Gift of the Desert

by Randall Parrish

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"FRISCO KID"

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.

CHAPTER III—Continued.

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She was alone—alone! Beyond law, justice, mercy even, without a friend, a hope; a mere atom left to perish at the will of a brute. Even God had deserted her.

Her wrist watch had stopped, and she possessed no knowledge of the time, yet surely it must be late. The respite now would be short; those who were coming to carry out this mockery could not be delayed much longer. She even hoped now they would come; anything was better than this uncertainty, this horror of waiting.

She wondered where Bob Meager was, and what he was doing. There was no movement about the house, except that of the cook in the detached kitchen. The fellow's regular work would have been completed long ago; no doubt he was busily preparing some sort of feast with which to celebrate the wedding. The wedding! Her wedding! There was the harsh mockery of laughter in her voice as she repeated over aloud the ironic words. Her wedding! Girl-like she had wondered often what it would be like. And now it was here; she was actually waiting the hour, the moment. And the husband; the man whom Fate or the devil had brought to her? He was waiting, too, no doubt, alone in the front room yonder, drinking himself into a reckless courage, becoming a greater demon with every moment of delay. It was too much, too much. The very heart seemed to go out of her, and she buried her face in her arms on the sill, her body shaking with the sobs which could no longer be restrained.

Suddenly her ears caught the distant sound of horses' hoofs through the silence, and she sat up, gasping for breath, once more clutched by fear. Yes, they were actually coming, the end was already at hand; he had not lied to her, not merely threatened—he was really brute enough to carry out the mad scheme. She was upon her feet, standing, motionless and rigid, back beyond view, when the little party rode up to the main door of the ranch house, which opened at their approach, a startling beam of light flashing within.

There were but three in the company, all men. Two of the faces she could not distinguish at all, one a rather trim figure, sitting his saddle like a cavalry man; the other a humping, decidedly ungainly fellow, topped with a broad Mexican sombrero which completely shaded his features. These two remained mounted, but the third man swung instantly down from the saddle, noisily greeting Meager as he stepped into the open doorway. He was a heavily built American, with coarse, bloated face, and wore a scraggly beard. When he spoke he croaked like a frog.

"Hullo, Bob!" he called out, waddling forward. "Well, I got here all right."

"So I see," with no special cordiality in the voice, which was hoarse from drink. "And you didn't come alone, Garrity; who the h—l is with you?"

"Alone!" He sputtered out a laugh. "Did you think I'd ride across that d—d desert at night alone? Not for all the money you got, Bob Meager. Arvan came along with me, an' out here at Silver Springs we run into another old pard o' yours, an' persuaded him to ride on along with us. Ain't that all right?"

"It depends! D—n you, Garrity, I told you this was to be a private affair, didn't I? Who is the fellow you brought along from Silver Springs?"

"Frisco—don't that beat h—l?"

"Frisco! Why, by G—d, I never supposed he dared show up this side the line." He stepped out eagerly, reeling a little from the liquor he carried, yet heading straight toward the taller figure in the dim light. The latter swung down from the saddle and met him, Meager, garrulous with drink, greeting him effusively.

"Say, I'm glad to see you, Kid," he burst forth, "but how the h—l do you dare come here? There is a lot o' guys who'd kill their own mother fer the reward Arizona's got on you. Tryin' to commit suicide?"

"No, not as desperate as that, Bob," answered the other, his voice rather low and musical. "I knew what I was doing all right, and these fellows didn't catch me asleep out at Silver Springs. I knew who they were before I joined up with them. Fact is, Bob, I was headed this way and willin' to have company of the right sort."

"Headed this way? Huntin' me, you mean? What's up?"

"Nothing to worry about tonight. What I came for will wait. Safe for me here, isn't it?"

"Sure," and Meager burst into a drunken laugh. "I've cleaned out the old outfit complete. Come on in, all of you, an' let's have a drink. Hey there, Sanchez," and his voice roared out the order to the bunkhouse. "Take care of these horses."

Deborah, her heart beating wildly, sank down upon a chair, with face buried in her hands. They had come, and there was no hope in them. The judge, the half-breed, were mere puppets, dancing to the voice of their master; the very tone in which he greeted them spoke his contempt of the fellows. Any appeal for mercy to such as they would be but wasted breath. And the third man! The girl had somehow, at first view, hope of him. His trim appearance in the dim light, the pleasant, firm sound of his voice, her knowledge that he was not part of the original conspiracy, had given her a sudden thrill of expectation. But this existed no longer since she heard his name. The "Frisco Kid"; the very sound of it served to chill her blood. Outlaw, desperado, spoken of in whispers along the border; tales of him had reached her ears ever since her first arrival. There was no hope for her in his presence.

Someone rapped gently on the door, and she sprang to her feet and stood motionless, staring through the darkness. The rapping came again.

CHAPTER IV

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The Marriage.

Deborah stepped forward silently, her lips pressed tight, opened the bureau drawer, straightening up once more with the heavy .44 gripped in her hand. The time had come, and she suddenly felt calm and cold.

"Who is there?"

"It's just me, Miss Meredith," answered a woman's voice weakly. "I've got one of my spells again. I—I need you bad. I just thought I couldn't drag myself this far; only I had to."

The reaction left the startled girl trembling, but she had no doubt as to the urgency of the call. Thrusting the revolver back into its hiding place, unwilling that Mrs. Meager should even see it, she swiftly unlocked the door and stepped forth into the dimly lit hall. Her eyes caught one glimpse of her patient's face, ghastly white, but

Directly Fronting Her Stood Juan Sanchez.

with terror rather than pain, and as quickly realized that she had walked into a set trap. Before she could even spring backward, a burly form crowded past her into the opening, completely blocking it, while directly fronting her, grinning maliciously, stood Juan Sanchez. She knew, without seeing, who was behind her—Bob Meager, chuckling in drunken satisfaction. It was the shrinking, frightened woman against the opposite wall who spoke first.

"I—I didn't want to do it," she screamed hysterically. "He—he made me; he—he said he'd kill me if I didn't. My G—d! what do these men want of you?"

"Shut up!" roared Meager angrily. "Run the old fool back into her room, Juan, and shut the door on her. Go on; I'll take care of the girl. Rather fooled you that time, I reckon, young lady."

She looked him coldly, contemptuously in the face, conscious of the struggle to remove the older woman.

"Don't try to remain, Mrs. Meager," she said quietly. "Go back to your room. I can take care of myself."

"But—but, dearie, what is it they want to do with you?"

Deborah laughed bitterly, so desperate by them as to be reckless.

"Marry me to this drunken brute," she explained, "this delightful stepson of yours. There is nothing you can do to help me; so go on back to your room—please go!"

Sanchez, grinning still, as though he enjoyed the task, forced the helpless woman down the hall. He shoved her roughly into her room, closed and locked the door. Deborah heard the fall on the floor within, but her eyes were upon the threatening face of Bob Meager.

"Well?" she said sharply, "you seem to have won the first round?"

"You bet I have. There wasn't no need breaking in, while there was an easier way. So you ain't going to make no row?"

"I have not said what I mean to do."

"An' I don't give a d—n," roughly. "Only I'd like to know whether you're going along by yourself, or whether we got to drag you? It's one or the other of them two things."

"Along where?"

"To the living-room, of course. That's where I aim to have the ceremony pulled off."

The girl thought quickly. Resistance there and then was absolutely useless. Both men were armed, and one of them, at least, was crazy drunk. It would be better to appear to yield, to seem reconciled to the inevitable. She was weaponless, unable to put up any defense; perhaps in the larger room some better opportunity for action might present itself. If she lulled their suspicions, led them to believe that she was conquered, she might be able to snatch a revolver from some holster, or even evade them and rush back to the safety of her own room. It was a grim, ghastly chance, but she could think of none better.

"I prefer going there by myself," she said, wondering at the steadiness of her voice, watchful of the expression on Meager's leering face. "No! don't touch me; don't dare to touch me."

The fellow laughed, but there was a snarl in his tone.

"All right; so the cat has still got claws, has she? Well, I guess I can wait putting hands on you; it won't be for long. Go on ahead, then. Come along, Sanchez."

In spite of her trembling limbs the girl walked firmly, never so much as turning her head to glance at the two behind her. She must act her part, play her character, persist them to think her indifferent to results, yet in no way afraid. Without a question she opened the door herself at the end of the narrow hall, and stepped into the room beyond. There were two men in the room, the short, thick Mexican called Arvan, sprawling on a settee, and the judge, sunk into the easy chair, where old Tom Meager had sat for so many years, calmly smoking a pipe. At their entrance the fellow got upon his feet and bowed, the pipe still in his hand. Deborah looked anxiously about for the other—the "Frisco Kid"—but he was not in the room. Then, ignoring the hand Garrity held out, her eyes fastened upon the face before her. She never before had seen a countenance more repulsive or so deeply marked by dissipation, and her heart seemed to choke her before the sudden stare of those pig eyes and the bestial grin of the thick lips.

"You—you are the justice from Nogales?" she asked doubtfully.

"That's what I am; Judge Cornelius Garrity, ma'am, at your service."

"And you were asked to come out here to marry me to Bob Meager?"

"Maybe so, if you are the girl."

"I am Deborah Meredith. I want to appeal to you, Judge Garrity, as an officer of the law, to refuse to perform this marriage—"

"Refuse! I refuse Bob? Why, it's all straight enough; I've got the license here all made out regular with your name on it."

"That is just the point. That license was procured without my consent or knowledge. I repudiate it; I refuse to assent to it in any way. I have never agreed to marry Bob Meager. I am here now under threat, and I appeal to you for protection."

"My dear young woman," he began hoarsely, "I was told before coming here that you were somewhat temperamental, and might therefore desire not to proceed with the ceremony. I shall not be swayed in any way by such tantrums. My own duty is plain; the papers are in correct form; Mr. Meager assures me that he had your consent, and has acted in accordance with your own wishes in the matter. It is too late at this hour to change your mind. I trust you will see the justice of this and make no further objections."

"Oh, cut out the hot air, Garrity," broke in Meager, surging forward, unable to control himself any longer. "Let her rave if she wants to; it don't hurt none of us, I reckon. You came out here to do up this job for me, and the sooner it's over with the better. The law of Arizona don't say anything about whether the female consents or not, does it?"

"Well, not directly, Bob; that's implied, rather."

"Implied, h—l! You go on and imply it then, pronto. I ain't organizing no debating society, you d—n pot-bellied idiot. I'm here to marry this Deborah Meredith; that's what I'm paying you for; an' [illegible] tend to her tantrum[illegible]

"You mean to f[illegible] you?" she asked, h[illegible] ing to combat his.

"Sure," he replied [illegible] supposed you'd do [illegible] kick. But that's [illegible] business."

"But such a mar[illegible] legal; no court wou[illegible]

"Legal! Courts [illegible] tired. This ain't C[illegible] here in an Arizona [illegible] remember ever car[illegible] law says, since I [illegible] my law, when it co[illegible] he suggestively slap[illegible] ster on his hip, "an' [illegible] tells me what I sh[illegible] sha'n't. You better [illegible] all. Legal! Well, I [illegible] what it was the [illegible] you? He's got the [illegible] the authority. Her[illegible] according to law. [illegible] you going to do? [illegible] is going to take you[illegible] ed, against the four[illegible]

The Startled Mexican and Meager Collide.

and he grinned suggestively, with a drunken leer, "after tonight, I don't reckon you'll be wanting the court anyway; you'll be so glad you've got a husband. Come up closer, boys, so you can see the whole show—Garrity is going to place us now, without no more words about it."

The judge stared his [illegible] taking a pretty slipper paper from [illegible] in his grubby fingers.

"Bob, [illegible] you right, miss," he said, with an effort at dignity. "He's sure got the law with him, an' the witnesses."

"But I refuse to marry him; I do not consent," she insisted with trembling voice.

"I ain't got nothing to do with your personal quarrels. There for you and Bob to settle. I reckon every married couple has them. You just stand there an' face it."

She was pressed back against the table, helpless to move, too thoroughly bewildered and dazed for the moment to attempt any action. Sanchez had deserted the door he was guarding, and stood just behind her, grinning cheerfully. Arvan was opposite, his dark, half-breed Indian face exhibiting no emotion, while Meager had planted himself at her right, his bloodshot eyes scowling into her own. Garrity began to read, but she only heard him dumbly, her mind inactive, comprehending not a single word. Then suddenly, consciousness came back as though something had snapped in the numbed brain, the words sounding clear, distinct: "I pronounce you husband and wife, and whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder."

With a single sharp cry, she sprang wildly backward, jerked herself free from Sanchez' hasty grip, and dashed headlong for the door leading into the hall. The startled Mexican and Meager, springing forward to intercept her flight, collided, cursing and striking at each other in that instant of confusion, while she flung open the door and swept out, untouched, into the hall. Her mind contained but one thought as she ran—her own room, the weapon in the bureau drawer. She could defend herself there; kill herself, kill him, if necessary! He should never touch her—never! She was free now, and would be helpless in his hands never again. She would die first, die gladly, but Bob Meager would never possess her alive. The drunken oaths behind spurred her on, strengthened her resolve. She ran, never glancing back, straight to the entrance sought, flung it open and sprang within, slamming the door shut behind her and feeling desperately for the key. It was not in the lock, nor could she find it lying on the dark floor beneath. Drunk as Meager was, he had thought of that; had seen to it that the way to her apartment would be left unguarded. The girl turned, her heart beating rapidly, and crossed to the bureau. Thank God! he had not discovered the gun, and she swung defiantly about, the weapon gripped in her hand.

"Well, I'll be d—d, if I don't believe it's a woman!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

THE KITCHEN CABINET

(©, 1923, Western Newspaper Union.)

Plenty of room for schools and balls, plenty of room for art;
Plenty of room for teas and balls, platform, stage and mart.
Proud is the city—she finds a place for many a fad today,
But she's more than blind if she fails to find a place for the boys to play.
—Dennis McCarthy.

SUGGESTIVE IDEAS

Place a few lumps of charcoal in the corners of the ice chest to absorb odors and keep the air sweet.

If shoes pinch, wring a cloth from or dip it in very hot water and apply to the spot that pinches. This will expand the leather and remove the tightness.

Mending china. In homes where choice and cherished china is broken, one does not wish to throw it away. Try this method of mending it: Mix a teaspoonful of powdered alum in a tablespoonful of water and set in the oven to become transparent. Wash the broken edges in hot water and while still warm coat the broken edges thinly and quickly as it sticks instantly. China thus mended will stand hot water and ordinary usage.

In placing the bird boxes to call the feathered friends to our homes it is wise to learn the height at which different birds enjoy their homes. The martins and swallows like to build at least twenty feet from the ground, while the bluebird and wren prefer an elevation not more than twelve feet.

Never soak fresh fish in water before cooking; it destroys the flavor and softens the flesh.

Use tartar emetic around the places where ants enter. It is a poison—so keep it away from pets and food.

Line bureau drawers with wall paper and cover your handboxes; they will look as smart as the expensive boxes bought at the milliners.

Use the oil of citronella around you if troubled with mites and mosquitoes. Pennyroyal is another good oil to keep away insects.

Turn the warm layer cake or loaf cake out on a cloth covered with a rose geranium leaf or two. It will be delicately flavored and scented.

If a tape needle or hodkin is not at hand use a small safety pin to draw in the ribbons in the lingerie.

And who was I to resist, withstand
That claim of fragrant gloom?
A summer night, like a thousand [illegible]
Or lay the blame on the orange flowers,
You know how sweet they are.

EVERY DAY GOOD THINGS

In small families where roasts will be left over, it is a problem to use the meat acceptably with no waste.

Lamb Pot-Pie.—Brown pieces of leftover lamb in bacon fat and finely-cut onions, adding one cupful each of celery, carrots and potatoes, all diced. Cover with water and cook until tender. Thicken the gravy with flour, season well and pour into a well-greased baking dish. Cover with baking powder biscuit and bake in a hot oven until the biscuits are brown. Serve from the dish.

Duchess Potatoes.—Peel and boil enough potatoes to make a pint when mashed. Mix them with the yolk of an egg, two tablespoonfuls of melted butter and the same quantity of cream. Turn this mixture on a pastry board and press it flat and smooth. With a sharp knife cut the potato paste into squares of uniform size, remove with a pancake turner to a greased baking sheet. Set in the oven to set, sprinkle with grated cheese of any kind and bake a delicate brown.

Any leftover cooked ham, put through the meat grinder, mixed with a bit of green pepper, a spoonful of peanut butter and enough salad dressing to moisten, will keep a week or more if in the ice box, making delicious sandwich filling.

Raisin Date Sandwiches.—Take two cupfuls of raisins, one cupful of dates, a little lemon juice. Mix the finely-chopped fruit, moisten with the lemon juice and spread on slices of buttered bread.

Melon and Peach Cocktail.—Cut the muskmelon into balls with a French potato cutter and the peaches into slices, then cut with fancy cutters—use one-third peaches and two-thirds melon. Arrange in tall sherbet glasses and pour over a strup made of lemon, orange or pineapple juice with a tablespoonful of powdered sugar. Garnish with a sprig of mint.

Date Fruit Tarts.—Cut into pieces one cupful of dates, add one-fourth cupful of chopped walnut meats, one-half cupful of chopped raisins, the same of chopped orange peel, one-fourth cupful each of brown sugar and honey, two tablespoonfuls of melted butter, and one-half cupful of water. Cook all together for five minutes. Fill pastry shells and top with a meringue. Sprinkle with coconut and brown slightly in the oven.

Nellie Maxwell

STATE'S SCHOOLS MUST ADVANCE

Dr. Becht Says Better Housing and More Attention to Elementary Work Needed

HIGHER PAY FOR TEACHERS

Interesting News Items, Briefly Condensed, Picked Up at the Departments Which Are of Interest to the People of the State.

Harrisburg, Pa. — Importance of proper housing facilities, the development of elementary education and more attention to individual instruction are stressed by Dr. J. George Becht, the new State Superintendent of Public Instruction, in a statement of policy issued from his office.

The new superintendent called attention to the fact there are 1,650,000 pupils enrolled in the public schools of Pennsylvania and first of all they must have proper buildings and teaching force. He calls for regularity of attendance and for better preparation of teachers and says nowhere is there greater need for study and development than in the rural and elementary school field.

"There are in round numbers, 1,550,000 pupils enrolled in the public schools. In their interests the whole machinery of our school system is organized. A program of education first of all must provide for this army of children proper housing facilities and an adequate teaching equipment. It must see to it that the children attend school regularly. The teaching force must be adequately paid and should be large enough to insure as much individual instruction as possible. Increasingly the teaching force must become better prepared and to that end the normal schools, schools of education and summer schools will be called upon to make a very significant contribution. The high schools—both junior and senior—must have their courses adjusted to fall in line with the best educational thought and practice, and such instruction must equip the boys and girls for the places they are to take in the world."

Soldiers' Home Head Approved.

Appointment of the Rev. A. W. Anderson, pastor of an Easton Baptist Church, to be superintendent of the Erie Soldiers' and Sailors' Home, was approved by Gov. Gifford Pinchot after a personal call paid by the new superintendent. He succeeds Captain William A. Martin, who retired. Auditor General Samuel S. Lewis, a member of the board, accompanied the new superintendent to the office of the governor.

Largest Oak Tree in State.

The largest oak tree, which State Forestry Department representatives have found in the State, has been located on the farm of the late Dr. Samuel Gregory, near Neffs Mills, Huntingdon county. The tree measures almost forty feet in circumference at the base, is eighty-four feet high and has a branch spread of 106 feet. The tree belongs to the group known as the "Bur Oak" or "Mossy Cup Oak."

Will Fight Japanese Beetle.

Mobilization of the State's bug fighting forces will be ordered as a result of the first reports of appearance of the Japanese beetle in sections of rural Philadelphia. The reports state discovery of some specimens of the dreaded insect and they have been identified here. As a result some quarantine regulations of strenuous character will be put into effect. This will be done in conjunction with federal and county authorities.

Don't Want New Jersey Moth.

State Bureau of Plant Industry agents have started inspecting shipments of trees from Massachusetts on reports that New Jersey found numerous gypsy moths in shipments from the same state. Over 500 consignments to Pennsylvania must be run down. The last place the State caught the moth and his kind was in Cambria county several years ago.

Burgess Has Deciding Vote.

Elections in councils of boroughs which have delayed organization and choice of officials in numerous small municipalities of the State in numerous instances will no longer cause deadlocks owing to approval by the governor of a bill authorizing the burgess to cast the deciding ballot. The laws have heretofore been silent on this subject, although many cases have been heard of. The new act makes it mandatory on the burgess to attend the meeting and cast the ballot.

Revenue in Fishing Change.

An increase in revenues estimated at between $50,000 and $75,000 for the year is forecast as the result of lowering the age limit for the issuance of fishing licenses, the Department of Fisheries announced. The number of resident fishing licenses issued last month exceed by several thousand the number issued for the same month in 1922. The department announced that several thousand permits for the use of outlines had been issued and that requests were being received at the rate of about 100 per day.

FAMOUS AUTHOR PRAISES TANLAC

Popular Song Writer Declares It Ended Indigestion and Restored Perfect Health.

E. Fortunato, nationally known songwriter and publisher, of No. 8 Fifth St., Philadelphia, in expressing his gratitude to Tanlac recently, said: "The Tanlac treatment helped me so much I consider it worth many times its cost.

"I suffered from a severe case of indigestion with continual pains in my stomach," declared Mr. Fortunato. "My food disagreed with me and did me little good. I always had a bad taste in my mouth, and splitting headaches kept me miserable. My wretched condition continued getting worse for months till a friend advised Tanlac.

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Jinks—Young Sapleigh doesn't seem to think so. He makes my parlor a darkroom every time he calls.

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