

# GIFT OF THE DESERT

By Randall Parrish

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## "I'VE KILLED HIM!"

**SYNOPSIS.**—On the isolated Meager ranch, on the southern border, Deborah Meredith, trained nurse, is in attendance on Mrs. Meager, whose husband has recently been killed. Immediately after the death, Bob Meager, Mrs. Meager's stepson, arrives and takes possession. He insults Deborah and she resolves to leave, but there seems no possibility of her getting away. Meager gloats over Deborah's plight. He tells her he has sent for a justice of the peace, who will marry them tomorrow. Horrified, the girl secures a revolver. The justice, Cornelius Garrity, scoundrel and bosom friend of Meager, arrives with a party, among them the "Frisco Kid," notorious desperado. Despite Deborah's protests, the justice performs the marriage ceremony. She escapes and reaches her room. There she stuns Meager with the revolver and rushes to the stables, hoping to secure a horse and escape. There she meets the "Frisco Kid." Somehow he inspires her with confidence and she explains the situation. The "Kid" tells her his name is Daniel Kelleen, that he is no friend of Meager.

## CHAPTER V—Continued.

"Yes, I will tell you, Daniel Kelleen," she said gravely. "I must trust someone, and you seem to be the one sent. All I know of you is that you are an American. I am an American also, and a woman. If that does not appeal to you, then nothing else will. I have told you already who I am and how I came here. The remainder of the story is brief. I have had nothing to do with Bob Meager since he returned, immediately after his father's sudden death. There was no opportunity for me to leave the ranch, so I remained in care of Mrs. Meager. Until last evening I never even encountered Bob but once. Then he came unexpectedly into his stepmother's room. He was brutal and insulting to us both. After that I kept out of his way, and he apparently ignored my presence entirely. I did not notice, however, that he was getting rid of all the old employees on the ranch, and replacing them with Mexicans. Evidently he wanted no Americans about him."

"I understand; not his kind."  
"So I thought, but with no conception that this change had any reference to me."

"It did have, then?"  
"So it seems now. He came upon me suddenly alone last evening. There was no chance for me to get away, and I had to listen to what he said." She dropped her face into her hands, but instantly lifted it again, and went on, her voice strengthening with indignation. Kelleen made no movement.

"He—he was not even decent about what he had to say. I was merely a chattel he had to deal with, a slave to

I went back to the house; what else was there I could do?"

"Nothing, I reckon, unless you killed the cuss. What did you do?"

"I—I made up my mind to do even that," she confessed. "I stole a revolver from the bunkhouse while the men were at mess, and then locked myself in my own room to wait. Along about nine o'clock the outfit rode in from Nogales. There was nothing for me to do but wait desperately. I meant to stay there, and defend myself, behind that locked door. But that devil tricked me. He got Mrs. Meager to call me from the hall, saying she had one of her bad turns, and I opened the door to help her. I—I hardly know what happened after that. I tried to explain to the man who came to marry us, but he wouldn't listen. He was just a creature Bob Meager had picked up to serve him."

"Sure! I know him—Garrity; he'd murder his mother for a drink of booze."

"But is he really a judge?"

"He's a justice of the peace down at Nogales."

"Then I was really married? It—it was legal?"

"Damn if I know about that. I think likely the whole outfit would swear you consented. Who were in the gang?"

"Juan Sanchez, a ranch foreman, and a black-faced fellow who came out from Nogales."

"Arvan; they'd swear anything Bob told them to. They'd make it out you were married all right."

"But—but I'm not; not now!"

"Not now? What do you mean?"

"I've—I've killed him!"

## CHAPTER VI

**A New Alliance.**  
For a moment Kelleen did not move; then impulsively he groped for her hand in the darkness.

"You killed him? You did? Say, I like you," he exclaimed earnestly. "You are sure some girl, you are. But are you certain you killed him?"

"I—I think so—yes," she stammered, totally surprised by the way in which he greeted her news. "But I—I am not exactly sure. All I know is he is lying there on the floor of my room, and—and he never moved after he was struck."

"Struck? You did not shoot, then?"

"No; I had no chance. I got away from them, and ran to my room, where I meant to lock myself in, but someone had taken the key. I shut the door behind me and got the revolver out of a drawer, determined to defend myself. The men followed, but stopped outside in the hall. I could hear them laugh and talk; then they went back to the front room again. Bob was so sure I couldn't get away, he wasn't afraid to leave me there. He planned to get drunk first, and then come back."

"Sure; that would be his style; and you waited? You didn't try to get away?"

"Get away! Where could I go? Only out into the desert, and those men would have trailed me if I tried that. Yes, I waited in the dark, desperate, determined to kill him when he came. And he came finally, so drunk he could hardly stand, but ugly with the liquor. I do not seem to remember exactly what did happen; he laughed and jeered at me, and got hold of the weapon before I had courage to fire. Then we struggled, and the grip of his hands drove me mad. The revolver fell to the floor, but I got it, and struck at him with all my might. That was all; he just lay there, and never moved; I could see his face in the starlight, but—but I couldn't make myself touch him. I—I believed he was dead, that I had killed him."

"Never mind, little girl," interrupted Kelleen firmly. "maybe he was, but I doubt it; guys like that are not croaked so easy. Then, I take it, you ran away."

"Yes; I—I couldn't stay there, and I thought perhaps there might be a chance, if I could only find a horse somewhere. I knew the others were all drunk, and I would not be missed before morning. I had to try, and that was how I came to be here. You—you understand now?"

"Yes, I understand, and I am going to stay with you. But first, let's get this straight. The main question is, are you ready to trust me as a white man?"

"Yes—I am."

"That means a lot more than you think right now," he went on, but evidently encouraged by her tone. "Because it ain't going to be so easy getting away. I don't take any stock in Bob's being dead; he's got a knock-out, that's all, and when he comes to himself again he's going to be raving. He'll have every rider on this ranch on our trail, and the best we can reckon on is maybe three hours' start. You got to stay with me, and do just what I say—and, girl, that sure means you must trust me plumb to the limit. Do you sabb that? This ain't going to be no canter between here and Nogales; the only chance we've got is to hide out, first in the desert, and then in the hills. I'm telling it to you rough; but you better know it now than later."

"You mean we shall have to be alone together for—for some time?"

"That's the stuff. We ain't going to have an easy gallop into town. You don't know me from Adam, and if you did, I reckon you wouldn't go a mile with me. I ain't very highly thought of along this border, I'll say that; there ain't many would choose me for a partner, that's a fact. More, I ain't got nothing to say to you except that I'm going to play square. If you trust me I'll bring you through safe enough in one way or another; but if you don't feel that you can go the limit, then the best thing for you to do, maybe, is to stay here, and scrap it out with Bob Meager. My notion is this run-

to repose trust in him? Who was the man? Why was he at the ranch if he had no connection with Bob Meager? What would his presence there imply? The ranch was on no commonly used trail; visitors never came without a purpose. To reach there at all required miles of desert travel, with no little hardship. There must always be an object in such a journey. What could it be in this case? Was the fellow a mere drifter, seeking a job? A fugitive from justice, hiding from the law? or actually in Meager's service? Surely he must be one of the three; nothing else would account for his presence under such circumstances.

Yet she liked, and trusted him; felt no fear of the man. So far as his relations with her were concerned not a doubt of his absolute squareness assailed her. She believed his promise. Outlaw, fugitive, border desperado, he had won her faith already. The reaction she experienced from being helplessly alone caused her now to rest all hope on this stranger who had so mysteriously come to her rescue; she cared not who he might be, or from where he came. Enough that he was there, strong-armed, capable, fearless, willing to befriend her, to guide her safely. It was in this spirit of almost blind confidence that the girl welcomed his return when he finally emerged from out the black shadows, leading two horses trailing quietly behind, through the corral gate.

He saddled and bridled the two rapidly, evidently accustomed to working in the dark.

"Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Put your foot in my hand. This is my horse; he'll carry you fine. Now, up you go. This your water bottle; I'll strap it to the pommel where it will be handy."

He swung into the saddle himself, restraining the half-bronco animal with an iron hand.

"You know the way down the mesa?" he asked, "the Nogales trail?"

"Of course."

"Then ride ahead, and I'll follow. I may have trouble with this brute before he learns who his master. Just go straight on out into the desert. I'll not be far away."

She rode forward, never questioning his right to command. The horse under her moved steadily at a swift walk, alert but well trained, obedient to the slightest pressure of her fingers on the rein. Her courage was high; she was no longer alone; the dread of the desert had left her.

Deborah found passage down the steep hillside and had advanced some distance across the level, before Kelleen joined her. No words were exchanged between them as he reined in his horse beside her own. Evidently the man was satisfied with her knowledge of the trail as well as the progress made. He turned in the saddle, gazing searchingly back at the dim outline of the mesa, now barely visible through the gloom.

"There is something wrong?" she asked, troubled by his silence.

"No, nothing stirring. I circled the bunkhouse before leaving; the whole outfit is still asleep. I was just getting directions fixed in my mind. We are going a route I haven't traveled lately."

"But the Nogales trail is not difficult to follow."

"That is exactly what is wrong with it," he explained, his face now turned forward. "It is so easily followed, we could never get far enough ahead of pursuit to be safe. They will jump to the conclusion that you have gone this way, of course. I am hoping they will believe you have gone alone."

"Do they know you were at the ranch?"

"Yes, unfortunately; but my disappearance during the night will not necessarily make them conclude we have disappeared together." He laughed. "I haven't a reputation for remaining very long in any one place, so my going will create no particular suspicion. Then I've covered things the best I could. They'll be sure you've gone this way—because it's the only trail you knew anything about—but they won't have the ghost of an idea what has become of me. That is exactly what I'm aiming to do—get the bunch riding this trail, thinking you're going it blind, and that all they've got to do in order to catch you is to ride hard enough. Then they won't stop to read 'Sign'—see?"

"But—but I do not," she ventured doubtfully. "It seems to me we are doing exactly what they expect us to do."

"Sure; I'm counting on two hours and a half, or maybe three hours of darkness yet. An hour will bring us to Silver Springs. Silver Springs is where we take a side trip, the sort not many know about. Two hours' ride from there the whole United States couldn't find where you was hid away."

She waited at the bars of the corral while Kelleen vanished in the darkness of the open, lightly swinging a colled lariat in his hand. Both houses were from there hidden from view, and now that her newly found companion had disappeared, Deborah felt entirely alone. Had she done right

"I mean yes. I trust you fully, absolutely. I will do exactly as you say."

"It is bound to be some test, young lady," he returned gravely, releasing her hand, and rising to his feet. "but I reckon I won't let you regret it. Nobody ever trusted Dan Kelleen yet and found him a piker. We're pardners now; let's go."

He picked up a saddle from the bed of hay on which he had been resting; found another hanging on a stake driven into a beam, and with both flung carelessly over his shoulder, emerged through the open door into the starlight. Deborah followed closely, a new feeling of relief giving lightness to her step. She was no longer alone, unguided; something about the words and actions of the man brought confidence. The situation was plainly no novelty to him; he had been a fugitive before and had learned every trick in the hard school of experience. Whatever had happened to Bob Meager, it was clearly evident the fellow had not yet recovered consciousness, and it was hardly likely his fellows would become aroused until he sounded the alarm. The way of escape still remained open, but no one could tell for how long. Success might hang upon moments. Kelleen's keen eyes searched the deep shadows anxiously, but his lips smiled in satisfaction.

"It's all right," he whispered confidently. "You ride, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Good! It struck me maybe you didn't, being a nurse from the East. My horse is all right, but I'll have to rope one for you, and I might pick a wild devil in the dark. Could you stay?"

"As long as he keeps his feet."

"D—n, but I like your style!" he said enthusiastically, letting his hand rest an instant on her shoulder. "You and I are going to hit it off fine. Come on, now; keep back in the shadow."

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## Have Cotton Wrap Match Thin Dress

Separate Coats and Capes of Light Materials Are Gaily Decorated.

The separate coats and capes created by the great dressmakers, whether for afternoon or evening wear, stress a lavish use of embroidery, observes a Paris writer in the New York Tribune. Capes made of cotton materials that match cotton summer dresses are elaborately beaded and embroidered.

Swinging grace characterizes many of the new topcoats, which vary only in their trimming, as they are all three-quarters to seven-eighths long and cut with a full bias flare. An attractive three-quarters length flaring coat is developed from green cloth and white buttons engraved in black.

One designer makes jackets of knee length that flare midway between waist and knees, with the top portion of the jacket cut perfectly straight. This type of jacket is particularly adaptable to crepe de chine, although he also develops them from cloth. This designer shows coats of crepe de chine which are made in the fashion of a perfectly straight sack overcoat covering the entire dress. The coats differ from those of last year in both collar and embroidery.

The collar used this season is like a huge roll and the embroidery covers the entire surface of the coat. Occasionally monkey fur is used for the collar, but one may say that there is relatively no fur used this season with the exception of silver fox.

Another firm has several very excellent cloth coats. One particularly attractive model is of green and gray wool combined. The outside of the coat is of the gray applied with green, while the inside is of green.

## Use Buckle to Close This New Fall Coat



This smart new fall coat is of navy blue material. It is cut with charming simplicity and attains distinction by the closure, a single broad buckle of dark blue enamel. Fine beaver trims the collar and cuffs.

## Sports Clothes Draw Approval of Women

There was a time not so long ago when sports clothes were for the purpose of costing one for golf, tennis, riding and so forth. Today all this is changed. Perhaps it signifies that life is a game and should be treated as such. At any rate, the practical influence of sports clothes makes itself felt on nearly all occasions. This is due no doubt to the simplicity and comfort found in these modes. A prominent moving-picture actress wears a charming frock which had its inspiration from a sport model. It is of cream silk crepe piped with red on collar, cuffs and pockets. The overblouse is of the regulation cut and comes well over the plaited skirt. A circle embroidered in red incloses a space for monogramming, which is quite the latest fad for blouses of this sort.

## Why Good Perfumes Are Very Expensive

Napoleon before and after battles bathed his head and shoulders in perfume. Doctor Mason writes in a recent Mentor Magazine. He used perfume as a substitute for a bath. That was why perfumes were invented—to counteract lack of sanitation. Running water and the bathtub enable us to get near each other without scent camouflage. Maybe you wonder why good perfumes are so expensive. It takes 3,000,000 roses to yield one pound of rose essence.

**Evening Capes.**  
Stunning evening wraps, cape mantou type, are made of ribbon and marabou. The ribbons are wide and edged with marabou, each band of ribbon being sewed onto a georgette silk foundation. The wrap is lined with silk crepe. Fog gray satin ribbon and gray marabou, made on gray silk georgette and lined with clover pink silk crepe makes a wrap that is a summer dream.



Topcoat of Green With Cloth Single Pocket and White Buttons.

When the coat is open it shows a full-length section of the green, which appears more like a dress than a lining. The impression given is that of a two-piece garment.

A model of black satin is one of the most successful coats of the season. Bright-colored embroideries are used to enliven the collar and the inside of the wide sleeves.

## Restful Wallpapers for Cozy Bedrooms

They are simply irresistible—bedrooms. They are the innermost sanctuary of the house. They are the rooms for confidences. They are the rooms for dreams. They are, of all rooms, nearest the heart.

What woman does not thrill with joy when she has the chance to "do over" a bedroom—perhaps a drab room with no meaning or life or personality?

There are literally hundreds of delightful wall papers for her to choose from—for designers have excelled themselves for bedrooms. She can have exactly the kind of bedroom to suit her individuality—and a bedroom must suit, for late at night when one is tired, one does not wish to be jarred; and early in the morning it is tragic to be irritated.

There are sunny yellows that the grayest morning in the world cannot discourage.

There are papers where flowers bloom so sweetly that the blakest winter morning can't be cheerless.

There are such quaint old patterns straight from revolutionary walls that even if a trolley jangles by outside it seems unreal and far away. And if you are one of those people like the man who said he could hear "anybody" but a person who smiles before breakfast—there are quiet papers of dignified elegance that fit no matter what mood.

And what they all express is a deep peace that brings "—innocent sleep, sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care."

There was a time when people made bedroom papers with restless figures—birds that never alighted on flowers half an inch away from them—and other unsatisfying pictures that drove the one who had to lie in bed and watch them into a mild insanity. And then the day of geometric figures—that one counted and counted going in all directions while one gradually went mad.

But those times are past—and the newer papers for bedrooms are restful, peaceful, quiet—papers that never annoy as one sees them day after day. —Milwaukee Sentinel.

**Fireplace Tiling.**  
The manufacture of ornamental tile has become highly specialized. Built into the facing of the fireplace they are exceedingly attractive. If you do not intend to buy enough for your fireplace, at least buy one for a teapot tile. Paste a piece of felt on the bottom and you have a handsome table ornament that will not scratch the most highly polished table. Thus arranged these tiles make very fine presents.

**Flower Brims.**  
Hat brims composed entirely of small flowers are seen everywhere. The flowers are arranged to give a flat appearance and give no suggestion of heaviness or weight.

**Sleeves Passe.**  
The strong call for summer is for sleeveless or almost sleeveless frocks. This was a mooted point last year, but at present there seems no doubt of the sleeveless frock's popularity. Voile is the most used of wash fabrics.



"I've—I've Killed Him!"

use as he pleased. It doesn't sound true, but it is true, every word."

"Go on," said the other dispassionately. "I know Bob Meager."

"He said he was going to marry me; he didn't ask me about it at all; just stated it as a fact. When I tried to object, the brute just laughed, and asked how I was going to help myself. He made me realize the situation I was in, without an American left on the ranch, and those miles of desert stretching away on every side. Then he told me everything was arranged for this very night. A—a man was coming out from Nogales to marry us. He said I better go into the house, and get ready. Then he laughed again, and went away. He—he wasn't afraid to leave me there alone, for there was no place where I could hide, no chance to leave the ranch. I—I was hardly sane, but—but after awhile

(TO BE CONTINUED.)