

GIFT OF THE DESERT

CHAPTER XII—Continued.
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By Randall Parrish

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"It must have been; the old Mexican camp was south there in that canyon where I told you the cavalymen were waiting tonight. I am beginning to understand what is up—or, at least, suspect what all this may mean. Someone has accidentally stumbled into this old mine. I don't believe the discoverer could be either Bob or Garity. But in some way they got wind of it and have taken possession. This munition train, supposed to be headed for Mexico, stops here. Casebeer don't know what's up, and don't care. He gets his money just the same, with less traveling and danger. Maybe he asks no questions; maybe he knows what's up and is in on the deal. Anyway, under orders, he dumps the stuff—powder, dynamite, whatever it is—and hustles it out of sight into that cabin. Before daylight comes his mule train is back again on the desert empty, traveling north."

"And there is nothing you can do, is there?" she asked. "It is no crime to discover and work a mine?"

"No—only, perhaps, that dead man you tell me about; murder is still a crime, even on this border. There is something about this affair which isn't straight; otherwise Garity and Bob Meager wouldn't be in it. Those guys are playing dirt somehow—it is up to me to find out how."

Kelleen stood up, advancing to the very edge of the flat rock, where he could look straight down into the deep depression below.

"There is no movement down there. Casebeer's outfit is not onto the scheme; after they go that stuff will all be carried into the tunnel. Meager will never dare leave it out yonder."

"What's the place called where the soldiers are?"

"Box canyon—why?"

"I was wondering—"

A sharp spit of fire leaped out of the night beyond the horses, accompanied by a dull report. The startled animals whirled and disappeared in the darkness, but Deborah saw only Kelleen, poised there on the edge of the chasm—saw him fling up both hands, clutching vainly at the air, and then topple over, down into those yawning depths below. She could not even scream, but some irresistible instinct caused her instantly to roll back from off the stone into the slight depression at its base. In the black darkness of this shallow hole she lay motionless, scarcely venturing to breathe. In her fright and daze she yet comprehended all that had occurred; the shot had come not from beneath, but out of the desert. Kelleen had been killed, the horses stampeded; she was unharmed, but alone.

It was all over so quickly the situation barely flashed through her brain, before a voice spoke, a voice familiar and hated.

"By G—d, that got him! Did you see how he toppled plumb over the cliff? That settles his spying on us, I reckon."

"Si, senior; but I would swear there was two of them there."

"You saw two?"

"No; only the one standing against the light, the senior 'Kid.' I know him; but I thought he spoke, and sure, senior, there were two horses."

"Of course, he stole mine. I had a shot at him then; but there is no one else here. D—n you, look for

plant him, after these others clear out. Casebeer's outfit must be through by this time. Go on down and start back. You paid him?"

"Si, senior; he never unload till I do; he what you call 'hard-boil.'"

"He's hard-boiled, all right, but by G—d, he's got to hold his d—n tongue over this deal! I'll go on down with you and have a final word with him. I'll tell that guy something he'll not forget. Come on; there's nothing more for us to do up here."

The frightened girl, crushed into the shallow hole, half beneath the shadowing rock, dare not stir for some time. The men might decide to return; some dim suspicion might enter their minds, causing them to retrace their steps. She could see nothing, her face pressed hard against the sand, and the sound of the two died away quickly. At last, unable to remain in that posture longer, she cautiously lifted her head and gazed about into the darkness. There was nothing to be seen or heard, and she finally struggled to her feet, clinging to the rock edge for support. It was all plain enough, yet she could not seem to think clearly, and her limbs were so weak they would scarcely support her body. Kelleen had been killed, murdered. Meager had crept up in the dark, and shot the man down in cold blood as he stood silhouetted against that gleam of fire. The victim had toppled over the cliff, and if not already dead from the bullet, must have been crushed into pulp on the rocks below.

These facts came home more and more visibly to the girl's mind. She had escaped discovery as by a miracle, and yet to what end? She was alone, lost, without either horse or weapon to aid her in escape. Both animals had disappeared in the desert night, her revolver had gone down with Kelleen. But one slender bit of fortune remained—her presence there was still unsuspected. The man whose discovery she had most reason to dread yet believed her back at the ranch, hiding from him behind locked doors, but helpless to escape his return. How she had ever eradicated his recognition was a mystery, yet, thank God! she had; and this fact alone gave her a slender chance.

Assured at last that the men had really departed, a measure of strength returning as she moved her limbs and faced the realities, Deborah crept back upon the flat surface of the rock, and gazed frightenedly into those dizzy depths below. It was like a nightmare, the horrid memory which haunted her of Kelleen's body whirling down through that glare of red light. But by then the light had faded, the distant fire having died down to red ash, and her eyes were unable to penetrate the gloom beneath. She stared into a black void, seeing no movement, hearing no sound. The awful silence and loneliness crushed her spirit.

What could she do? Where could she go? Not to those men there in the valley surely; not to Bob Meager, asking for mercy and release. He was impossible; her bitter hatred of him more intense than ever. To all the wrong done her in the past was added now this brutal murder of Daniel Kelleen—and suddenly, unexpectedly the girl realized what this last meant to her. She refused to acknowledge the truth, fought it back there alone in the darkness, yet it would not be altogether ignored. Daniel Kelleen was dead—gone from out her life forever—and there came into her heart a desire for revenge, a mad impulse to fitly punish the murderer. She longed to become the instrument to prove her loyalty to him by action. Yet how? What was it possible for her to do?

She stared helplessly about into the dense blackness of the desert, and up at the desert stars overhead, her mind obsessed with these questions. It was no longer herself so much as the aroused memory of him. She would carry on his work; she must at whatever cost. But how? The cavalymen stationed at Box canyon! They were waiting for the approach of Casebeer's outfit, or else some word of command from Kelleen. They could not be far away over there—to the south he said, and he had pointed in that direction. The stars would help her to keep the points of the compass until daylight came, and then surely she could discern something else to steer her course by. She must go on foot, straight out into the desert; there might not be one chance in a hundred of her going right—yet the one chance was better than remaining there for Bob Meager to find her. She would rather die miserably in the sand waste than feel that wretch touch her again; God, yes, the kiss of Death would be sweet, compared to the touch of his lips. She shuddered at the thought. His wife! the subject of his foul caresses; helpless to repel his lust, his brutal bestiality. She would make the trail; she would go south. This was all that her mind grasped clearly—the soldiers were camped at Box canyon, and Box canyon was somewhere out there to the southward. To reach them was her only hope.

She stood up and studied the sky. She knew so little of those stars they frightened and confused her in their desert brilliancy, and yet she remembered enough to meet her immediate need. The Big Dipper was easily found, and then the North Star. She

must be right, for Kelleen had pointed over there, and the direction he had designated coincided exactly with what the stars told. She could not go far wrong if she kept that North Star at her back—she would be going south. A moment she paused, hesitating to take the plunge, a prayer on her lips. How lonely, desolate, black the night was; the very silence seemed to hem her in, isolate her from all the world. Then, with firm-set lips, the girl went forward, plunging her way through the sand, instantly swallowed up in the black desert.

She plunged on recklessly, desperately, hope dying within her as she advanced. Nothing could guide her now, or save her, but God's mercy. The soundless void through which she moved, the impenetrable black curtain enveloping her almost drove her mad. She could not fight the depression or keep her mind clear. The sand shifted under her feet and twice she fell heavily, tripped by some protruding rock, and left bruised and breathless. Her advance was blind, uncertain, and she scarcely dared turn her face forward for fear of losing the guidance of that one star by which she endeavored to steer. She was lost utterly, but for that, and when for a moment her eyes strayed everything became confused, her every sense of direction gone. How long she toiled on, how fast her rate of progress, the girl never knew—the way was uneven, with unexpected depressions here and there, and ridges of rock projecting through the sand, and occasionally mounds she had to go around. Once she encountered a shallow ravine, stepping off into it unconsciously, and then crawling painfully up the opposite side, cut by sharp splinters of stone, before attaining the level again. For the moment she lost her star, but finally located it once more, and plunged desperately on.

Then she saw something just ahead of her—a dim, indefinable shadow, which seemed to move. It was so hideous, so grotesque and shapeless, her very heart stood still with terror. The girl sank to her knees, trembling, with no eyes for anything except that mysterious moving object. Misshapen, huge, looming oddly through the gloom, it was advancing steadily toward her—a formless something which resembled neither man nor beast.

CHAPTER XIII

The Border Patrol.

Deborah rose timidly to her feet, her heart beginning to beat once more, but not with fear. Forth from the darkness came the low whinney of a horse in sudden recognition, while as instantly that horrid shadow took both shape and form. It was a horse, saddled, bridled, the rein trailing along the sand, one of the two animals stamped by the shot which had killed Kelleen. He had sensed her coming in the desert night, and was even then dumbly welcoming her. The girl went forward slowly, doubtfully, fearful of again startling the animal into flight, but he remained quiet, sniffing at her as she drew near, and she finally put hand on the dangling rein. It was the horse Kelleen had ridden, and Deborah hid her face in his mane and cried softly, while he turned and rubbed his muzzle against her shoulder in silent greeting. It seemed too good to be true; as though God had led her every step of the way. The sudden reaction left her weak as a child.

Yet she must go on; there was more cause now than ever before to go on—more hope of success. She made the effort twice before she succeeded in dragging herself up into the saddle, but the horse stood patiently, making no attempt to break away. Once there the girl's strength came back, and with it her determination. All was still, deathly still; not a breath of air touched her cheek; the dense night shut them in. Carefully she located the only star she knew; to her mind it seemed utterly wrong in its position, yet she was faithful to it. Half afraid, yet not daring to venture otherwise, she drew the horse about and rode south.

The night seemed endless, the black desert eternal. There were times when the girl lost consciousness of everything, except that shining North Star ever at her back. It was her one guide and hope; through it she retained sanity and faith. In that way lay Box canyon and those waiting troopers. She dare not ride fast, knowing not what pitfalls were ahead, the course irregular, up and down. The horse picked his way intelligently, the reins lying loose, except as she occasionally held him inexorably to the southward. She swayed wearily in the saddle, clinging to the high pommel for support, unable to see, yet aware that they crossed shallow ravines, and found passage occasionally along ridges of overtopping rock, and then advanced more easily for long spaces over wide expanses of sand, noiselessly as a specter. It was hard to keep awake, to concentrate, to remember—she had to struggle to realize this was not all a dream.

Then, after seemingly endless hours, the dawn came. Would she ever again forget it? She hardly knew at first what it was. Riding drowsily with lowered head, she became dimly aware of a change, a lightning of the gloom about, a dull grayness tingeing faintly the black wall of the surrounding night. Almost as she wondered the daylight came, wan and spectral at first, widening her vista on a gray circle as the stars slowly faded from out a multicolored

To the left a brightening white

light shot up in long streamers, touching with more gaudy tinges the edges of fleecy clouds, while in the other direction a purple haze blended with the deeper shadows along the horizon. It was the coming of the sun, rising majestically above the far-off rim of the desert, and she was still moving southward; through the long night hours she had kept the faith.

Yet there was little of hope, of encouragement, in the picture unrolled before her. Her view gradually spread out in wider and wider circle, but with no relief to its drear sameness or monotony. Sand, leagues upon leagues of sand, stretched wherever her wearied eyes turned, leveled by the wind, or cast upward in rounded hillocks, but ever gray, depressing, a sea of desolation, dead, unmovable, extending to the far circle of the overshadowing arch of sky. It was all lifeless, not even a sagebrush or Spanish bayonet visible. Doubts assailed her. Had she taken the right course? Did Kelleen imply that Box canyon lay directly south and had she been led astray, and thus wandered blindly out into the very heart of the desert? Could she, could the horse live through such a day of torture, as that rising sun promised? Helpless, hopeless, the girl drooped down wearily in the saddle, closing her eyes to the desolation. They plodded on drearly.

One street frock was of navy blue Poiret twill, cut on rather severe tailored lines, and yet trimmed with soft lace frills, which contradicted the tailored effect. It was fashioned in one straight piece, with a rounded neck bordered by a pointed collar and long sleeves molded to fit the wrists like gloves. A jabot of shirred ecru lace drooped from the collar fastening, while lace ruffles bordered the sleeves, half-veiling the hands, and extended

frills at the side of each sleeve. Additional strips of the three-tone braid were applied over each hip in a conventional pattern and extended the length of the skirt at each side, forming pseudo-panels. Three long tassels of dark blue silk dangled from the braid outlines on the hips, adding the finishing touches to the model.



What Was It Over Yonder?

her mind a chaos, haunted by every memory of horror arising from those swift-occurring events which had led to this tragedy. Her forcible marriage to Bob Meager, the bitter hatred his touch had aroused, his drunken, lustful eyes, the blow she struck him, with murder in her heart, the fleeing like a hunted criminal, desperately seeking escape. Then the coming of Kelleen into her life, strangely, mysteriously weaving about her a web of fascination, even as they rode together through the darkness. She had never entirely thrown that off, the odd spell of his presence, his cool, confident words—she felt she never would. Even when she questioned him the most, she still secretly believed; and now that he was actually dead, not so much as the flicker of a doubt remained.

She saw again that dead man in the cave; experienced the grip of those savage arms, and once more, in heedless terror, fired down the black tunnel, and then struggled upward through that awful hole into the light of day. Then all that followed, followed so swiftly, was but a jumble of events, yet each distinct, unforgettable, burned on her soul. True! It could not be true! It must be delirium, a wild fiction of romance raging in the brain of a half-mad dreamer. Yet this was the desert—the desert! She lifted her eyes to look, gazing out blindly over the dull gray expanse. What was it over yonder? A tree? A ridge of uplifted rock? Not much, surely, and yet everything in midst of that solitude. Her heart beat suddenly with hope. Perhaps that marked the end; perhaps that was where the trail ran—the trail to Box canyon. If so, God was good!

The tired horse lifted his head, and whinnied, breaking into a slow trot, the sand crunching under his hoofs. Deborah was wide awake now, alert and ready. Yet it actually was a tree, and the tops of others began to show beyond; their presence promised water, grass, life; that horrid desert left behind. Yet it was a long, dreary ride of an hour before they reached there, coming to a shallow valley through which trickled a mere rill, rock strewn and almost as desolate as had been the desert itself, but with here and there a patch of grass visible, and a few scattered, wind-racked trees. It was a scene scarcely less dreary than the upper plain, yet to Deborah and her horse was most welcome.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Balata Rubber.

Owing to the constantly increasing demand for india rubber, caused by the use of tires for motor cars and other vehicles, there is more or less a rubber famine, even in normal times. The method of gathering india rubber in tropical countries has been exceedingly wasteful, because the easiest way, that of cutting down the trees, had too frequently been adopted. The search for substitutes has resulted in making known the virtues of a South American tree called the Balata.

Black in Evidence for Fall Dresses

Darker Materials Take an Early Lead in Modes for New Season.

Black frocks predominate in the early fall exhibits, with navy blue as the only close competitor, notes a fashion writer in the Washington Star. Fabrics are unusually interesting, though, and they more than make up for the lack of variety in color tones. Several new satins have made their appearance—soft clinging, crepe-like silks that lend themselves admirably to drapery and pebbly-surfaced satins that are effective in plainer models, with little or no trimming.

Ecru lace is a favored medium for collars and cuffs, while beige georgette and eyelet-embroidered organdie are also popular. Some frocks, fashioned on simple, straight lines, combine two of them. For instance, one attractive model seen was of pebbly black satin, with the bateau neck bordered by a rolled-over collar of openwork beige organdie frilled with several tiers of narrow self-color lace. Gauntlet cuffs of organdie, also edged with lace fluting, added the only other touch of trimming.

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Frock of Navy Poiret Twill With Lace Jabot and Sleeve Frills.

In straight lines up the side of each sleeve, nearly touching the elbows. Green braid, stitched in silver and outlined on one side with a narrow thread of gold braid and on the other with red, outlined both collar and sleeve ends, and also framed the lace

frills at the side of each sleeve. Additional strips of the three-tone braid were applied over each hip in a conventional pattern and extended the length of the skirt at each side, forming pseudo-panels. Three long tassels of dark blue silk dangled from the braid outlines on the hips, adding the finishing touches to the model.

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Unusually Plain But Striking Jacquette



Crystal crepe has been masterfully used in creating this winsome garment. The cuffs, revers and sash are in black.

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Dainty Ribbon Rose Bag Is Easy to Make

Every woman wants a dainty and distinctive bag to carry with her pretty frocks. Here is one of the daintiest and easiest that can be made. For the foundation cut two circles of buckram and cover with silk of the same color as the ribbon you intend using. Use four or six yards of ribbon according to the size of bag desired. Tack the end of the ribbon to the center of the circle, then twist it and swirl it around in circles until the entire foundation is covered. Pins will have to be used to hold the ribbon in place until the foundation is covered; then the ribbon is tacked and the pins removed. When the two circles have been thus covered they are joined together with the same ribbon. This makes a rose bag similar to a double cockade, and should be swung over the arm.

Hand Knit Frocks Are Chic for Sports Wear

Hand-knit sports frocks for madame and mademoiselle are among the smart knitted garments worn by women who dress well. But if a woman can wield a knitting needle, she can have the same frock at much less cost. Some of the frocks are made in one piece, with low V-neck and plain stocking stitch for three-quarters of the way, and in squares or plaids, as you will, of the knit and puri combination. The skirt ends with a plain hem effect in the stocking stitch. Others are two-piece. Yellow, tan, beige, powder blue, green and white, in one tone or with another color combined, are used for these frocks. The softest yarns should be used. Some of the frocks are embroidered in Angora or brush wool, and still others are trimmed with worsted yarn flowers or conventional designs which are appliqued on.

Draped Fall Hats

Many of the early fall hats are draped on the lines of a tam. A very pretty model of black velvet is embroidered in white silk. The design is large leaves in outline stitch.

And after the dance, if one has light refreshments in the dining room and more guests than one can comfortably accommodate at table, the dining room window seat pleasantly offers itself.

It is possible to upholster a window seat in cretonne or other material in harmony with the rest of the room. This is not essential, except as a matter of personal preference, as window seats may be had in stock designs with excellent wood finish in styles to harmonize with the character of the room. The use of bright colored cushions and upholstered seats, however, is undoubtedly a large factor in the charm of the room and gives a verve that immediately attracts attention. The best kind of upholstery work and a good grade of stuffing is most essential to make the seat cushions comfortable.

Hide Your Waistline When Wearing Sweater

Many women find that the most beautiful sweater does not look well worn over a skirt, because the waistline of the skirt breaks the attractive appearance of the sweater by beginning a space of another color from that showing through the upper part. To overcome this unattractive feature, wear a slip the length of the sweater in place of the corset cover-brassiere or shorter undergarment. The slip can be made loose or tight like a brassiere, but it should be worn over the skirt, covering the waistline, and should reach to within half an inch of the bottom of the sweater. When sleeveless slips are worn over blouses, the blouse should be worn outside the skirt.



Deborah Gazed Frightened into Those Dizzy Depths Below.

yourself, Sanchez! This rock is clean as a billiard table, and there's no place to hide. Where the h—l do you suppose those broncs went?"

"We find 'em when the day comes; they get far in the desert, senior. Where the 'Kid' fall—here?"

Deborah realized that the Mexican had clambered onto the flat top of the rock, and was peering down over the edge, while Meager remained on the sand, impatiently moving about.

"Well, what do you see?" he barked finally.

"Not one d—n thing, senior; black like h—l down there—he no live after that."

Meager laughed chucklingly.

"I'll say he couldn't; not even if he was a cat. There ain't no use our hanging round here. That guy is out of the way, and we'll pick him up an'