

GIFT OF THE DESERT

BY RANDALL PARRISH

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CHAPTER XIV—Continued.

With the instant all strength left Kelleen. The knife dropped from his fingers and he rested motionless, scarcely breathing, his eyes staring up into the dark. He had won; he was not seriously hurt, yet for the moment could not even realize his victory. Yet gradually he knew; the knife he had wielded—the knife—he had killed the man. Whoever he was he had killed him; he lay there now beside him in the dark—dead. The very horror of it started anew the blood in his veins, that dead man lying there, motionless, becoming cold, with open eyes staring up at the tunnel roof. And he had killed him—killed him with the knife. Yet it had been a fair fight, man to man, and one of them had to die. He could breathe better now, and he sat up, trembling and shrinking back from contact with the dead body. He could not see it, but he knew it was there.

Kelleen struck a match, which gave forth at first a dim, spectral light between his trembling fingers, then glowed into a sudden flame. He thrust it forward over the body of the dead man, and stared down at the up-turned face. For a moment not a muscle relaxed, his form that of a statue, as his eyes searched those ghastly features. Where had he seen the man before? That hairy face? Those long, misshapen arms? Dend! Of course he was dead—but who was he? Somewhere in his memory, dim, indistinct, clung a recollection which would not become wholly clear. Then the vision came, his lips uttering a startled exclamation.

"By G—d! I know now; it's Manuel Gomez! It's the ape-man!"

Manuel Gomez—the murderer, the outlaw, the dread scourge of northern Mexico, that bloodthirsty wretch, whose crimes had made him an object of detestation on both sides of the line for years. Manuel Gomez, the killer of women and children, the destroyer of towns, raider, thief, bandit and insurrectionist—the ape-man! Kelleen had never seen him before, but he knew; there could be no other like that, and every story he previously had heard of the fellow came trooping back to his mind in vivid memory—cruel, remorseless, without mercy, hunted like a wild beast, yet ever escaping the tolls, he had left a trail of blood over all that land. Well, he was dead now! Yet how came he to be there? Was this his hiding place? or was the man there for some new crime? If so—what? And Bob Meager? Juan Sanchez? Were they also sharers in his villainy? Could they be members of this fiend's gang? Was it from here he led his hellhounds over the desert and plain?

The recurrence of these names instantly brought back to Kelleen a realization of his own peril. Gomez was dead, killed by his hand. Unwittingly, unknowingly, there in the dark, in desperate combat, he had avenged a hundred murders by the thrust of a knife. But these others—they were still alive; they would surely come. There could be no doubt of that. All that Deborah had told flashed across his mind—her encounter with this same Mexican ruffian—why, she had even described the fellow's long, ape-like arms, but he never once had thought of Gomez—of her creeping onward along the tunnel; the sudden change in its direction, and her stumbling over a dead body in the dark. He recalled the story of her escape, creeping up that narrow passage, through which she could barely squeeze her slender body; the firing after her from below, and her silent shot sent in return; then the desperate struggle which ended on the desert above. And what then? Meager, Bob Meager, going straight to that same hole and calling down for Manuel—using his very name.

Well, there was no Manuel now on guard there, but he could not face these other two alone, and they would surely be there by dawn at least. He arose to his feet, still dazed and confused, hardly able to tell directions, but driven by a wild impulse to escape, to get safely out of that silent blackness, that grave, in which he felt smothered and imprisoned. His groping fingers discovered a crevice in the stone, as though the solid rock had been rent asunder, a deep, irregular gash yawning the length of his arm. He even advanced a step into the strange fissure, wondering at its existence, tempted to explore its secret, when they came! He heard them pressing aside the vines and clambering to the top of the rock which helped conceal the entrance. They did this apparently without fear, with no impending sense of danger, and then dropped to the floor of the tunnel. There were two of them; he could tell that by the sound—Meager and Sanchez. But where, then, was Deborah Meredith!

CHAPTER XV

The Light Goes Out.

Kelleen waited in an agony of suspense, his thought with the missing girl, rather than on his own peril, or the nearness of those men groping blindly toward him in the darkness. That they were surprised, startled at not being greeted by Gomez was plainly evidenced from the first guttural utterance reaching his ears.

"Where the h—l is the fellow?" Meager exclaimed angrily. "I told you I called him from up above and got no answer. Now, by G—d! he isn't even down here."

"Oh, he's here all right. There was

no chance for his getting away without our knowing it. We had our men about here all the time."

"Your men!" Meager laughed scornfully. "Those greasers; they would only be playthings for Manuel. H—l, man! you and your gang couldn't even keep your eyes on 'Frisco.'"

"He sure told me one d—n straight story. He seemed to know about all was going on. I'd heard a lot about him, knew he was a friend of yours, and supposed him all right."

"And spilled all you knew—d—n a Mex, anyhow."

"Well, ain't he?"

"Ain't he what? He ain't nothing just now. I did run with him a bit, of course, down below the line. But



Kelleen Waited in an Agony of Suspense.

he wasn't invited into this game, and his being with Garrity was just an accident. At least I took it that way at first. Now I sorter reckon it maybe was all a put-up job. I ain't exactly made up my mind what the guy was up to—just suspected something was going on, and decided to butt in. I reckon. But, after he got out here snooping around, there wasn't nothing to do but put him out o' the way—specially after he stole your horse."

"I ain't go sure he stole your horse."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I told you before. You're so bullheaded nobody can tell you nothing. I never did think that fellow you shot was alone. He was talking to somebody when we crept up—I heard him."

"Talking to himself; you never saw nobody but him."

"No, I didn't; he was up on that rock against the sky, but there might have been somebody else out o' sight on the ground. You was in such a d—n hurry to get to Casebeer, you wouldn't do anything else."

"Course, I knew the 'Kid' was alone, and after that tumble he took wouldn't bother no more. We had to get Casebeer's gang out of here before daylight."

"I don't know why. You haven't told me much. Why didn't you let the outfit go on? What did you want to unload the mules here for, and then send them back?"

"I didn't get any chance to tell you. It was after you left last night that I got the dope. That's why I had to ride out here myself, by G—d, on my wedding night." He laughed out loud.

"Say, Sanchez, there's some real girl, let me tell you. Think she's knocked me out; rapped me with a gun when I was drunk, and got away. D—d if she didn't, the little vixen. I've got to go back and show her what kind of a he-man I am when I'm sober."

"She got mad at you?"

"Rather that. I thought she was the soft sort, but she's a wildcat. Got me the first swipe, but she'll never find me so dead easy the next time. I'll teach her who's boss when I get this job out of the way. What was it you asked?"

"Why you stopped Casebeer?"

"That's what Garrity came to tell me. He'd got on to something. There's a leak somewhere. We couldn't get the stuff through tonight—a bunch of cavalry are up in Box canyon."

"H—l! What brought 'em there?"

"The judge didn't know. He got it from somebody at the post. The outfit started south, but that's where they were bound."

"You don't suppose they know?"

"Sure not—only suspect that stuff is being run through again along this trail. All we got to do is lie low awhile."

"No one has seen Gomez?"

"He hasn't put his head out of this hole. You haven't seen him yourself, Juan. Come on; he must be back in there asleep somewhere now likely. Keep one hand on the wall."

"Shall I strike a match, senior?"

"No, not here; wait till we turn the bend; then it will not show outside. Can't be long now till daylight comes."

Following the opposite wall they would miss any contact with Gomez' body, and there was nothing he could do but stand and let them pass.

The two men had turned the sharp corner, the slight sound of their movements ceasing to reach his ears. Then the faint glow of a match reflected along the rock wall, the silence broken by Meager's voice.

"There's the lantern, Juan—in that niche, see. Here, turn up the wick."

The flame brightened suddenly, but the outer tunnel yet remained black. Only in the distance the light flickered along the walls, casting weird shadows. One of the men evidently held the lantern up, peering about curiously.

"He's not here, senior; where's the old devil, anyhow?"

They moved forward with the light, and Kelleen, all fear swiftly lost in his intense interest, crept on to the curve in the tunnel, from which point he could see their dim shadows. Behind him, but unnoticed, daylight began to be visible through the mantle of vines concealing the entrance. The dark figure on the floor assumed vague outline. The two men in the lantern glow came to a halt, thrusting the light forward, peering at the object which had attracted them. The Mexican identified it first in a sudden cry.

"It's a body, a dead man," he exclaimed. "He has been killed—Manuel!"

Meager held back, the coward gripping him, but Sanchez bore the lantern forward, desperate to learn the truth. His startled voice came down the passage.

"It's not Gomez," he cried, "and no face I ever saw before. Perhaps you know the man?"

"No; but there has been a fight, or a murder—see, he has been shot; and in the back, by G—d! Gomez must have done this job. But what has become of the old devil? And who was this kid? What was he doing here? See if there is anything in his pocket, Juan. Give me the lantern."

He held it up, as the Mexican dropped to his knees, and began to rummage through the dead man's clothes. The increasing daylight of the desert found entrance far above, and stole down the narrow passage in a faint, ghastly glimmer, which only added to the ghastliness of the scene. The strain was too much for Meager's nerves, and he swore gruffly.

"Come on," he said fiercely; "bring the light. We'll search every inch of this d—d hole."

Kelleen turned, his first impulse being to escape, to rush toward that dim glimmer of light now plainly marking the cave entrance. Yet the futility of such an effort came to him instantly. There was a better way than that, and he whirled back to face them, as the two came cautiously forward, the glow of the lantern glimmering like a red star. The hand with the weapon in it fell to a level, and he fired, the glass flickering into a thousand pieces, the light instantly extinguished.

Kelleen's plan of action had formed swiftly in his mind. He had a glimmering of what this conspiracy meant, but must learn more. Only one method was possible—a confession from Bob Meager. The real secret of this tunnel was in his possession, now that Manuel Gomez was dead. He must be made to talk.

The advantages in this encounter were altogether on his side. He knew them, where they were; they possessed no knowledge of his exact position, who he was, or whether they faced one opponent or a dozen. They had been taken completely by surprise, started by the sudden attack, confused in the darkness. He had both of them absolutely at his mercy.

The silence was intense after that first startled second. There was no movement, not even the sound of breathing audible. The two stood motionless, crouched back against the wall, peering into the blackness from whence that tongue of flame had leaped into their very faces, yet revealing nothing. They could neither think nor act. Who had fired—Manuel Gomez? Some enemy who had trapped them? Were they facing one man, or a dozen? Into what had they blindly walked? Confident of his own safety, realizing that he had the whip hand, Kelleen smiled grimly, every nerve tense, his revolver poised. The situation pleased him.

"Drop your guns, both of you!" he commanded sternly. "Quick now! I've got you against the light."

"Who the h—l—"

"Stop that! Drop them, or I shoot something besides a lantern. It's a hair trigger I'm playing with."

He heard both weapons fall to the floor, Meager cursing impotently, but the Mexican silent. Kelleen laughed.

"Kick them away from you—that's right! Not bad fellows when properly handled, I see. Now up with your hands, and back against the wall there."

He could not see the fellows, not so much as an outline of them, yet knew they obeyed the order. It was a bluff which worked because they half believed themselves silhouetted against that distant gray bar of light far down the passage, targets not to be easily missed. That cool, stern voice, unfamiliar in the echoing tunnel, meant business, rasped like a steel file on Meager's nerves.

"By G—d! Who are you?" he snarled savagely. "What the h—l do you want?"

"The first is of no importance, Meager," returned Kelleen with emphasis. "But I'll answer the latter question. Unbuckle your belt. Go on; I know what you're doing. Yes; take it off. I've got you boys covered; make one false move, and you'll sure taste lead. Now throw that belt about the Mexican—sure I know who you both are; I came here gunning for you two guys—around his arms—now, d—n you, draw it tight! Yes—that's exactly what I mean—strap them to his body—"

Just what happened is not clear. Kelleen could not see; he dare not take a step closer to make sure. The chances are that Sanchez had two guns at his waist. He had discarded one, but the other yet remained. Not certain that he was not outlined against the background of light, he dare not attempt to draw; but now, his hands lowered, as Meager drew the belt about his arms, desperate, bitter with hate, his fingers must have gripped the butt. With one convulsive effort he fired in the direction of the voice. The bullet struck the side wall, sent a splinter of rock tearing into Kelleen's cheek, yet, even as he staggered back half blinded in the flame, he had glimpse of the maddened Mexican, running blindly down the passage. An instant the fellow stood out clear, his head thrust forward, his arms still held by the belt clasp; then Kelleen pulled trigger, and the runner sprawled out, flat and motionless, in the very center of that little pool of daylight.

It was the swift work of an instant, then darkness, and Meager's huge bulk crushed Kelleen against the wall in one mad effort to kill. For a moment the smaller man, taken completely by surprise, struggled helplessly to escape the stranglehold of those clutching fingers. The revolver dropped from his hand, and he was forced resistlessly backward, strangled, unable to tear loose that viselike grip. As the two fell, however, Meager's head struck the rock, the sharp blow so dazing him as to permit Kelleen an instant of relief, a long, fresh breath, the release of one arm. Underneath him, pressing against his hip, lay the gun he had been forced to drop. With desperate effort he gained possession of the weapon, thrusting the muzzle savagely into Meager's side.

"D—n you!" he choked. "Feel that! Get up, or I'll blow a hole clear through you. You dirty brute, to kill you would be a pleasure. Get clear up! Do you know me now?"

The fellow, thoroughly cowed, shrinking back with the point of the revolver still pressing hard against his rib, stuttered, but made no reply. The widening radius of daylight gave Kelleen the outlines of his bulky figure, but features were invisible.

"What! not yet? I'm the 'Frisco Kid'! First you thought you'd double-cross me; then you decided murder would do the job best. Well, Meager, neither plan worked. I'm on to your game, and I'm very much alive. Now I've got you. Like to make a guess why I don't kill you?"

"You—you want me to squeal first."

Meager hesitated, and Kelleen's gun pushed harder.

"You better spit it out, Bob; I'd sure love to shoot."

"Well, d—n you, what's the difference? Garrity told me the fellow was hiding in here somewhere. Manuel

pecially where dark backgrounds are used. In the new imports every shade from pale green to bright red is seen, though, of course, the smart Parisienne follows the dictates of her complexion as well as fashion.

With the color, the influences of

Jacket Blouse Is Gay Fall Fashion

Favored Garment Is Only Slightly Altered for Present Season.

One of the interesting aspects of the fall blouse fashions is the continued popularity of the jacquette, especially for autumn wear, observes a fashion authority in the New York Tribune. The jacquette was worn so extensively during the spring months that it might have been supposed to have had a brief and exuberant flowering and an early death. But such is not the case. It remains with us, but in slightly altered guise.

The snash has to a considerable extent disappeared, and where it stays it is of such soft materials as to make it possible to wear the jacquette under an outer garment. And in the majority of cases it has been supplanted by a buckle at the side after the style of buckles on dresses bearing the side-drape, or in some instances with an inconspicuous fastening of a deep-enfolding belt. At this point the jacquette becomes almost indistinguishable from the costume blouse, which is expected to come into its own with the days of late autumn and winter when the coat suit, fur-trimmed and sumptuous, makes its appearance.

The keynote of the new blouses is elegance either of materials or decoration. There are blouses of dainty, cut velvet and crepes of the heaviest quality. The general lines are the same usually adapted to the straight silhouette, but a new note of Oriental luxury is found in such barbaric colors as Chinese yellow, used not only in embroidery designs but occasionally as a solid color. And there are brilliant and daring combinations of color in which yellow and red predominate. es-

Suit of Black Velvet; Fox Collar and Cuffs



Showing a very beautiful suit of black velvet heavily embroidered in bright green and red beads—collared and cuffed with red fox.

early civilization still dominate the mode. Fashion expresses in a thousand despotisms ways the Persian, the Byzantine, the Karomanian, Turkestan and peasant motifs. However, to one who looks more deeply than the casual observer, it is apparent that flower designs are fighting their way into favor. Flower colors—rose red, gentian blue—are much spoken of.

There are blouses made of silk so printed that they are almost legible. Designers say that at no time can they remember having such demands made upon them for new patterns. The colors are exquisite—an everlasting silken rainbow greets your eye.

Ribbon Powder Cases Made in All Colors

As long as women powder their noses—and who among us cares to look upon them after they cease doing it?—they will carry powder cases, and it goes without saying that as long as they carry them they will continue to make them of ribbon. One of the very latest models is fashioned in the shape of a square envelope with the flap curiously adorned with rosebuds of gold-colored sealing wax and tiny ribbon rosettes in contrasting colors. These cases are made up in all colors, so that one has no difficulty in matching one's frock. Emerald green, coral and peacock blue are among the favored colors.

Gown of Orchid Ribbons

One of the smartest new importations in dinner gowns has a skirt made entirely of horizontal bands of orchid satin ribbon, and a straight sleeveless bodice so entirely covered with ribbon embroidery that it is almost impossible to see what the foundation material is. About half-way down the skirt a band of royal blue faille ribbon appears, encircling the skirt, holding in its fullness slightly, and culminating in two loops on the left side. Another band of the faille ribbon finishes the skirt at the bottom. A few spider web motifs are done on the ribbon with silver and gold threads.



One of the Most Popular Models in Paris at Present.

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Circular Panels and Flounces Brought Out

So anxious have the French designers been to avoid mistakes and to please fastidious Americans that many of them have settled on a compromise in design. This they have effected by giving straight lines a circular treatment.

This may sound incongruous, but there is truth in the statement that nothing is impossible to a French dressmaker. It has been accomplished by the use of circular panels and flounces on straight-line fall frocks. Circular bands and loops without number are employed and the skirts are often gathered or given a circular effect by a slash at the front or one side. Similar decorations are given below a straight-line bodice by wrapped skirts and the apron at front, back or sides is frequently utilized in a similar manner. Circular insets of fur and over-tunics offer opportunities for like effects.

Length is likewise compromised by uneven hem lines, longer at back than front or trailing at the sides. Here, too, the over-present apron comes into play. Skirts for daytime dresses are generally of moderate length, however.

Stenciled Walls Add to Appearance of Home

Colors for stenciling can be bought in various shades at almost any paint store. Get a short bristled brush and before painting starts, see that your colors are thinned as directed. Trim your stencils at the top and side if you are stenciling a frieze about the top of your wall. In this way you can get near the ceiling and into corners.



"Now, Up With Your Hands!"

used to come to him when he needed stuff, but he never was able to track him—he was too d—n smart for the judge. That was what I came up here for, and mostly the reason why I grabbed the ranch—see, Garrity fixed things, because he knew Manuel had a h—l of a lot o' spools stored away. We wanted a free hand. When I came up I fired every American, and took up Mexicans I knew. We run just cattle enough so as to get an excuse for exploring the desert. We knew the d—n slippery cuss was hid around here, but couldn't get onto his hole.

"Well, go on."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Saying illustrated. "Hard lines" murmured the student when he couldn't translate a passage in Homer.—New Haven Evening Register.