between 10,000 and 15,000 acres will be leased within a week. Approximately 40 land owners have leased their land on a basis of one-eighth royalty provided oil is found.

According to the geologists who have been making tests on the land during the last two months, the sand strata in which it is believed oil will be found, lies between Holdrege street, Lincoln, on the north; the south boundaries of Grant and Stockton precincts to the south; Stevens creek to the east, and the west boundary of the Shrine County club grounds and the east limits of Bethany on the west.

NEW BUS LINE BEGINS OPERATIONS

Rushville, Neb. — (Special) — A bus line from Hot Springs, S. D., to Chadron, Neb., and extending east to Merriman and joining the Winner-Hot Springs bus line at Martin, S. D., has been put in operation by a Winner, S. D. company.

DEFENDANT IN DIVORCE ACTION KILLED IN CALIFORNIA

Fremont, Neb. — (Special) — Mrs. Allen Kollmeyer, well known Fremont young woman, was accidentally killed in an automobile accident in Los Angeles, Cal., Friday according to a telegram received by her father, Ed. Ackerman, delivery clerk at the Fremont postoffice.

Mrs. Kollmeyer went to California in August taking her 5-year-old son, Jean, with her.

Last week an action for divorce was started by her husband, who is representative in Nebraska territory of a rubber tire concern. The petition charged desertion.

Two sisters of Mrs. Kollmeyer, who was formerly Lillian Ackerman, reside in California.

BUT FEW PRAIRIE CHICKENS EXCEPT ON PRESERVES

O'Neill, Neb.—It will be impossible to wipe out prairie chickens in Holt county, where private game reserves are numerous, but in sections thinly settled and open to hunting, the bird practically is a thing of the past, according to veteran sportsmen.

The result of both chicken and grouse hatches in the last season have been encouraging in some quarters and disappointing in others. Chicken cholera, a disease that killed many prairie chickens last year, failed to appear this year. The prairie fairs have been few. The Waltonians have asked the state game commission for a two-year closed season. Additional refuge protection expected is said to guarantee the survival of the bird.

ADDITION COSTING \$145,000 FOR NORFOLK HOSPITAL

Norfolk, Neb. — (Special) — According to Postmaster H. L. Wichman, Norfolk is to have a new addition on the postoffice.

The rearranged plans call for a three-story addition extending northward from the present structure. It is expected that about \$145,000 will be expended on the new structure. The addition will be about 35 by 75 feet in size.

Construction on the project will probably start early in the spring.

STATE HAS NO RIGHT IN CASE

**Dismisses Action to Secure Possession of Wayne County Estate**

Lincoln, Neb. — (Special) — The state has dismissed its motion in the county court of Wayne county to reopen the will of Steven Nichols, which already has been probated, in order that the estate, which is estimated at \$100,000, escheat to the state in the absence of heirs.

The state alleged undue influence was exercised and that Nichols was incompetent at the time the will was made, but a special investigation conducted by the assistant attorney general revealed that Nichols was of sound mind until his last illness and that there was no evidence to sustain the motion.

They will give \$1,000 each to three churches and a lodge at Wayne, \$500 to Samuel Barley, \$2,000 to an osteopath, Dr. T. T. Jones, who cared for Nichols in his last illness, 80 acres of land to George Fox, a tenant.

The remainder of the estate was to be divided share and share alike among three of Nichols' friends, Rollie W. Ley and Herman Lundberg who had looked after Nichols' business interests for a number of years, and O. S. Roberts, with whom he made his home for the last 15 years.

ASK \$900,000 MORE IN CASH

**Regents of Nebraska University Make Demands Known to Governor**

Lincoln, Neb.—(UP)—An increase in appropriations for the University of Nebraska during the next biennium of \$900,000 was requested to Gov. Arthur Weaver by the board of regents of the university, it was made known Monday.

The recommended appropriations from the state general fund and for capital improvements for 1931 and 1933 show a grand total of \$5,752,000 as against \$4,852,000 appropriated by the last legislature.

In the statement accompanying the itemized list of requested appropriations, it is pointed out that the university, under the proposed appropriations, would receive 75 cents of each \$1,000 assessed valuation or would require a levy of .75 of one mill. The last legislature allocated .68 of a mill for the university for 1929 to 1930 and .71 of a mill for the second half of the biennium.

The requested appropriation calls for an increase of \$465,000 in the maintenance budget of the university and an increase of \$435,000 for capital improvements.

The latter sum would enable the university to begin a building program which will extend over a period of years, the university regents point out, and would permit progress at a rate that would complete a definite program within the next 10 years.

FARM PRODUCE FOR TELEPHONE SERVICE

Lincoln, Neb.—Farm produce is being taken in exchange for telephone service, Ole Christenson, owner of the Wolbach Telephone company, told Railway Commissioner Hugh Drake, who went to Wolbach to investigate complaints of poor service. Christenson said the service was not good but he could not collect his accounts because patrons won't pay until he improves the service and he cannot improve it until he collects what is due, about \$2,500.

Christenson has had to take corn, potatoes, chickens and even a goat in satisfaction for bills, he said. The other day a lineman came in with 10 bottles of catsup for a bill. It was divided among the force.

Later it was found to be all spoiled. "However, it was not a total loss," said Christenson, "we still have the 10 empty bottles."

The company was badly hit a few years ago when it had to pay \$6,000 damages to a man injured by a company truck. It was without liability insurance.

OPINION SAYS BINGO IS UNLAWFUL GAME

Lincoln, Neb.—Bingo is an unlawful game in Nebraska, Attorney General C. A. Sorensen told T. A. Grimes, of Erickson, who inquired as to its legality. He proposed Bingo to be used at a high school carnival.

Sorensen also has given an opinion to Minor F. Daird, of Superior, that it is lawful for a school board to have a schoolhouse insured in a mutual company if the articles provides in its approved articles that such company may write that kind of insurance. In Nebraska a mutual insurance company is not an assessment company.

LIGHTED MATCH SHOWED GAS BARREL WAS LEAKING

Pender, Neb.—(Special)—Saturday evening the son of Joe Marksmeyer, living five miles southeast of Pender, thought the barrel of gasoline was leaking. So he lighted a match to find out. It leaked. Now the young man has to be taken to the doctor each day to have his leg treated. More than 3,000 bushels of corn, 1,000 bushels of oats and a few pieces of farm machinery burned. There was little insurance on the grain.

**Time to Buy.**  
From Christian Science Monitor. American savings banks are showing increased deposits, co-operative banks have greater amounts to lend prospective home owners than in years, commercial banks were never better supplied with funds to foster business demand, large corporations in general are rich in cash, insurance sales have been breaking records and the Federal Reserve System is in a position to advance tremendous credits to member institutions.  
Yet in the face of a steadily rising tide of surplus money in the nation, department store sales are

slow, freight car loadings are below normal, earnings of most industrial corporations are smaller and the stock market has been receding more or less steadily since the middle of April. The nonstatistical person is moved to ask, "Why? Is not the United States as rich in material possessions as a year ago or two years ago?"  
The answer to the question, "What is wrong with business?" can probably be given by the veriest tyro fully as well as by the recondite economist. There can hardly be any dispute that the answer is: Fear. Industrialists and manufacturers are afraid of not being able to dis-

pose of their products at a profit to wholesalers or retailers, who in turn are afraid that people will not buy goods on the counters. And what are workers afraid of? Only that their pay envelopes may become thinner or their jobs be rendered precarious. So, they pare their purchases to the bone. This slows up operations all around, and thus the "vicious circle" to which statisticians are so fond of referring is started.  
It would seem that the business community is picturing its present status and prospects as falsely dark as they were absurdly brilliant in the boom days of last year. Sentiment makes or unmakes business.