

THE DESERT MOON MYSTERY

BY KAY CLEAVER STRAHAN

I thought, then, that her situation was comfortable compared to mine. If you have never been packed in a box with a lot of explosives, as I hope you have not you can have no notion of what I went through. I could have climbed out. But, if you are an elderly woman, of my size and build, as I hope you are not, and if you have a certain reputation for dignity to live up to, and a certain reputation for sniping to live down, you can have an idea why I didn't ease springing out of there, like a jack-in-the-box, or like the immoral ladies who emerge from pies—so the papers say—at bachelor's parties. I weighed the matter carefully, as I heard, through the thin boards, Hubert Hand, talking to someone, come into the kitchen. I chose death by suffocation or combustion.

"My dear woman," were the first words I heard from him, "you may set your mind at rest. I am not going to marry the girl. I am not a marrying man, as you know; and, if I were, she wouldn't have me."

"You leave her alone, then. Understand me. Leave her alone."

If I believed my ears, that was Mrs. Ricker's voice; that was Mrs. Ricker, not only talking, but talking like that to Hubert Hand.

"You faster me," he said. "Jealous, still, after all these years?"

"I despise you. But you leave that girl alone. If you think I'll stand, silent, and allow you to marry her—"

"Hire a hall. I told you I wouldn't marry her, and that she wouldn't have me, if I were willing to."

"Wouldn't she, though? Wouldn't she? She is mad about you. She can't look at you without love in her eyes, nor speak to you without love in her voice. She tries to hide it; but she can't hide it from me. I know. She loves you."

I am not sure whether I read it or whether I figured it out for myself; but I do know it is a fact that no woman ever accuses another woman of being in love with a man unless she could imagine being in love with him herself.

"As to that," Hubert Hand said, in that preeny, offhand manner that men, who will discuss their love affairs at all, use when discussing them. "What possible difference could it make to you, Ollie?"

"Only that I would kill her, and you, too, before I would let her have you."

"Easy on there, my girl. Your last attempt at murder—at least I hope that was your last attempt—was not, you may recall, very successful."

"I would be successful another time."

I clamped my teeth to keep them from chattering. I wished that I had some way as easy for muffling the sound made by the pounding of my heart, which was thudding away as loudly as a butter churn in rapid action. Except for that I kept quiet; very quiet. Surrounded, in there by quiet. Surrounded, in there by people who talked of murder as calmly and as comfortably as if they were discussing moss-roses, very quiet did not seem half quiet enough.

They went into the other room of the cabin and stayed there for a few minutes. I could not hear what they were saying, but I did not budge an inch. After I heard them passing the window, and was sure that they had left the cabin, I remained, very quiet, in the chest for about five minutes longer before climbing out of it.

home, shivering in every bone, limping, since both my legs had gone to sleep, when Sam, riding his bad tempered bronco named Wishbone, came up behind me and dismounted.

"Corns bad Mary?" he questioned. "Must be going to have rain."

"Keep water in the ditches. Both my feet are asleep, from the ankles up."

"Upon my soul! First time in history you ever sat still in one place long enough to have that happen. Well, well. 'Do the thing that's nearest.' Want to climb on Wishbone and have me lead him?"

"When I go to meet death," I told him, "I shan't go on the back of a nasty tempered bronco."

"Speaking of tempers," Sam grinned, "a person would think I had sung your feet to sleep, Mary."

"Considering," I replied, "that everyone on the Desert Moon is, right now, at this minute, in mortal danger of their lives, all your light-hearted jesting seems pretty much out of place."

I told him, then, about the packages of explosives hidden under the shelf. I had not told him about my climbing in with them; so I was in no way prepared for his actions. He stopped. He dropped Wishbone's bridle. He put both his hands on his stomach and leaned over and burst into uproarious laughter.

"Ho-ho-ho," it rolled out seeming to fill the entire valley. He leaned to one side; he leaned to the other side, and kept on laughing to deafen the far distant deserts.

"Fireworks," he gasped. "I got them for Martha. Going to surprise her on the fourth. Sent for them months ago. Hid them up there. Ho-ho-ho! I told you to stop pussy-footing around. Mary Ho-ho-ho! Do not look for wrong and evil, you will find them if you do."

With as much dignity as a heavy woman, with both of her legs asleep, could muster, I turned and left him. His words and his actions had certainly given me one decision. From this time on, I would tell Sam Stanley nothing.

CHAPTER XI

The Letter

When I got back to the house, John was driving up the road in the sedan. He had been to Rattail for supplies and for the mail. He tossed the mailbag out to me, and drove around to the kitchen door to unload.

As a rule the Desert Moon mail is uninteresting, being made up, almost entirely, of bills and advertising matter. Since the girls had come, a few sleazy, foreign looking letters had livened it up a bit. To a person who had never been farther east than Salt Lake City, a letter from England, or from France, does carry quite a thrill with it. There was a letter for Gaby today, postmarked France.

About a month before this, Gaby had received another letter that was a duplicate of this one; the same gray paper, the same sprawling handwriting. Instead of taking it indifferently, as she did other letters, and reading it wherever she happened to be, she had snatched it out of my hand and had run off to her room. All that evening she had seemed to be preoccupied, and worried. The writing looked like a man's writing; but, like a lot of other things, including cigarette smoke, hip pockets and hair cuts, it is not as easy as it used to be to distinguish between male and female handwriting, at a distance. Sending only two letters in

close to two months, it seemed to me that whoever had written them did not write unless he or she had something of importance to say. I was still puzzling over it, when Gaby came into the room.

Sure enough, she snatched it out of my hands, just as she had done with the other letter, and ran straight upstairs with it.

When John and Dany came in, a few minutes later, I went upstairs. Habit stopped me at Gaby's door for a minute, with my ear to the keyhole. Faintly sounds don't come plainly through our thick doors, I heard the portable typewriter that she had brought with her when she came to the ranch, click, clicking away.

My first judgement was that she was not losing any time in answering that letter; but, as I went down the hall, I had a hazy notion that there had been something queer, different, about the way she had been using the machine. Instead of snapping away on it, lickety-split, as she usually did, she had been touching the keys slowly and carefully, picking them out one at a time, the way I have to do when I try to use Sam's plaguey machine to copy recipes for my card catalog.

I was tuckered and tired. So, after telephoning some instructions to Belle and Sadie in the kitchen, I took plenty of time to tidy myself up. I dawked in my bath, and I cut my corns, and rubbed hair tonic into my scalp. But, when on my way downstairs again, I stopped for a second at Gaby's door, the typewriter was still going, with its slow click, click. There was nothing to be made out of it, so I went along. It was fortunate that I did, because, before I had reached the top of the stairway, Gaby's door flung open and she called to me, with something in her voice that made me shake in my shoes.

I turned and looked at her. Her face wore an expression that was not human; an expression that would have made any decent woman do as I did, and turn her eyes quickly away.

"Tell Danny to come up here," she said.

I hurried off downstairs, and delivered the message to Danny who was with John in the living-room.

"What's the matter, Mary?" John questioned, when Danny had gone upstairs. "You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"I think," I answered, "that I have—the ghost of Sin."

"Doggone that girl," he said. "I wish she were in Jericho." "Gaby, you mean?"

"You're darn right. She's causing all the trouble around here."

"What trouble" I asked, just for a feeler.

"I don't know—exactly. She keeps Danny miserable. But that isn't it, or not all of it. Don't you seem to feel trouble around here, all the time? I thought everyone did. I do, Gosh knows."

"I know," I said. "I feel it, too. I think Sam does, though he won't altogether admit it. Just the same, John, there isn't a thing we can put our fingers on, is there?"

He walked to the window and looked out at the long range of Garnet Mountains, turning blood-red, now under the sunset.

"I suppose not," he said, at last. "Sometimes, though, when I see Danny looking as she looked when she went upstairs just now, I feel as if it would be a good thing if somebody would put their fingers around that vixen's throat."

was murdered; choked to death, with great brutal bruises left on her throat.

CHAPTER XII

An Insight

In spite of all my efforts not to do so, I have, again run on ahead of my story. But, I declare to Goodness, the horror of it, after all these months is still so strong upon me, that I know the only way to get that written is to write it with no more dilly-dally, and then to go back and lead up to it properly with the events that immediately preceded it.

That evening, then, the second of July, the two girls came down, late, together. Danny was paler than usual, and her face had a drawn, hurt look, which she explained by saying that she had a severe headache. Gaby was gayer than gay.

I kept watching her, crying to catch her face in repose, to see if any trace remained of that dreadful expression I had seen in the afternoon. Her face, nor one bit of her, was in repose for a minute from the time she came downstairs until she went upstairs again, after twelve o'clock that night.

She put "La Paloma" on the phonograph, and did a Spanish dance, clicking her heels and snapping her fingers until they sounded like fire-crackers. She did an Egyptian dance, slinking about, and contorting. It wasn't decent. She got the whole crowd, including the girls from the kitchen (who had stayed to gape through the door at her dancing, instead of going home as they should have gone), and excluding only Danny, with her headache, Mrs. Ricker and me, to join in a game of follow the leader, and she led them a wild chase all over the house from a lar to attic. Laughing, and jumping, and screaming, and shouting they went, with the radio shrieking out the jazz orchestra in Los Angeles; and me with depression so heavy upon me that it felt real, like indigestion.

Mrs. Ricker was doing some tating. As I watched her, I decided that, ears or no ears, she was pot the woman I had heard talking, that afternoon, up in the cabin. Hubert Hand had said to that woman that she could not have been Mrs. Ricker; not our Mrs. Ricker, the thin, silent woman who had lived so decently with us for so long. Those white, bony fingers, darting the shuttle back and forth, making edgings for handkerchiefs, had never held any murderous weapon. Those tight, wrinkled lips had never said, "I would kill her, and you too." John had never said—I shivered. It was fanciful thinking, but it seemed to me that for years the Desert Moon had ridden in our sky, clean and clear, a lucky, fair weather moon, and that now the shadow of the wicked world was slowly creeping over it, inch by inch with the darkness that was to end in its eclipse. Wicked thoughts and wicked words breed wicked actions, and I knew it then as now.

Martha came crying to Mrs. Ricker. "Gaby hurt Chad," she said. "I wish she would die. We would make her a nice funeral."

Mrs. Ricker's fingers darted faster, back and forth.

Danny spoke, from the davenport. "You shouldn't talk like that, Martha, dear. It is wrong."

Her voice sounded as if it ached. She looked, lying in a huddle over there, as miserable as I felt. I was drawn to her. I went and sat beside her.

"Could I do anything for your headache?" I asked. "Get you some aspirin, maybe."

"No, thank you, Mary." There was so much gratitude in her big dark eyes for nothing but common decency on my part, that I felt downright ashamed of myself.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

OF INTEREST TO FARMERS

CONSERVING HARNESS

The cost of good heavy work harness has now become an important factor in the cost of a team, and it is important that the farmer use good judgment in the selection and upkeep of this part of his equipment. We can give no practical rules by which the average man can tell the difference between good and poor quality harness, and about all we can do is to buy only from established and responsible firms, whose advertisements are carried by the better farm papers that guarantee their advertisers to be reliable, or who sell through responsible dealers who in turn will guarantee the harness. An important point in buying harness is to make sure that it is heavy enough for the work after it has seen three or four years' service. There are certain relations between the weight of a horse and the weight of the harness he should wear. The difference in price between harness with 1 1/2-inch and 2-inch tugs and 1-inch and 1 1/4-inch lines is usually not more than \$3 or \$6, and the heavier harness usually will give enough longer life to more than make up the small difference in the first cost. The care of the harness has much to do with the service it gives, and whether it will dry out and rot in four or five years or stay strong and flexible for perhaps 20 years. A new harness ordinarily does not need oiling before being put into service. Harness teaming use will stand a light application every month or so, while all farm harness should be thoroughly cleaned and oiled preferably twice a year. Oiling not only keeps the leather soft and pliable, but also helps to keep water from soaking in. Every spring before farm work begins, the harness should be taken apart, loose dirt cleaned off, washed thoroughly with warm water and mild soap, hung up until the surface is barely dry, thoroughly oiled with good harness oil, allowed to dry in a farm room, and all excess oil wiped off. It should then be gone over carefully and all rips and breaks sewed with good waxed thread, and all worn or broken rings, snaps, buckles, hasps, rivets and so on repaired or replaced. It is then ready to put together for another year's service. Harness so cared for is always ready, barring accidents, to stand up under severe service and not give way at a critical time when some unusual strain is put upon it. Harness and leather experts generally advise that only animal or vegetable oils should be used on harness, and are of the opinion that petroleum oils are likely to do more harm than good. The old standbys were whale oil and cod oil; but now they usually recommend neat's-foot oil for neat's-foot oil and tall-oil melted together and applied warm but not hot. A good harness oil bought from a reliable firm is safe and usually just as cheap. Experience seems to indicate that salt sprinkled round on the barn timbers where the harness is hung is effective in keeping mice and rats from gnawing the harness, while pine tar smeared on the posts close to the tar also seems to be a good preventive. A good collar is an important part of the harness and deserves much better care than it usually receives. It should be carefully selected to fit the horse's neck and shoulders without interfering in any way with his breathing, should be kept scrupulously clean of any deposits or roughness which might have a tendency to chafe the shoulders, should be oiled even oftener than the rest of the harness, and should be kept well laced and evenly padded. Many collars are ruined by carelessness in pulling them apart to slip on more easily.

BENEFITS OF DRILLING

Drilling corn offers some distinct advantages over checking the crop, in ease of handling and lowering the cost of production. The only disadvantage, which may be real or apparent, is the added difficulty of controlling weeds in the drilled rows. Under the management we have developed during the past five years, says a progressive farmer, our cornfields come through event wet seasons as well as the checked fields. By drilling, we save much of the planting time, do all the turning during cultivation at the narrower sides of the fields only and give the mechanical picker a better chance to do good work on account of the regular passage of stalks through the machine. It is, of course, essential to have the seed bed clean of weeds by working the ground immediately previous to planting. Then comes a very important step. We use on the planter a simple disk attachment which makes a shallow furrow on either side of the planted rows and throws the dirt into a small ridge over the planter wheel tracks. The furrows protect the seed from being washed out by a heavy rain even in hilly country. The harrowing which ordinarily follows right behind the planter to erase the planter tracks is therefore unnecessary. We delay the first harrowing after planting about a week, usually, and then operate crosswise of the planter rows. This management rids the field of myriads of seeding weeds of all kinds, especially in the rows, because the harrow tears down the ridges made by the disk attachment as it levels the surface.

SQUAB ESSENTIALS

In the production of high-class squabs three things are essential from a nutritional standpoint—grain, grit and water. Grain is so obviously a requirement that it is rarely neglected. Grit and clean water are less obvious. Besides grinding the feed, grit supplies certain mineral elements necessary to the health of the bird. If grit is lacking the birds will soon get out of condition and will not even start nesting. Many kinds of satisfactory

DON'T FORCE THE PULLETS

It is not best to hurry the pullets into heavy production. Allow them to come into production normally without feeding highly stimulating feed. Fewer "blowouts" will occur when production is not forced at the start. Feed two parts of grain to one part of mash, and the pullets will continue to gain in weight and still receive enough protein to encourage the egg organs to function without interfering with growth.

SEGREGATE BREEDING STOCK

Good succulent pasture is always beneficial to pigs when weather permits. Rye is much used for fall hog pasture in the north, rye and crim-

health grit for squab raising are on the market. Grit should preferably be kept outdoors in the fly pen in a wooden self feeder or in a porcelain dish. It should never be kept in a metal container. In winter when outdoor conditions are severe the grit will have to be kept inside the house, but this period should be as short as possible because grit will absorb odors and impurities and will not serve so satisfactory an effect as when it is kept in the fresh air. Keep the grit slightly moist. The birds like it better that way. A pigeon will drink two or three times as much water as will a hen. Squabs are fed entirely by the old birds. First they go to the feed hopper to get their supply of grain, then they fly to the water for a drink, after which they go to the nest, where by an act of regurgitation the youngsters are fed. If water is absent the parents will wait until it is supplied and the squabs go hungry as a consequence. Naturally the water should not only be abundant but also clean. If allowed to get foul, canker and kindred troubles will appear. Running water is ideal but if this is not possible the water should be supplied in fountains which should be kept absolutely clean and frequently sterilized.

CROPS AND LIVESTOCK

Much has been said about the factors that influence the value of the cultivated crops produced on the farms of this country, but little about one factor that more than all others determines the total farm value of all crops. This one factor is livestock, and as the prosperity of the livestock producer and finisher fluctuates so will the price of our major farm crops fluctuate. For the last few years the farm value of all the crop produced on the farms of the United States has approximated \$8,500,000,000, and livestock has furnished a market—in other words provided an outlet—for crops representing on the average 52 per cent of this total value. Even a superficial study of the situation will reveal a ready explanation for this fact. Corn ranks first among farm crops, with a value averaging around \$2,000,000,000 a year, and 35 to 40 per cent of this crop is fed to livestock. Hay ranks second, with a value around \$1,500,000,000, and nearly 100 per cent of it is fed to livestock. Cotton, with a value approximating \$1,250,000,000, ranks third, but none of it is fed to livestock. However, livestock furnishes a market for \$250,000,000 worth of the by-products of cotton production. Wheat ranks fourth, with an average value approaching \$1,000,000,000. Approximately 40 per cent of this crop is marketed through livestock in the form of bran, shorts, low-grade and low priced wheat. This is a factor often overlooked in discussions of the factors determining the price of wheat. Oats rank fifth, with a value ranging from \$500,000,000 to \$750,000,000 annually, and 85 per cent of it is marketed through livestock. Here we have five of approximately 200 crops produced on the farms of the United States, representing an average annual value of \$6,500,000,000 of the \$8,500,000,000 value of all crops harvested, and the portion of these five marketed through livestock amounts to over \$4,000,000,000. These facts and figures emphasize the tremendous importance of livestock as a factor in determining the value of the farm crops produced in this country and the need of giving more attention to the factors that make for greater livestock values.

A NEW SWEET CLOVER

Alpha is the name of a new variety of sweet clover recently originated. This new clover has the appearance of a hybrid between alfalfa and sweet clover. It is finer stemmed, leafier and more profusely branched from the crown than ordinary sweet clover. In other characteristics such as type of pods, color of flower and biennial habit of growth Alpha resembles the ordinary biennial white sweet clover. This new sweet clover originated from several peculiar plants found in a clover field in 1924. By inbreeding and selection three strains were developed. These strains now are classed as alpha sweet clover. It is of interest to note that alpha sweet clover is resistant to disease. One of the strains is extremely resistant to stem canker, a disease which limits the growth of sweet clover in many sections. Of greater importance to stockmen is the fact that alpha sweet clover does not have such a pronounced bitter taste as does the common sweet clover. In seed production, yield of hay, winter hardiness and ability to produce nitrogen the new variety is equal or superior to ordinary sweet clover.

ESTIMATING BOARD COST

The average feed consumed per cow per year on 354 typical beef-cattle farms in the corn belt, according to an official survey, was as follows: Grain 122 pounds; hay 1,900 pounds; silage 700 pounds and straw 600 pounds; while, in addition 12 acre of corn fodder, 1.6 acre of corn stalks and 24 acre of corn stover were required for the winter feeding period of 5 1/2 months. The balance of the year was spent on pasture, all of which was during the summer with the exception of four days. It was also shown that 4 bushels of corn and 1,200 pounds of alfalfa hay put a gain of 325 pounds on a two-year-old steer in 130 days; 360 pounds on a yearling steer in 160 days; and 400 pounds on a calf in 200 days; and that approximately 85 per cent of the cost in fattening steers is for feed, while labor accounts for 5 1/2 per cent, interest 6 per cent, and 4 1/2 per cent goes for miscellaneous expenses.

SON CLOVER FARTHER SOUTH

son clover farther south, while cowpeas and soybeans are used in southern states. Soon after weaning it is best to separate the animals which are to be kept for breeding purposes from the fattening stock, as the development for best results with each class requires a different system of management.

NUTHE JOB FOR LIZZIE

Don't throw away your old fliver engine. Have it repaired (if it needs it) and use it to run the spraying machine. Moist mashes still are the open sesame for egg production from the late hatched and lightweight

Elke Torture Rack From Kinross Journal.

tion, unusual fluctuations are recorded, the answer is assumed to be untrue.

weary, a picture of the murderer girl was flashed upon the screen before them. No results. Then the grilling was continued until the Chicago criminologist and his machine arrived Sunday morning.

Q. What was a person called who played a lute? D. W. A. He was called a lutenist or lutist.

been to let a guilty man escape rather than take any chance on punishing an innocent one. A lie detector will be of great value in criminal work if one is developed that overcomes public skepticism.

Q. What was the fur cap called which was worn by some of the American soldiers in the Revolution? It was made of a squirrel's skin with the tail left on. H. T. M.

A. Such a cap was called a squirrel tail and the soldiers wearing such headgear were called squirrel tails.