

THE DESERT MOON MYSTERY

BY KAY CLEAVER STRAHAN

That may be true, and it may not. Canneziano had a good education; he talked poetry, and played the violin. Margarita heard him playing, down in the outfit's quarters one day and had Sam invite him up to the house to play. She accompanied him on the grand piano that Sam had bought for her.

Before long, Dan Canneziano was spending a good part of his time at the ranch-house, Sam, being nobody's fool, soon saw how the land lay; but he, according to his custom then and now, kept his mouth shut and his eyes open. Sure enough, one evening they tried to elope together. Sam went after them and brought them back. I remember, yet, how the three of them looked, coming into the house that night.

Margarita, her head high, defiant, but pretty as a fire's flame. Canneziano, slinking in at her heels, like a whipped cur, expecting worse; and Sam, following behind them, calm as cold turkey. The three of them had about half an hour's talk together. Then Sam herded Canneziano down to the outfit's quarters and, I suppose, told the men to keep him there, for there he stayed until Sam was ready for him again.

The next morning Sam started to the court seat. He reached there that evening. The following morning he got his divorce. He came back to the Desert Moon on the third morning, with his divorce and with the preacher. He sent for Canneziano, and stood by, while the preacher married Margarita Stanley to Daniel Canneziano, decent and regular, according to the laws of Nevada.

There it should have ended. It didn't, because Sam never got over loving Margarita. I don't hold that to his credit. I see no more virtue in keeping on loving a person who has proved unworthy of being loved, than I see in hating a person who has turned out to be blameless, or in continuing to do any other unreasonable thing.

At any rate, Sam did it so when, nine years later, she came back to the Desert Moon, with twin girls, Danielle and Gabrielle, and said that Canneziano had deserted her and the children Sam took them all right in. I don't know, yet whether or not they took him in.

Certainly he did not show much surprise when, in about ten days, Canneziano put in an appearance. Sam allowed him to get a good start with his threats, and then he took him across his knees and gave him a sound spanking, and passed him over to Margarita to dry his tears, and washed his own hands and went fishing.

That evening he had one of the men hitch up and take the whole kit and caboodle of Cannezianos to Raltail in time to catch the east-bound train. I am ashamed to say that Sam gave them money. I don't know how much. I shouldn't be surprised if it was more than they had expected to get from their blackmailing scheme. A tidy sum, I'll be bound, for shortly after we heard that Canneziano had opened the finest gambling house south of the Mason and Dixon line, in New Orleans.

Sam wanted to keep the children. He offered to adopt them. Margarita would not consider it. But, several times after that, pale yellow perfumed letters came to the Desert Moon, and Sam answered those letters with a check. Me, he answered, each time, with, "It is for the little

girls, Mary. I can't let little girls go needling."

When Margarita died, in France, seven years after she had paid us her blackmailing visit, Sam, the nifty, wrote to Canneziano and again offered to adopt the girls and give them a good home on the Desert Moon. He got a few insulting, insinuating lines for an answer. Canneziano had his own plans for his daughters, who had developed into rare beauties. He would thank Sam to keep his hands off, mind his own business, and so forth.

It would have made a milder man than Sam Stanley fighting mad. Sam went around all that day, swearing to me that he was through; that he had made his last offer of help to the Canneziano family, had sent his last contribution. I know for certain, though, that he sent five hundred dollars to Gabrielle, after that, in answer to a letter she wrote to him. But, if Sam was soft with the women, he was not soft with Canneziano. He had showed up here, beaming and broke, about three years ago. He had left, suddenly, after having seen Sam and no one else, less beaming but quite as broke as he had been when he had come. I thought maybe, Sam was forgetting that side of the family, and that this might be a good time to remind him.

"Is Canneziano planning to come on later, too, and rest?" I asked.

"Just at present he is in San Quentin, serving a three years' term. Danielle didn't say for what devilry. His term's up this summer. That is another reason the girls want to come here. Somewhere safe from his persecutions, I think the letter said. Poor little girls," Sam went on, "I reckon we haven't any idea of what they've been through, all these years."

"I reckon not," I agreed. "But they aren't little girls any more. Seems queer to me, with all the beauty their father was bragging about, that neither of them has married. Twenty-four is getting along."

"I'll bet," Sam answered, "it is because they have never had any decent opportunities. You know how pretty they were as little girls, and how good—"

"Danielle was good enough," I said. "Gabrielle was a holy terror."

Sam let that pass. "Considering," he continued, "a life that they've had to lead, and all, I think it speaks pretty well for them that they have come through straight and clean."

Instead of asking him how he knew that, I said, "You'd be willing, then, to have John marry one of them?"

John, Sam's adopted son, was the apple of Sam's eye. He would have the ranch, and Sam fortune, other dependents provided for, when Sam died. Whether or not the girl he married would be contented to live on the ranch, and help John carry it on and keep up its traditions, making it one of the proudest spots in Nevada, was a mighty important thing to Sam.

He waited so long before answering my question that I was sure I had hit the nail on the head. "John," he finally said, "is old enough to take care of himself."

With that he turned and went out of my kitchen, not giving me a chance to say that, though I had lived through fifty-six years, I had never yet seen a man at the age he had just mentioned. I did not care. I felt too vimless for even a spat with Sam. I knew that if

rangers tried constantly and unsuccessfully to kill Two Toes. Recently he and his pack killed 14 goats in one day. Describing this as murder, Sheriff E. L. Cooper and Deputy Prosecuting Attorney James Robertson of Cross county, Ark., called for the best hounds in the state and a posse of hunters. They found the pack at dawn, separated Two Toes from his followers, cornered him at noon. Tired, fiery-eyed, froth-mouthed and snarling, he made his last stand in the hollow of the fallen tree which was taken to Memphis

these Canneziano girls came to the Desert Moon, they would bring trouble with them. I was right. A merciful Providence be thanked for that, for a time at least, the knowledge of how terribly right I was, was spared me.

CHAPTER II JOHN AND MARTHA

I am not an admirer of men. Looking at most any man, I find myself thinking what a pity it was he had to grow up, since as a little, helpless child he would have made a complete success.

Sam Stanley is different. There is some of the child left in Sam, just as there is, I think, in any good man or woman—a little seasoning of simplicity, really, is all it amounts to—but there is a quality about Sam that makes a person feel that he set out, early in life, to follow the recipe for being a man, and that he has made a thorough job of it. Physically, alone, Sam would make about three of most men, with plenty left over for gravy. But it is not that. It is the something that makes him stroll up, unarmed, to a cowpuncher who is bragging wild with moonshine and clinking with firearms, and say, in that drawing, gentle voice of his, "What's the trouble here, son?" And the something that makes that cowpuncher get polite first, and evaporate immediately after. And Sam whiteheaded, now, at that.

Why he, as a young man, with a pretty fair education and a tidy sum of money left him by his father, who had been a well thought of lawyer in Massachusetts, should come out here to Nevada, take up his homestead land, and settle content for the rest of his life, has always been more or less of a mystery to me. I will warn you, though, that it is a mystery that doesn't get solved in this story, unless you care to take Sam's explanation of it.

He says that, when his father died, it left him without a relative, whom he knew of, in the world. He was twenty years old, and he owned a set of roving toes and an imagination. So he went to California, seeking romance and gold. Finding neither, he took a small boat named Indiana, and went up to Oregon, where he joined a friend of his, named Tom Cone, who had a place on the Columbia River near Rooster Rock.

One day Sam was out in the woods—he said there was nothing to be out in except woods or rain in Oregon in those days—and he heard a noise behind a thicket. He thought Tom, who lived for practical jokes, was getting ready to pull one. So Sam crept up to the thicket, stooping low and making no noise, and shouted "Boo!" at the biggest bear he had ever seen in his life. Sam says he has forgotten what the bear said. He decided, then and there, that the Oregon forests were no place for a man with no more sense than he had; he left them, and came down here to Nevada.

"No forests, no fences, no folks, and a free view for ten thousand miles," is the way Sam puts it, "so, I stayed. It was the first place I'd ever found where I didn't feel hampered for room."

He staked out his hundred and sixty acres with Boulder Creek tumbling and roaring through them. He built his cabin, out of railroad ties, in a grove of quaking aspen trees. He hired help, and built fences, and dug ditches, and planted crops, and bought stock. He bought more land. He hired more help, dug more ditches, planted bigger crops, bought more stock. He has been doing that, regularly, ever since. And of course, he located the lead and silver mine, on his property, that made him millions, if it made him a cent, before it played out. But, in spite of the money that "Old Lady Luck," as he called his mine, made for him, Sam never gave his heart to it. It was the Desert Moon Ranch that he

loved, and the money he made from it that he was proud of. That was why, when the honor of the ranch went under, during those terrible weeks last summer, Sam all but went under with it.

After Margarita left the place from her visit of 1909, taking the twins with her, Sam went around for a week or two, with his head cocked to one side as if he was listening for something. I knew what he was missing, and I was not surprised when, one day, he told me he had decided to send to San Francisco and get a couple of children and adopt them.

He wrote to a big hospital in San Francisco and got in touch with a trained nurse who would be willing to come up and live on the ranch and take care of the two children. He had her go to an orphan's home and select the children and bring them with her when she came. Sam's specifications concerning them were that they were to be a boy and a girl, under ten and over five years old, healthy, American, and brown-eyed, (Sam's own eyes are the color of ball-blue, giving his face, with his red cheeks, and his white beard, the patriotic effect I have mentioned.)

The nurse came early in September with the two brown-eyed children, named Vera and Alvin. Sam at once renamed them. John, he said, was the only name for a boy, and Mary the only name for a girl. But, since my name was Mary, he would let the little girl have Martha, which meant, according to Sam, "Boss of the Ranch."

The nurse's name was Mrs. Ollie Ricker. If you can imagine a blue-eyed, pink-checked, yellow-haired bisque doll, turned old, you will have a good idea of her appearance at that time. I don't know how old she was then. I don't know old she is now. Younger by many years than I am, I am sure; and yet she has always seemed old to me; old with the sudden but inevitable oldness of a wrecked ship, or a burned-down house, or a felled tree, that makes a body forget that a year ago, or perhaps only yesterday, it was a fresh, new thing. She never talked. I do not mean that she never chattered, or gossiped. I mean that she never said one word, not "Good-morning," nor "Good-night," nor "If you please," nor "Thank you," if she could possibly avoid it. At the end of sixteen years of daily association with Mrs. Ricker, that is, up to the time of the second murder on the Desert Moon, I knew exactly as much about her past life as you know at this minute.

John, at that time, was nine years old. He was as bright, and as upstanding, and as handsome, as any little fellow to be found anywhere; bashful at first, but ready and glad to be friendly, with an uplifting smile that wrinkled his short nose and that would wheedle a cooky out of a pickle jar. I may as well say, now, that this description of John, at nine years old, is as good a description as I can give of John at twenty-five, if you will draw his height up to six feet, and put on weight accordingly.

Martha, when she came to us, was a frail, white-faced mite, with enormous brown eyes that looked as if they had been removed from a jersey heifer and set in her white face. The papers from the orphanage gave her age as five years; but even I, who knew less about children than it was decent for any woman to know, soon saw that something was wrong. She walked well enough, but she could scarcely talk at all. Her ways and her habits were those of a two-year-old infant, yet she was far too large for that age. Before she had been with us a week I knew that Martha was not quite right in her mind.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

WHAT NEXT? The spotlight's turned again today, On Mistress Bossy Cow; The center of the stage she holds In Calif. & now.

A milk inspector there declares In no uncertain terms, The tuft of hair between her horns Is breeding place for germs.

He vows these pests—though by what route He gives us no detail— Full many a time and oft descend Into the foaming pail.

So Bossy to a barber hies, And he gets on the job, To change her former "wind blown" style, To nifty "boyish bob." —Sam Page

Letting the People Know From New York Times

Scowls greeted Representative Garner, of Texas, when he returned to the tariff conference room after having told his House colleagues everything that happened there. But the applause on the floor which greeted his promise to keep the House posted on the activities of the conferees will be echoed around the country. Mr. Garner is breaking precedents, and making a little mischief, which as a democrat he is probably willing to do. But his reportorial activities provide assurance that conference tariff deals will be made pretty much in the open. Heretofore such discussions have been mass producers of compromise and log rolling. Every one knew what was going on, but by the time the conferees had agreed and brought reports back to their respective houses it was too late to do anything about many of the schedules. Now members of both bodies are to be given the time and the opportunity to organize in favor of certain positions on particular rates. In his bland explanation of the deadlock over the casein rate, Mr. Garner had a very particular object. It is his contention and that of many other representatives from agricultural districts that the Senate duty of 5½ cents a pound benefits the farmers, while the House rate of 2½ cents a pound has the Massachusetts paper manufacturers in mind. Here is marked one of the clear issues in congress over the pending tariff bill. The special sessions and regional interests can be served under the Garner method. And it is also possible that the daily warring which the Texan proposes to give will result in compromises more in the agricultural interests. As a matter of fact, what Mr. Garner told the open House has always been whispered about both chambers after conference sessions. The leaders always know what has happened; they pass the news on to other members and to some newspaper men. But heretofore the information has not been official. Tariff covenants have not been openly arrived at, and many negotiators are inclined to believe that no covenants can be made in the limelight.

When "Pep" Is Silly.

From Milwaukee Journal. Nothing that people love and reverence does not have rough hands laid upon it by some. But it is strange and incomprehensible to a professor of philosophy in a Christian college proposing to turn the Twenty-third psalm into "modern" terms. No words in the language are dearer to people's hearts than the psalm which begins: "The Lord is my shepherd; I need not want." They are part of the earliest education of every child who has any knowledge at all of the Bible. But Prof. Holmes of Swarthmore thinks them meaningless to the modern city dweller. He would change them to: "The Lord is my automobile's low gear to help me in climbing hard hills. 'The Lord is my antiseptic in times of dangerous epidemics.' We cannot quote it all. It is too cheap, unutterably cheap and meaningless. And from a college professor! The veriest school child in the grades would know better than this; for he would miss the beauty of the rhythm. And he learned what a shepherd was long before he heard of antiseptics. The veriest slogan-loving Babbitt would know enough not to lay hands on words that have brought comfort to millions of hearts, that have led men to look up to a loving God with new courage for life's trials, and have given hope to the dying."

PERILS OF YOUTH.

Unwind a film of long ago— Across your vision passes A flash of mother, bearing cup Of sulphur and molasses.

The kids are lined up, all a-squirm, At midnight and noon. While mother steps before each one And hoists the fatal spoon.

Then down each anguished throat descends— For blood, in spring, needs thinning. A nauseous mess that fairly jolts Each youngster's underpinning.

The modern youth treads warily Mid poison booze and gasses; But they're longer run-a-foul Of sulphur and molasses. —Sam Page

Fifty-Fifty

From The Humorist. John—I do hate having a half-brother. Mother—You haven't any half-brother. John—Well, what's Eric? I always give him half my apple, half my candy, half my clothes, half my bath, and now he's gone and taken half my measles.

Graft Makes Living Costly.

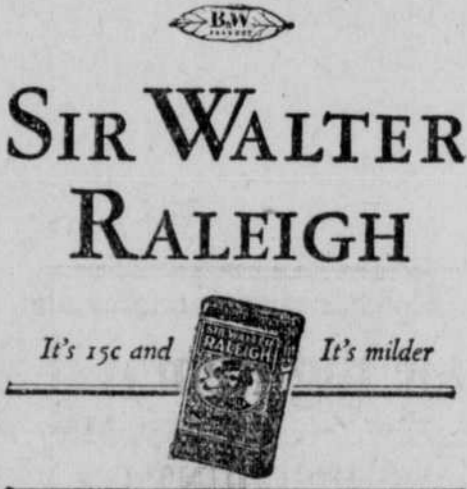
From Nebraska State Journal. The Kansas City Star has dug deep enough into underworld sources of information to announce that racketeers placed a tax on business in that city last year of a million dollars. Racketeering is spreading. It is common in New York, Chicago and Philadelphia, but the cities less in size than these have been comparatively free of this evil in the past. Every city should be alert to the first indication of invasion of this lawless tax on legitimate business which the consumer in the end must pay. The cost of living may be lowered by absolute removal of such forms of graft.

Don't wait until your last friend deserts you—



LET Sir Walter Raleigh mel-low down that powerful pipe of yours! Sir Walter will do it. It's a particularly mild and mellow mixture of excellent tobaccos. And the tobacco is wrapped in heavy gold foil to keep it fresh and fragrant to the last pipeful in the tin.

TUNE IN ON "The Raleigh Revue" every Friday, 10:00 to 11:00 p. m. (New York Time) over the WEAF coast-to-coast network of N. E. C.



Auto Tires in Color The craze for color has taken the form of a demand for automobile tires to match the car. In Great Britain and on the continent automobile manufacturers are offering vehicles on which the tires match the body of the car perfectly. The claim is made that the tires thus treated with the special material designed for the purpose are preserved and therefore last much longer, but the principal object is the harmonious color effect.



Light Visible at 100 Miles A beacon light of such size and strength that it will be visible for 100 miles is to be erected on the Winnipeg shore of the Hudson Bay company as an aid to aerial night travel. The light, 200 feet high, will be the largest airway beacon in Canada. It will have 20 per cent greater intensity than the beacon tower at Croydon, England.

