

GIFT OF THE DESERT

By Randall Parrish

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"AFRAID OF ME?"

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 seizes 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." Somedence and she explains the situation. The "Kid" tells her his name is Daniel Kelleen, that he is no friend of Meager. They ride off together into the desert. Presently she realizes that Kelleen is the "Frisco Kid."

CHAPTER VI—Continued.

"How did you know?" she questioned, suspiciously.

"Oh, it's part of my trade to learn the country I'm working in."

"Your trade?"

"Sure; you never supposed I was here for my health, did you? I've got a trade, all right, and perhaps I'll tell you about it some time. It's enough now for me to say that it has taught me as much about this desert as any Indian ever knew. I've rode it alone, east, west, north, and south, and one of the strange places I stumbled into—by good luck, not more than two days ago—was this Devil's gulch I'm heading for now. If we get there by daylight we'll have this game blocked."

"You believe no one else knows the place?"

"Sure, someone does, but not this outfit. I doubt if old Tom Meager ever knew of it, but I have some reason to believe Bob may. It has been a thieves' den in its day, no doubt, if the story was known."

"A thieves' den?"

"Likely—yes. You do not know this country very well, Miss Deborah, but it has been the headquarters for cattle rustlers and smugglers for years, centuries, for all I know. In some respects it is as bad today as it ever was. Mexico is just over yonder, and he made an expressive gesture with one hand, "and this desert stretches along both sides the line; on every side mountains and wild country. The Meager ranch is the only oasis in a hundred miles. I don't know how the place was ever found, but I'll bet it was held by the rifle."

"It was," she said, eagerly. "Old Tom told me the story. He came in here, a young man, prospecting, and discovered these hundreds of acres, with water, grass, everything, even a considerable bunch of wild cattle. There was no one in the country then, and the cattle were not even worth stealing. He lived here alone for years, found gold somewhere, and got enough to develop this property. The Indians never troubled him much, but rustlers did, both Yank and Mexican. They had a regular trail through those hills to the east. It is used yet occasionally; I rode out there with Tom Meager once, and it is like a road—"

"Yes, I've seen it," Kelleen interrupted, "running through Gorieta canyon. There's another trail also down Box creek."

"Thousands upon thousands of stolen cattle were driven along there north and south, and oftentimes they tried to pick up some of the Meager stock in passing. For years they were fighting almost all the time. Then soldiers came and patrolled the border, and broke the trade up very largely."

"You have a pretty clear idea of the situation, young lady!" the man said, quietly. Tom Meager ran this ranch straight and fought for his rights like a man. Everybody along the border knew that, and respected the old man. But this cub of his is another proposition. The whole border brood contains nothing worse than Bob Meager. He is low-down man, and has been a thief, and an associate of thieves, all his life. It doesn't make any difference how I know all this—I do know it. There was a bitterness to Kelleen's voice which startled the girl.

"You hate him?"

He laughed lightly.

"Oh, no; I cannot afford to do that, but you have got me started, and I might as well finish up. I reckon you know the fellow fairly well yourself. I get him from another angle. It is not clear in my mind yet exactly how he got possession of this property. Of course, I know he is old Tom's son, and the natural heir, but I met the father once or twice, and cannot believe he ever put the ranch unreservedly into Bob's hands, giving his widow nothing. I'd like to see that will, for I'll bet all I'm worth it's phony. Garrity drew it, as I understand, and still holds it. The instrument is duly recorded, but the original remains safely in possession of the judge."

"Is that regular?"

"Perhaps so; not being a lawyer, I can only guess at the regularity. Of course it will have to be produced in court for final settlement of the estate; but I don't think they anticipate any

serious questioning as to the validity of the document."

"Could it be contested?"

"The widow could claim her dower rights."

"But Mrs. Meager would not dare. She is an invalid, and in deadly fear of her stepson."

"And you have heard of no other will?"

"Not a word. Mr. Meager's death was very sudden, an accident."

"He was found dead on the trail, I heard?"

"Yes, his horse came home without him. There was an inquest, the evidence going to show that his horse



"What is That Ahead?"

reckon. Now we've got to throw them off the trail."

He grasped her bridle rein, the two horses moving forward at a walk, circling to the left of the stone marker. A hundred feet beyond, the faint sound of horses' hoofs gave evidence that they passed along a narrow ridge of rock. Suddenly Kelleen came to a pause, leaning forward in the saddle to see more clearly.

"You have no memory of how things are here?" he asked.

"No; only that the springs are over to the left yonder."

"Then listen; there is an outer opening of rock which swerves here to the right, and runs almost directly east for two hundred yards. Follow that carefully; go just as far as possible, and then wait there for me. There is no danger, so you keep close to the rocks. Keep to the center so the horse will leave no imprint."

"And what are you going to do?"

"Ride straight ahead down the trail; then circle back through a gully, and meet you out yonder. Don't be afraid; just wait. I'll come, although it may require half an hour or more for me to make the trip safely; I've got to cover every trace after I once strike out into the desert."

She watched him ride away vanishing quickly into the gloom, his horse's hoofs making no sound in the soft sand. Instantly she began urging her own mount along the narrow rock ridge, watchful that he did not stray from the narrow path of rock. Where this very plainly ended she drew the animal to a halt and sat upright in the saddle, staring wonderingly about into the silent desolation. Her mind traveled back over all that had happened that night. She had no time before for thought; she had been continuously forced forward by circumstances beyond control, driven blindly. But now everything which had occurred so swiftly during those past few hours swept over her in memory like a flood. What was the end now before her? It all seemed more a horrible dream than any reality of life. It was beyond belief, beyond experience; that such things were even possible seemed utterly beyond reason.

Yet memory would not die or be deceived. It was true—all of it was true. The death of old Tom Meager; the return of the renegade son; his brutal assumption of control; the glow of lust in his eyes at their first meeting; and then—then the happenings of this last night. And now—now she was there waiting, amid all this desolation, for the return of a strange man, whose face she never had seen. The whole situation seemed impossible, yet she could not doubt its actual reality. She was not dreaming; she was wide awake.

Yet as she reviewed all the events leading up to this situation the girl could not perceive where she might have done otherwise. The impossibility of leaving the ranch unaided; the forced marriage; the drunken assault; the blind effort at escape, believing she had killed the man in self-defense; and the unexpected meeting with Kelleen—all these had been utterly beyond her control. Even after that scarcely a choice had been left her. The man had had to be accepted as a friend, or else left behind as an enemy. He was in position to either serve or betray her, as he chose, and there was that about his personality which had won her faith. What it was she hardly knew, nor did she have the slightest conception still who the man actually was. His evident dislike of Meager and Garrity meant nothing, except perhaps as thus explaining his willingness to befriend her against them. She had seen him as only a dark, ill-defined shape in the night. She had gained no glimpse of his features, but she liked his voice, the genial yet respectful way in which he addressed her, the cool assurance with which he had taken complete control; whatever the fellow's past might have been, she felt confidence in him, believed firmly that he was really endeavoring honestly to serve her in this emergency.

It seemed a long while, so long as to almost frighten her, before she became aware of his approach. Indeed, he was actually beside her on foot before she recognized his presence, approaching silently from the opposite direction from that anticipated. Her startled gaze had scarcely distinguished his dim outline, when he spoke, his hand already grasping her horse's rein.

"There, that is over with," he said genially. "Now I'll lead you for the next five hundred yards. After that we'll do some real riding."

Where their course led she could not clearly determine from the saddle, but they moved forward slowly. After some hundred yards had been traversed, the path led upward once again, the horse's hoofs now sinking into deep sand. Then a horse whinnied just in front of them, and the next instant she could make out the darker shadow. Kelleen released his grip, with a little laugh of relief.

"Lonely, old fellow? Well, I won't leave you again. Now we've got a straightaway ride for it, Miss Meredith. I'll lead off, and you follow. You'll have to keep up pretty close to see me in the dark, and there will be no noise to guide you in this sand."

"But—if I should lose you?" she asked, staring about, half frightened by the thought.

"No danger; the horse you're on won't get lost. But if you miss me call out; there's no one to hear in this desert. Ready now?"

CHAPTER VII

Covering the Trail

Deborah could perceive nothing, except the dimly visible heap of stones which Kelleen pointed out. All around stretched the black void of the desert, silent and full of mystery. The girl had remained almost unconscious of this intense barrenness as they had talked together, but now suddenly awakened to a sense of the desolate surroundings. She was alone with this man, fleeing for her life into unknown danger. However this realization shocked her, their arrival at the spot sought for only served to arouse her male companion to more energetic action. As the horses came to a stop, he turned in the saddle, peering back through the veil of darkness toward the Meager ranch.

"Everything seems all right so far," he commented quietly. "They are still drunk and asleep back there, I

He swung into the saddle, and faced her waiting.

"Yes."

"Then we'll ride fast, and don't be afraid; it's level as a floor."

The girl rode low in the saddle, her head bent forward to protect her eyes from the shower of grit hurled against her by the ceaseless wind. She was conscious now of her extreme weariness; she could only cling grimly to her seat, aching in every muscle, blindly following his lead. She knew the horse under her was panting for breath, his sides wet with sweat, but Kelleen never once drew rein, or to her knowledge, even glanced back to assure himself of her presence. There were moments when she felt she must actually cry out, her nerves falling her, but she crushed the desire back, and rode on, dulled with fatigue.

Her eyes and thought centered on the figure of the man riding steadily in front. She could obtain no glimpse of his face, not even its contour, yet how straight he sat in the saddle, his shoulders thrown back, his left hand grasping the rein lightly. His seat was that of the trained, disciplined cavalry man, rather than the cowboy, and she could but mark how easily his body followed the slightest movement of the animal under him. Suddenly, but without glancing back he pointed into the grim, gray desert ahead.

"Do you see anything over yonder?" he asked. "Just ahead there—a hundred yards?"

She stared where he pointed, both halting their horses, but could perceive nothing except the same dreary expanse of sand.

"No; what is it?"

"One of nature's marvels; the place I'm heading for. You can be within ten yards and never know it is there."

He turned and faced her smilingly. "Made it straight through the night, too. Why, what's the matter?"

She was staring at him through the dim light, her lips parted, her eyes expressive of fear. For the moment she did not speak, and he asked again anxiously.

"What is it? Are you afraid of me?"

"—I know now who you are," she managed to say. "You—you are the 'Frisco Kid.'"

A moment his lips shut tight, a bit grimly; then he laughed.

"Sure; but how did you guess?"

"I saw you ride in last night with Judge Garrity. I had a good view of your face from my window, and heard Bob Meager call you by name."

"No doubt that's all true enough, but what of it? Ever heard of me before?"

She hesitated, but only for an instant. It was her nature to speak truth.

"Yes, I have," she answered steadily, looking straight at him, yet in some mysterious way not the least afraid. "I have been led to believe you a most desperate character, an outlaw, a criminal, with a price on your head. I have been told many of your exploits—and, and; but why compel me to repeat all this?"

"Because it is extremely interesting, for one thing; quite flattering for even a better reason. If we are going to continue being friends—and I insist



"You—You Are the Frisco Kid!"

that we are—we shall have to come to a mutual understanding. What am I in your estimation? A robber and thief, I suppose? Who told you all this rot—Bob Meager?"

"Oh, no; I heard all about you before he ever came back. That was months ago; there were soldiers through here searching for you, a major and twenty cavalrymen."

"What major?"

"His name was Reynolds."

Kelleen chuckled and leaned suddenly forward, placing his hand squarely on hers where it rested on the saddle pommel. Somehow she made no effort to withdraw her fingers from the contact, and their eyes met.

"I believe in you and am your friend."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Perish the Thought.

"My heart is all yours."

"Have you ever loved before?" asked the girl.

"Now, dearie, would I offer you a second-hand heart?"—Louisville Courier-Journal.

Evening Mantles Gorgeous Affairs

Velvet, Brocaded and Plain, of Metal Brocade and Metal Lace.

Evening mantles may be described in brief as gorgeous affairs, brilliant in color and splendid in materials, seemingly more appropriate for winter, obversing a fashion writer in the New York Tribune. They are of velvet, brocaded and plain, of metal brocade and metal lace. In resume, we may say that every material is used from fur to lace. Metal lace is a rival to metal cloth as the favored and most elegant medium. Sometimes the two are combined.

Collars offer as much variety as the form of the wrap. The collarless wrap for evening as well as for afternoon wear, has not met with much success. Every woman realizes that nothing is so becoming as the frame formed for the face by a high collar. This is one of the reasons why wraps with the standing collar have met with such great success.

The idea of a puff taken in a bias way over a roll—a bourrelet, as the French call it—is the simplest and most general form. There are some collars of fur, skunk or sable, but the fancy collar is of material worked in some ingenious way, often with the insertion of flowers or of strips of fur or perhaps of velvet intermingling with the material when it is of a delicate nature such as lace or chiffon.

A charming idea used by one designer is the torsade of two materials softly taken around a bourrelet. In fact, any of these collars is very much softer and prettier than the hard



Black Satin Coat With Colored Embroideries, Enlivening Collar and Inside of Broad Sleeves.

plaited collar of the material introduced last season, which must, however, be acknowledged as the pioneer of present styles.

Another youthful idea is the ribbon wrap. This is of various widths of crimson velvet ribbon, the widest, at the hem, being about nine inches. These are stitched upon a voile nylon background of the same shade, with about one-half inch of distance between each ribbon. The wrap is three-quarters length, the narrowest widths of ribbon, about one inch, being at the point where the wrap reaches the collar, to which it is gathered quite full. This collar is formed of alternating rows of mink tail and puffs of velvet.

How Good Floor Wax May Be Made at Home

A good floor wax is made as follows: One pint turpentine, four ounces aqua ammonia, one pint water. The beeswax and turpentine are placed in a vessel which is set in hot water until the beeswax is dissolved. Of course, they should not be placed near a fire, as turpentine is inflammable. As the beeswax dissolves the mixture should be stirred vigorously. Then the ammonia and water should be added gradually and stirring should be continued until a creamy mixture is obtained. The wax is best applied to the floor by being placed in a double cheesecloth bag. In 20 minutes the floor should be polished, preferably with a weighted floor brush.

Frocks of Taffeta in Fashion Picture

Grandmother wore a black taffeta dress to church, granddaughter wears a black taffeta frock to dances. In the two words "dress" and "frock" lies all the difference between the dignified, conservative appearance of one and the appealing, piquant charm of the other. Utterly charming are these new dance frocks of taffeta, and youthful enough for the youngest of debutantes. Frocks of black taffeta are shown for girls of twelve or even younger.

One of the prettiest fashions of the moment is that of wearing an apron of embroidered white organdie over a slip of black taffeta. Another taffeta model, of which there are several different variations, is a tight-waisted, full-skirted frock which reaches al-

Crepe Embroidered on Paris Coat and Skirt



Prominent among summer fashion creations at the Paris races was a light suit featuring crepe embroidered on coat and skirt, with very wide sleeves and a very tight skirt. A long black plaited sash was worn on the left side. A tight turban matches the suit.

Light Effects in Hats for Midsummer Wear

Hair nets promise popularity for mid-summer. They are so lovely and youthful, and come in all possible shades with simply a folded band of matching crepe about their crowns. If you buy a hat of this staid that reflects the light, always try it on when you're in a position where the light can come through and glance upon your features. This is the only way you can judge its real becomingness.

Bright hats are all the rage with white dresses. In fact, the brighter the better, and of course, it is well to have shoes to match.

If you can't wear bright red and bright green, however, there are many delightful paler tints. All shades of rose are smart, not to mention shades of blue and yellow and lovely caramel and beige.

Hose and Kerchiefs Are of Scotch Plaid

Quite the most startling of sports stockings are those showing vivid plaids. They are made of silk more often than of wool, and, judging from the prominence they have received in the displays of the shops, they will be fairly usual at country clubs before the season closes.

The plaids worn in sports clothes may be quite Scotch, but the fad for wearing them comes from France. Seemingly the French woman has not grown tired of them. Plaid materials are used for various sorts of small sports hats. For summer days there are frocks of Indian cottons displaying very large and very loud plaids in the brightest hues. Quite new are large handkerchiefs on the bandanna order printed with large Scotch or near-Scotch plaids.

Buttons Are Made of Ribbon One Inch Wide

There is no smarter trimming for the dressy afternoon frock than buttons made of ribbon. The buttons are made of one-inch ribbon, each button requiring five inches, which is gathered at top and bottom onto a wooden ball. At the top the gathering string is pulled so that the ribbon does not entirely close about the ball but leaves a small opening where a twisted bit of gold ribbon makes an ornamental finish. However, a more unique finish is achieved by gliding the ball or painting it in many colors. These buttons may be used on girdle, skirt and sash ends or on coats and blouses wherever a button or an ornament is needed.