

Gift of the Desert



CHAPTER XV—Continued.

"Seems he wasn't doing anything any more, just hiding out; none of his gang with him. It had got so hot for the old devil he was afraid to show his nose above ground; fifty thousand for him, dead or alive, you know—that last raid had got the U. S. after him as well as Mexico, and he was smart enough to lie out here until it blew over. Maybe he never would have got on to him if Sanchez hadn't struck his trail one day by accident over beyond Silver Springs. That led him into this valley, and then he got lost again. After that we kept a watch. It didn't do no good for some time, the old fox was too sly. So finally Garry put up a meeting with him—they had some secret signal arranged between 'em—and in that way we traced out this cave and got him cornered."

"Cave! It's a tunnel, ain't it?"
"I don't know what it is. I've only been here once before—in the dark. What's your idea?"
"That Manuel found 'Alvara's Lost Mine'—it's got all the earmarks."
"The—the 'Lost Mine'! Then—it's worth millions! You—you can't mean it!"
"It's only a guess; let's check that now, and finish up with Gomez."
"Yes, but wait!" exclaimed Meager eagerly, suddenly seeing a chance for himself. "There ain't no use of you making any gunplay with me, 'Kid.' What's the matter with us being partners? There's only three of us know about this—you, Garry, and me. H—I! there must be money enough here to make us all rich; Gomez has got a devil of a lot hid away somewhere, and, good G—d! if this is the 'Lost Mine'—"

Kelleen hesitated, not from any doubt as to his own purpose, but in an endeavor to choose the best method. Meager's plan opened new possibilities; the man must know more than he had revealed, while Garry was apparently even deeper versed in the mystery. Just now both men would be more valuable alive than dead.
"That sounds fair enough, Bob," he replied quietly. "You say the judge is in on it, too?"
"Sure; he got the dope, and you can't play any tricks on Garry. He's coming here this morning."
"Here?"
"That's what. We had a nice little surprise party all made up for Manuel. Only you cooked the goose—"

A low, peculiar whistle echoed through the passage, and Meager stopped suddenly. Again the whistle sounded, evidently from the entrance to the tunnel.
"I reckon that's him," he said grimly.



"I'll Play the Game," He Answered Shortly.

"Now what is it between us, 'Kid'—peace or war?"
Kelleen thrust his revolver back into his belt.
"I'll play the game," he answered shortly.

CHAPTER XVI

The Spoils of Crime.
With eyes long accustomed to the darkness the two men could perceive shadowy objects in the outer passage, where little shafts of daylight penetrated through the tangle of concealing foliage. The walls of the tunnel were gray-tinged and darker objects—perhaps the dead body of Manuel Gomez—shapeless and grotesque, littered the floor. Meager, evidently feeling full confidence in this new

alliance, moved forward, while Kelleen followed, still suspicious, and alert for any treachery. If Garry came there alone he would take the chance; if not, then he would fight the battle out there in the tunnel, asking no quarter, and giving none. Meager stopped, his huge bulk almost blotting out the light.
"That you, Con?" he asked anxiously.
"Who the h—l else would it be?" exclaimed an exasperated voice. "What's going on here? Nobody on watch; I didn't want to come poking in, liable to get shot. Where the devil is Manuel?"
"Come inside and I'll explain; just drop over that ledge; it's only a foot or two to the floor. You came alone?"
The fellow did not answer, but no one followed as he clambered across the barrier of rock. Apparently he could perceive nothing when once within, except the dim, shapeless figures awaiting him.

"Two of you, eh? D—n, but it's dark in here! That you, Manuel?"
"Manuel is dead," explained Meager briefly. "He's been killed."
"Dead! Killed!" The judge pressed his body back against the rock. "What do you mean, Bob? Then who is this other fellow—Sanchez?"
Kelleen took the matter into his own hands.
"I'm the 'Frisco Kid,'" he announced calmly, yet with one hand resting on his gun. "You know me, and that it is all right. I'm in on the deal, that's the only difference."
"Now, see here, Garry," broke in Meager gruffly. "It don't look to me as if there was anything else we could do. The 'Kid' got onto this himself. We both know he's all right, and under these conditions he ought to have his share. H—I! if he don't, I reckon we won't any of us get any. Besides, there's only the three of us left—Manuel and Sanchez are both dead. And say, 'o you know what 'Frisco' says he believes this d—n tunnel is?"

"This tunnel? the cave, you mean?"
"Sure; he says it's 'Alvara's Lost Mine'—and, by G—d! man, if it is, then maybe it's worth millions of coin."
Garry made no response. Kelleen could not discern the expression of the man's face, but was suspicious that his hand rested threateningly on the butt of a revolver. The fellow was treacherous, unscrupulous, miserly even in crime, capable of any act to assure his gain. There was only one safe way of dealing with him—the way of force, the heavy hand. Yet he would make one more endeavor.
"Well, Judge, 'Kelleen said quietly, "how do you like this plan?"
"I'm d—d if I see why I should divide up with you."
"You are rather dull this morning, Garry. I haven't much of a reputation for wasting words, have I? No doubt you have heard the 'Frisco Kid' knows how to shoot when needed? What more explanation do you want? I'm in on this deal, or you are a dead one—that's all. Now say which it is."

No man could have doubted the deadliness of Kelleen's meaning. Garry knew the border code far too well to hesitate.
"Of course you're in. I—I only wanted to understand."
"You've got it clear enough now, but we'll play safe. Your friend Meager here is unarmed, and you will be far better off without a gun—throw it over into that corner."
"And leave you free to murder us both—?"
"Sure, if I decide it's best. Only I don't usually do business that way. You have heard plenty of stories about me, but no one ever said I shot a man treacherously. If you two play square there is no danger; but this is a case of two pitted against one; either one of you would cut a throat for a five-dollar bill. I'll give you a minute—throw away that gun!"

He stood fronting them both, the two between him and the stronger light. His face was emotionless, but the voice speaking was crisp and hard. The two knew him only as a desperado, a border renegade, a man whose willingness to kill had been proven. There remained no choice. Garry, growing forth an oath, flung his revolver into the dark corner savagely.
"Frisk him, Bob; I'm taking no chances this time—a knife, hey! Rather an ugly tool, Garry—do all judges carry them? Yes, throw it over there along with the gun. Are you sure that is all? Now, Garry, turn about is fair play; try your hand on Meager—stripped clean, is he? Better feel inside his shirt; imagine he is a prisoner in your court. Good! Now, I reckon, we are in fair shape to discuss business together. First, gents, let me say this—I haven't the slightest objection in the world to killing both of you on general principles. I know your style, and I'm going to make the present situation perfectly

clear. Both of you are d—n rascals, capable of any dirty deviltry. You'd kill me in a minute if you only had a chance. I don't propose to give you that chance, for I know what my life is worth, and mean to protect it. I happen to need you just now alive, and, if you obey my orders, and answer my questions, you'll go away from here alive. If you don't, you'll be buried here—do you get that?"
"You mean to kill us anyhow after you find the loot."
"No doubt that's your idea. That is what you would do, and you have me ticketed in the same class. Well, that doesn't happen to be my plan at all. In the first place, you've got me labeled wrong. I'm not really after the loot; I'm after you. Do you get that, Garry? Meager here is just a common thief; he's a brute, and therefore dangerous, but a d—n, sneaking coward. All I care particularly about him is to save a woman—"
"What woman?" The surprised question burst from the other fellow's lips before he could restrain it.
"Deborah Meredith, the woman you forced into marriage with you. But Garry here has been the evil genius of this border for the last ten years. There is no crime he hasn't had a finger in. But no one could catch him red-handed. Now I've got you both—got you good and hard. I'm going to bring you in, dead or alive—but alive if possible."
"Who the h—l are you?" burst forth Garry, his face beaded with perspiration.
"My name is Kelleen, a captain of



"I've Been After You Three Months." cavalry; I've been after you for three months."

"Good G—d! then you're not the 'Frisco Kid'?"
"I'm all the 'Kid' there ever was," Kelleen admitted carelessly. "That party was simply manufactured to order; here is where he ends his desperate career. I would have kept the secret awhile longer if I could, but perhaps it is just as well. Now we understand each other, Garry, and the very best thing you can do will be to answer my questions."
Kelleen paused, turning quickly over in his mind what he had better attempt. He felt a profound contempt for his prisoners. Meager, while a physical giant, was mentally no more than a mere cowardly brute; Garry might be truly dangerous—a sly, treacherous villain, but physically unable to cope with him for a moment, and now utterly cowed. While he remained armed, and they were weaponless, he certainly had nothing to fear. His first intention had been to hold the fellows as prisoners, until the squad of troopers appeared; turn them over to the lieutenant in command, searching the cave later at his own leisure. But why wait? It might be an hour, two hours yet, before the soldiers arrived—and then there was Deborah. His thought leaped swiftly to the girl; what had happened to her during those long, dark hours? Where had she disappeared after he had been dashed from the rock? She had evidently escaped discovery; he knew that; had wandered off into the desert doubtless, might be there still, lost in those leagues of sand, struggling for life. The vision called to him, yet he could not seek her until after his men came. These prisoners were far too important to be left unguarded. His duty as an officer held him as in a vise.

But he realized that at that moment a decision that his heart was with Deborah Meredith. He must find her, rescue her, and—thank God!—there was time enough to accomplish this.
"When did you first learn that Gomez was hiding out in this neighborhood, Garry?" he questioned suddenly.
"Six months ago. I saw him in Nogales."
"Privately?"
"Yes; we had some deals together before."
"Told you for protection, did he? What did he want this time?"
"Provisions. I was to get him out grub at night; leave it at a certain spot. That was all."
"He didn't tell you where he was hiding out?"
"No, but he had plenty of money. I didn't get much information out of him; he never did trust anybody. The authorities had run him pretty close. I reckon; anyhow, he was all alone, not one of his gang left. When I couldn't find out anything more, I got Meager to come up here."

"After the older Meager was killed?"
"Sure; that gave us a chance."
"I see; the papers were all in your possession; not above doctoring them, were you?"
"What the h—l is that to you?"
"Not a great deal to me, perhaps, but of some importance to a couple of women I know—one of them a friend of mine. Old Tom Meager left an invalid widow, whom you fellows have, I believe, robbed systematically, and then there is the girl Bob forced into marriage. You didn't suppose I knew about all this. I imagine—well, I'm going to get to the very bottom of it before we are through. But just now I want to use the two of you. We'll find out between us just what Manuel did have hidden away in this hole. Line up there against the wall; face about the other way! Now listen: I've got both guns, my own, and the one Garry threw away; they are cocked and within three feet of your backs. I can't possibly miss you, and if you make one move, except as I tell you, I'm going to let drive. Are you ready?"
"Ready for what?"
"To do as I order. All right, then; light that lantern, Meager. Now there is plenty of light for me to see you by at this distance. Move forward slowly—Garry, you keep your hand on the wall, and you, Meager, take hold of Garry's sleeve; now don't forget; if you do it's sure fatal. Go on slow, a step at a time."

They advanced some ten or twelve steps down an opening scarcely wide enough for the two to pass abreast, Kelleen's gaze wandering from the backs of his prisoners to the gray walls on either side. The light flickered, yet revealed no opening, until they came to the very end, and fronted the solid rock. Even then, for an instant, Kelleen failed to perceive the narrow cleft to the left beside Meager, but the latter, excited by the discovery, thrust the sputtering lantern forward, holding it at arm's length, above a rough stone slab which half barred the way.
"H—l's fire! Look there!" he cried excitedly, almost dropping the light.
Garry craned his neck to see, both men so wild at the sudden discovery as to lose all thought of everything else. Even Kelleen, revolver in hand, and fully awake to the danger of his position, pushed forward far enough to gain a partial glimpse within. Meager started to climb over, but the judge stood motionless, breathing hard, his hands gripped on the stone, his eyes glaring about the oddly shaped room, probably originally a cavern formed by water, but enlarged by the efforts of men. The whole apartment might have measured fifteen feet by ten, barely high enough to stand erect in, the walls varicolored and sparkling in the rays of the uplifted lantern. At the farther extremity lay a pile of debris, scattered rock and powdered stone, as though resting just as they fell after an explosion, the entire end almost totally covered. Protruding from this pile, clearly revealed, now that Meager had found footing inside, and held the blazing wick higher, was the white, ghastly skeleton of a man, his bones still covered with bits of ragged cloth. Caught by a falling rock, he had been pinned there helpless until he died.

The three men scarcely saw all this, or gave it a thought, for there, immediately in front, and all about them, unarranged, scattered in heaps, lying where they had been thrown carelessly over that outer barrier of rock, rested the miscellaneous spoils of a thousand robberies, the sack of churches and towns; jewels torn from women's hands, silver and gold, rich booty of crime from midnight raids, and the burning of cities—the hidden treasures of old Manuel Gomez. It was unbelievable, staggering. What suffering, what death, what cruelty and torture did these things picture! And wealth—wealth! Who could even calculate its value? Bloodstained, crime-gotten, the fruits of fifty years of outlawry, here was gathered, in one vast heap, wealth to make the mind of man helpless to grasp its value.

Garry, digging his fingers frantically into the stone, unconscious of what he did, his eyes blazing with sudden, uncontrollable madness, dragged himself over the barrier. He had lost all reason, all fear; with a mad cry he gathered up into his arms all that he could grasp—golden crucifix, chaliced goblet, a great silver link glittering with pearls, a jeweled bodice blazing in the light—laughed like a fiend as he hugged them close, then staggered on in wild ecstasy, a string of oaths breaking from his lips. Something tripped him and he fell, his arms flung blindly out; a gripping hand struck the lantern from Meager's grasp, flung it, still blazing, a half-dozen feet away. An instant there was silence, a mere flicker of light, which shot along the floor as though on a trail of powder—then a glare and roar, a blast of flame, a report as if a thousand cannon had exploded; and utter darkness.
(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Marble.
Marble is a product of marine sediments and volcanic fires. It is laid down on the sea bottom as shell heaps, which gradually turn into chalk. If the strata should be deeply buried in the rocks, the intense heat of the earth causes chemical elements to rearrange themselves so that they crystallize into marble. Various impurities in the chalk give the marble its various hues.

Qualities Admired in Others.
Cruel men are the greatest lovers of mercy, avaricious men of generosity, and proud men of humility; that is to say, in others, not in themselves.—Colton.



Just a Little Smile

HOW HE KNEW HIM
Captain (in civilian clothes)—Come on, fellow, open the gate.
Sentry opens the gate; captain passes.
Captain—Why the d—l do you let civilians through here?
Sentry—I knew you were an officer.
Captain—How the d—l did you know that?
Sentry—By your manner, sir!—Stockholm Strix.

The Advanced Age.
The modern woman approached the medical man tremblingly.
"Is there no hope of my husband—?"
"Go on madam; . . ."
"Is there no hope, doctor; is there no hope?"
"That depends, madam, on what you are hoping for, said the doctor, reaching for his hat."

A GOOD START.
And has that young promoter cornered your heart?
No; but he is beginning to hand out that "one of our representatives will call upon you" line of talk.

Wants Are Comparative.
"Man wants but little here below," At least so he observes. Comparing what he wants with what He feels that he deserves.

His Quarry Found.
A young Swede appeared at the country judge's office and asked for a license.
"What kind of a license?" asked the judge. "A hunting license?"
"No," was the answer. "Aye tank aye bane hunting long enough. Aye want marriage license."—Freeman's Journal.

Assigning Him His Part.
The Grocer—Mebbe those eggs weren't quite up to grade but I'm too busy to talk about it just now.
Mrs. Chatterton—Who asked you to talk about it? I'm doing the talking. You listen.

Natural Surprise.
Mr. Brown—I had a queer dream last night. I thought I saw another man running off with you.
Mrs. Brown—And what did you say to him?
"I asked him why he was running."—London Tit-Bits.

Disqualified.
The caller begged the little daughter of his hostess for a kiss. "Kissing is only for children," she told him. "Well, aren't you a child?" he asked. "Perhaps," she replied, "but I don't call you one."

A Giveaway All Around.
"I think," she said as she came into the room, "that I will give that parrot away."
"Yes," replied the young man who was calling; "it would only be fit for that. It has been doing as much for you."

JUST SO.
She: I don't know what millionaires see in chorus girls.
He: No—naw—en 'em, either.

Paper.
Paper clothing, paper bags, Paper dishes, paper tags, Paper money for your wage, We live in a paper age.

Vivid.
"Any fish where you are going?"
"So the booklet says."
"Rainbow trout?"
"Well, the author paints them in all the colors of the rainbow."

The Ultra Modern Woman.
She—I sympathize fully with the suffragette movement. I wear knickers and I fence, box, smoke and play football.
He (dryly)—Do you shave, too?

Oh, Girls!
"And so, daughter, you are married?"
"Yes, papa; why didn't you come to the wedding?"
"Oh, shucks! I told my social secretary to send you and mamma an invitation. Oh, well, never mind; you can send your check just the same."

Can't Blame Them.
Visitor—What do the inmates think of the new asylum?
Keeper—They just rave about it.

NURSE FINDS A PERFECT REMEDY

"From my long experience as a nurse I do not hesitate to say that I consider Tanlac Nature's most perfect remedy," recently declared Mrs. I. A. Borden, 425 Pontius Ave., Seattle, Wash. Mrs. Borden is a graduate of the National Temperance Hospital, Chicago, and her wide experience in caring for the sick lends particular emphasis to her statement.
"I have used Tanlac exclusively for seven years in the treatment of my charity patients," continued Mrs. Borden, "and my experience has been that, for keeping the stomach, liver, kidneys and bowels functioning properly and for toning up the system in general, Tanlac has no equal. Recently I had a woman patient who could not even keep water on her stomach for fifteen minutes. Six bottles of Tanlac fixed her up so she could eat absolutely anything. Another patient, a man, seemed unable to digest any food at all. Three bottles of Tanlac put him in such fine shape he went back to work. These two cases are typical. My confidence in Tanlac is unlimited."
Tanlac is sold by all good druggists. Take no substitute. Over 40 million bottles sold.—Advertisement.

Why Not?
If certain medicinal spring waters benefit human beings why should they not be good for horses who have similar bodily structures? So thought a well-known English horse trainer and his ailing horses at Doncaster are now being supplied with water from the famous Harrogate springs, in spite of laughter of his friends. Did not Epsom salts originate in a spring near the famous race course at Epsom? And, is there any significance in that fact?

Too many speak twice before they think.
Does any one know where the dead of night is buried?

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