

Gift of the Desert



by
Randall Parrish

THE STORY THUS FAR

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. They ride off together into the desert. Presently she realizes that Kelleen is the "Frisco Kid," but doesn't fear him.

CHAPTER VII—Continued.

"Pop" Reynolds, hey?" he said lightly. "Then I am sure his story must have been a good one. So he told you I was a mighty bad man? Well, now you've met me, do you believe it?"

"I—I don't know," she confessed doubtfully. "I—I would rather not think that."

"Which is a hopeful sign. Well, please try not to think so for the next half-hour, at least. Then maybe I can tell you my side of the story. There is no time now, for we've simply got to get under cover. Do you see that blue ridge over yonder? You know what it is?"

"The Meager ranch, isn't it?"

"Yes, and in twenty minutes, as soon as the mist rises, they could pick us out from there with a good field glass. We'll have to find a safer place to talk in than this. Here, I'll lead the horses; it's only a step to the rim; then we'll both have to make the descent afoot."

They moved forward slowly, into what appeared to be the interminable desert, the man plowing his way through sand, the tired animals following with drooping heads.

Suddenly he stopped, gripping the reins tightly and pointing with his other hand. Deborah needed no guidance, for her eyes were already riveted on the yawning gash in the surface of the desert, starting down with a startled feeling of awe into the apparently bottomless chasm not five yards away. A moment she gazed, hardly comprehending, too thoroughly dazed by this phenomenon of nature to completely grasp its significance. Then she felt Kelleen lift her bodily from the saddle and lead her forward to the very edge. Below lay exposed in the cold gray of the dawn the full marvel—a deep gorge, as though scooped out by a giant spoon, cut directly across the barren sand plain, with no evidence anywhere above of its existence. To the eye it seemed some three hundred feet wide, but much deeper, the side walls rocky and irregular, the crevices and ravines choked with sand, while far below appeared the soft green vegetation, and along the base of the opposite wall, much more precipitous than the side on which they stood, the silvery sparkle of a small stream. Deborah drew a quick breath, glancing aside into the face of the man at her side.

"You have been down there?"

"Yes; the descent is not particularly difficult along these ravines; the sand gives purchase, even the horses will pick their way."

He smiled at the consternation in her face.

"What is it?" he questioned; "fear of the passage, or of the 'Frisco Kid'?"

She looked straight at him beneath leveled brows, conscious of the sudden flush of her cheeks.

"Neither; I am not afraid."

"I did not believe you would be, for you are not that sort at all. The truth is, young lady, you really haven't so much on me in this matter of recognition. I happen to know quite a bit about you."

"About me? You? What, may I ask?"

"Just a bit, as I say, a mere picture not easily forgotten. I saw you once, before ever you came to Meager's ranch, and I have remembered it ever since. Do you remember a morning in August, 1918, when the Thirty-third division went over the top, waded a river, and cleaned out the heights beyond? It was a sharp fight, and lots

of the boys never came back. You remember, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, I was there, and I got mine about eight o'clock. Mine must have been plenty, for they hauled me back to the first-line hospital and had some sort of surgical job done before I woke up. The man next to me died, and the nurse who was with him—she was heavily built with very light hair."

"Jessie Seavers."

"I don't know, but she gave me a drink of water, and then they put another wounded guy into the place where the dead body had been. He was just a kid, not more than seventeen, I reckon, and, was crying like a baby, his nerves all shot to pieces. You were his nurse, and I lay there and watched how you fixed him up. It's not likely you've forgot that."

"No! No!" She bent her head. "He was from my town; he—he died that night."

"I didn't know, for they took me away, but I lay there and watched you for another hour before the stretchers came. I never saw you again. I would have liked to mighty well, and I didn't even know your name then—just a memory of your face."

"He reached out his hand suddenly. 'I—I wish you'd shake hands with me,' he said, almost hesitating at his boldness, 'and sorter pretend to forget that 'Frisco Kid' business.'

"I have forgotten it," she answered steadily, their eyes and hands meeting. "You were a soldier in my division; I believe in you, and am your friend."

CHAPTER VIII

Story of the "Frisco Kid."

To Deborah, Kelleen was no longer a bandit, a fleeing fugitive from justice, but a soldier who had been wounded in battle, who had played the part of a man; while to him the girl was no longer a stray runaway in whom he felt little interest, but a nurse whose face had haunted his memory since he had first watched her in the glow of the French sun. They stood there on the rim of that strange crater, the grim, gray desert circling them about, neither able to think of a word to say. Deborah's eyes fell, and she withdrew her hand, turning to stare into the depths below. The slight movement served to arouse Kelleen to the situation.

"Well, this will never do," he exclaimed, new cheerfulness in his tone. "They will have a glass trained on us over there before we get to cover. We'll send the horses down first; they'll find the best route and we can follow. Come, Sultan, over you go, old boy; oh, no, you're not afraid; we've done this little trick before. Go on, sir!"

He struck the animal with the flat of his hand, and with a reproachful shake of the head, Sultan slowly and cautiously began the steep descent, seeking a path along the deeper layers of sand, and zigzagging from gulch to gulch better to obtain foothold. The other horse followed, but not without a struggle, trembling with fear, and keeping close to the trail left by the leader. Kelleen touched the girl's arm.

"Come," he said briefly, a bit of command in the voice. "Really it is not so dangerous as it looks from here. Sultan has found the best trail, and we'll drill along after him."

They made it slowly, picking their path along the trail left by the two animals, finding purchase in the sand, occasionally steadied by an outcropping rock or the exposed root of some clinging shrub. The drop was more extensive than Deborah previously had realized from above, and the sharp descent left her breathless.

The sand disappeared as they reached the lower levels, the walls becoming sheer rock, but slashed with gullies, and finally these were more or less choked with vegetable growth. At the bottom, where the two horses were contentedly munching the short grass, the valley had all the appearance of a new land, made fresh and verdant by the magic touch of water. Deborah at the foot of the long descent, clung to the projecting root of a tree and stared about her with wide-open eyes, unable to restrain her amazement.

"Why this is simply marvelous," she exclaimed. "I did not appreciate what it meant from up there. You have been down here before, you said? You—you do not believe you are the only one who has made this discovery?"

"No; that is hardly probable. There were reasons why it was impossible for me to determine the truth when I was here before, yet I found evidences that others had been before me—the remains of a camp fire, an exploded cartridge shell, and even the imprint of a horse. I have no wish to frighten you, Miss Deborah, but my idea is that probably this place has been, and

perhaps still is, a hiding place for thieves."

"Cattle stealers, you mean?"

"Yes, and mule and runner. This whole border is honeycombed with that sort of thing, and this hole is certainly an ideal hideout. Come, let's sit down here and eat what we have, for I am not going to risk a fire, and I'll tell you a theory I've worked out."

"Please do."

The bag of food the girl had secured from the ranch kitchen was carefully strapped to the saddle of Sultan. Kelleen procured this and spread the contents on a strip of grass. They were both eating when he resumed speech.

"I am inclined to think," he said gravely, "that this has been a rendezvous for that sort of traffic for years. I don't believe many have known about it, or else some whispers would have reached me, but this particular section of the border has been a sore spot for years. Someone stumbled on this place just exactly as I have—perhaps several somebodies—but my present notion is that the discoverer was either Bob Meager, or one of the disreputable gang he has with him. His determination to get control of the ranch at his father's death, the fellows he has brought there from across the line, and Garrity's deep interest in the affair, all combine to make me suspicious. Do you see? The ranch, and this hole, together, make an ideal outfit for running either cattle or mule caravans across the border, and some of those fellows over there have been at that job for years."

"Then how do you dare come here with me?"

"Because it alone promised security for this one day. Tonight we'll go on, but we could not travel across the desert in daylight without being seen."

"Her eyes were on his face inquiringly.

"You dislike Bob Meager very much?"

"Not altogether; it may have had weight, I confess. Now, however, that thought has gone entirely."

"And Judge Garrity?"

"He is utterly despicable."

"Yet you seemed very friendly with him only last night. On excellent terms."

"He smiled good-naturedly.

"You are quite a cross-examiner, Miss Meredith. Sometimes, you know,



She Drew in Her Breath Sharply.

It becomes necessary to play a part in life. What is the cause for all this shrewd questioning?"

"I hardly know myself, but it is all so strange, and has happened so suddenly. I am just beginning to think clearly. How did you happen to serve in the Thirty-third division—they were all Illinois troops?"

"So you even noticed that. I was transferred."

"From what command?"

"The regulars."

"Was that not very unusual? You—you were surely an enlisted man?"

"I did not say so," he smiled back; "and now that you drive me to a confession, I might as well make a full breast of it. I was transferred to take command of a company."

"A captain?"

"Yes."

"Why?" She drew in her breath sharply, leaning forward with new eagerness. "Then surely you are not now what I thought you to be—an outlaw, a renegade? You are not really the 'Frisco Kid'?"

"Oh, yes, I am. At least I am all the 'Frisco Kid' there ever was, to the best of my knowledge, although I fall to line up entirely with the reputation so kindly given me by 'Pop' Reynolds. The 'Frisco Kid' is an entirely manufactured character, made for a practical purpose. Do you grasp the idea?"

She shook her head, but her eager eyes belied the action.

"You have a glimmer, nevertheless. I'll explain. This portion of the border has been a hotbed of outlawry for years. It has baffled every commanding officer assigned to this district. We had no information to work on; suspects were numerous, but proof lacking. Finally a plan of action was evolved, but to carry it out successfully, a desperado with an established reputation as a bad man was first of all most essential. With this end in view the 'Frisco Kid' was carefully put on the stage. Newspapers along the coast, and near the border began

to note his exploits; dispatches regarding him were sent east; rewards for his capture, dead or alive, were posted. It was intimated, finally, when his name had become sufficiently familiar, that he had escaped into Mexico, and then that he had been seen again in this neighborhood. Troops were dispatched to run him down, and word to that effect scattered broadcast on both sides the line. You see the purpose of it all?"

"To win the confidence of the real gang?"

"Exactly; and it worked. The end is already in sight."

"But who, then, are you?"

"Daniel Kelleen, just as I told you, a captain in the—rd cavalry."

"You—you volunteered for this service?"

"Yes; you see it was impossible for the department to use any officer who had been stationed lately along this border. Such a one might be immediately recognized, and the whole scheme ruined at once. At the same time, whoever was chosen to play the character must have intimate knowledge of the border. I met the requirements fully, as I had served here ten years ago as a mere boy, and knew the country fairly well. So here I am, the 'Frisco Kid.'"

Deborah held out her hand impulsively.

"I'm glad you told me," she said in all frankness.

CHAPTER IX

A New Viewpoint.

She had been sleeping for nearly two hours, with head supported on a saddle, the steep wall of the canyon on one side of her and the valley itself shut completely off by a thick growth of shrub. She had not realized how tired she was, and, in fact, rested there some time in this nook Kelleen had found, staring with wide-open eyes up at the strip of blue sky, her mind still active. The knowledge of who this man really was had brought her instant relief, and a new sense of safety in his presence. So her heavy eyes closed, and she slept.

Something must have awakened the girl suddenly, for she sat bolt upright, with eyes wide open in fright. Kelleen had disappeared, but beyond this no change of any kind was apparent. The entire scene was so calm and peaceful that Deborah's heart ceased its first violent throbbing, and she even smiled at her earlier fear, and arose expectantly to her feet.

What had become of Kelleen? Through the tree branches behind which she had been concealed Deborah searched the full length of the chasm within reach of her vision, but discovered no trace of his presence. It was not likely the man would be absent long. It must already be noon by the sun, and, actuated by a desire to do something, she finally began to arrange a meal for his return. She had opened the bag of provisions, when suddenly her eyes caught sight of something moving far below, and to her right, objects at first hard to distinguish, and then quickly discerned as two horsemen, emerging from the very cleft in the rocks where she had decided the canyon probably ran. They came steadily on, growing more distinct each minute, yet still too far away for recognition.

She crouched lower behind her screen, and waited breathlessly. Two, what could that mean? It seemed highly improbable that Kelleen could have encountered a friend in this spot—a man in whom he had faith—who was returning with him. If this was, as he so evidently believed, a hidden lair of outlaws, a rendezvous for border crime, it was hardly possible he had met with any comrade here, if—if he was really what he had claimed to be. The thought of that "if" struck her like a blow. But was he? Her eyes strained to watch every movement of those approaching horsemen. She could perceive enough already to be certain that Kelleen was not one of the group; they were both Mexicans, or at least so attired, and their mounts bore Mexican trappings. Little as the girl knew of the frontier, she at once realized the danger of being discovered by such men.

Deborah was conscious of trembling in every limb, as she crouched there, behind the leaves, instinctively grasping the only weapon in her possession. Then she suddenly recognized one of the riders as Juan Sanchez.

They had followed her then, and were seeking her now. There could be no possible doubt as to Sanchez's mission. How the fellow had reached there so quickly, and why it even had been suspected she had sought this remote spot of refuge, were unsolved questions, yet it was highly probable that searching parties had been dispatched in all directions, and the Mexican had been the one whom Fate had headed that way. Anyhow she could not speculate as to how or why. She must find hiding place somewhere among the rocks.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Early-to-Bed Staff.

Blaine McGrath's little son was visiting in Liberty. Mrs. McGrath talked over the telephone to the youngster one day, and she could tell by his tone that he was a little homesick. It was apparent that what he was missing was his occasional trips down town in Indianapolis, where he gathered thrills from the bright lights of the picture shows.

"Do you really wish to come home?" the mother asked.

"Yes," he said, "I think I do. There's too much night in Liberty."—Indianapolis News.

Help the world when it asks you, but be careful when it isn't asking.

THE KITCHEN CABINET

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After tasting many essences we find freshness the sweetest of all.

SUMMER DESSERTS

As dessert is valued for its decorative effect as well as its nutritive value, a little time spent in embellishing a dish will be very much worth while.

Apricot Whip.—Take two cupfuls of apricots, one-half cupful of sugar, one teaspoonful of lemon juice, the whites of two eggs. Fresh fruit is rubbed through a sieve, the sugar added, lemon juice, and fold in the stiffly beaten whites. If canned or dried apricots are used, soak them, and the cooked fruit to the sugar and cook five minutes; cool, then fold in a slow oven for twenty minutes. Serve with cream or a soft custard, garnished with cubes of bright-colored jelly.

Peach Cup.—Take eight ripe peaches, two eggs, one-half cupful of milk, one and one-half cupfuls of flour, three teaspoonfuls of baking powder, one-half teaspoonful of salt and one tablespoonful of butter. Peel the peaches and mash two of them, add the well-beaten yolks of the eggs, then the milk and the dry ingredients sifted together. Add the butter, melted, beat well, then fold in the stiffly beaten whites of the eggs. Put a layer of this mixture in a buttered custard cup, add half a peach, cover with batter, sprinkle each with sugar and bake in a moderate oven for twenty minutes. Serve with whipped cream or hard sauce.

Velvet Sherbet.—Take the juice of three lemons, two cupfuls of sugar and a quart of rich milk. Mix well and put into the freezer. Turn the freezer slowly at first, then when it begins to harden, beat quite fast. This makes a delicious smooth sherbet that is universally liked.

Tuna Fish Salad.—Take one cupful of tuna fish, flaked, three-fourths of a cupful of salad dressing, one-half of an envelope of gelatin, one-fourth of a cupful of water, one-half cupful of chopped celery, one green pepper chopped, one-half teaspoonful of salt, and a dash of paprika and cayenne. Mold and serve on lettuce.

The hotel low enough to keep out pump and pride;
The threshold high enough to turn deceit aside;
The doorband strong enough from robbers to defend;
This door will open at a touch to welcome every friend.
—Henry Van Dyke.

FOOD FOR HOT WEATHER

Frozen dishes are the most sought after during the heated term. There are so many kinds of ices, sherbets, mousses, frappes and creams that one need not serve the same one many times.

Grape Sherbet.—Take one teaspoonful of gelatin, one tablespoonful of cold water, one cupful of sugar and one-half cupful of cold water. Cook the sugar and water and cool. Dissolve the gelatin in the tablespoonful of water and add to the hot syrup. Let the mixture cool, add one cupful of grape juice and a tablespoonful of lemon juice, mix well and freeze. This will make a quart.

Dried Apricots.—Soak four cupfuls of dried apricots in four cupfuls of water until soft, cook until tender. Press through a potato ricer to remove the pulp, then the water in which they were soaked and cook for ten minutes. Remove from the fire, cool, add the juice of three lemons and freeze. When partly frozen add the stiffly beaten whites of three eggs. Finish freezing.

Fruit Ice Cream.—Take a quart of crushed strained berries, or ripe peaches, put through a sieve, adding a tablespoonful of lemon juice to any fruit juice, sweeten to taste and add a quart of thin cream. One may have two or more fruits if desired. Banana pulp, prepared by putting bananas through a sieve, orange and lemon juice, sugar and cream make a delicious combination. Freeze as usual.

Delicious Dessert.—Split a layer and spread with vanilla or chocolate ice cream, cover with the other half and pour a hot chocolate sauce over it; serve at once. Fruit ice cream may be used with a nut sauce or plain ice cream with a fruit sauce in the cake in the same manner.

Rabbit Pie.—After the rabbit is dressed and cut up, washed and put on to cook in water with a bay leaf, a tablespoonful of vinegar, a sliced onion, a sprig of parsley and a stalk of celery. It is seasoned when partly done with salt and pepper. When tender the pieces are taken up and placed in a crust lined baking dish, the gravy thickened, strained and poured over the rabbit with one cupful of cream added. Place the top crust with a vent for escaping steam and bake until thoroughly done. A handful of mushrooms and a tablespoonful of raisins are added to the gravy before putting in the pie—by some cooks.

Restless Nights? When Coffee disagrees **Drink Postum** "There's a Reason"

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Pretty Word Painting of a Quiet Evening in the Sanctuary of the Home.

It is evening. Supper is over. We have left the small, cold dining-room. We have come back to the sitting room where there is a fire. All is as usual. I am sitting at my writing table, which is placed across a corner so that I am behind it, as it were, and facing the room. The lamp with the green shade is alight; I have before me two large books of reference, both open, a pile of papers, . . . All the paraphernalia, in fact, of an extremely occupied man. My wife, with her little boy on her lap, is in a low chair before the fire. She is about to put him to bed before she clears away the dishes and piles them up in the kitchen for the servant girl tomorrow morning. But the warmth, the quiet, and the sleepy baby, have made her dreamy. One of her red woolen boots is off, one is on. She sits, bent forward, clasping the little bare foot, staring into the glow, and as the fire quickens, falls, flares again, her shadow—an immense Mother and Child—is here and gone again upon the wall.—Katherine Mansfield, in "The Doves' Nest and Other Stories."

An ounce contributed to the happiness of another is a pound added to your own.

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When Coffee disagrees

Drink Postum

"There's a Reason"

Nellie Maxwell