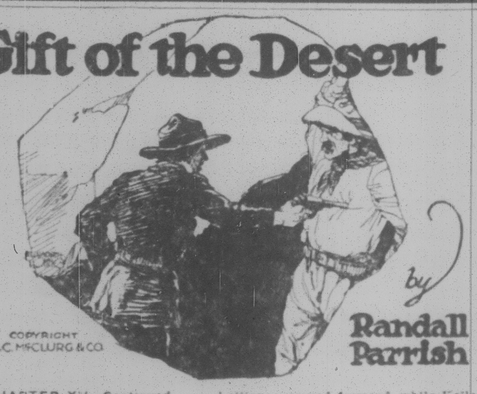
Gift of the Desert



by Randall Parrish

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CHAPTER XV—Continued.

—15—

"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 we 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 Garrity 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 chuck 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, Garrity an' me. H—ll 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 Garrity 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 Garrity. 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. "Now what is it between us, 'Kid'—peace or war?"

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

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—one 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 Garrity 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, Garrity," 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—ll! 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."

Garrity 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, Garrity. 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. Garrity 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. Garrity, growling 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, Garrity—do all judges carry them? Yes, throw it over there along with the gun. Are you sure that is all? Now, Garrity, 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 devilitry. 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, Garrity? 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 Garrity 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 Garrity, his face beaded with perspiration.

"My name is Kelleen, a captain of cavalry; I've been after you for three months."

"I've Been After You 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, Garrity, 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; Garrity 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 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, Garrity?" he questioned suddenly.

"Six months ago. I saw him in Nogales."

"Privately?"

"Yes; we had some deals together before."

"Paid 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 Garrity 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—Garrity, you keep your hand on the wall, and you, Meager, take hold of Garrity'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.

Garrity 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 variegated 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 resulting just as they fell after an explosion, and almost totally covered. Projecting 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 bursing 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.

Garrity, 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, flinging 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.

PENNSYLVANIA BRIEFS

Thomas Cook, aged 50, was electrocuted at the Pancoast mine at Troop when he came in contact with a live wire, and his son was badly shocked when he attempted to rescue his parent.

Lancaster thugs held up and robbed Ikke Miller and H. C. Killian of about $75.

William S. Kuhn, 11 years old, of Akron, was mysteriously shot in the right leg while returning from gathering nuts.

The Pottsville school board decided that school districts from other parts of this county which are having scores of pupils educated in the Pottsville schools must pay up their tuition, due for several years, or the children will not be allowed to go to school there.

"Spiked fruit" was discovered when Allegheny county detectives raided an alleged moonshine plant near Gibsonia and arrested Barnett Shelain upon a liquor violation charge. In this plant, the officers said, they found row after row of glasses filled with plums and other fruit. The skin of the fruit had been punctured and liquor injected into it.

Sealers of weights and measures in Pennsylvania save about $64,000,000 annually for the people of the state, J. Wilbur Crezier, of Johnstown, told delegates attending the annual convention of the Pennsylvania Association of Weights and Measures, in Washington, the speaker declared. Another speaker of the day was R. W. Smith, of the bureau of standards, Washington, D. C.

The highest producing grade cow in Pennsylvania is believed to be Josephine, owned by A. W. Young, of Somerset county. According to figures announced by I. O. Sidelman, in charge of cow testing association records at State College, she produced 17,797 pounds of milk and 6301 pounds of fat in twelve months. The total value of the milk was $635, and the net profit to the owner after deducting feed cost was $400. The cow is six years old.

Swerving his motorcycle to avoid an automobile, William Ickes, of Altoona, ran into a post, fractured his skull and died in a few minutes.

Three hundred and forty-five aliens were granted citizenship papers in the Scranton federal district court, and only one applicant was refused.

Mrs. Sarah Keener, 78 years old, celebrated her birthday by assisting to put away the tobacco a the home of her son-in-law, Matthew Douglass, at Conrads.

Lancaster county will celebrate its 200th anniversary with a fair or exposition at least national in scope in 1928. Preliminary plans were indorsed by members of the Lancaster Rotary Club. The organization will act as a medium in forming a fair commission.

Hazleton police have no clew to the whereabouts of Mrs. Patrick Verona, charged with kidnaping her 11-year-old daughter, Katherine, from a local school where she was a pupil. Mrs. Verona was divorced some time ago by the Schuylkill county courts, which gave the father custody of the child. Verona and his daughter since had lived with his mother in Hazleton. Mrs. Verona is said to have come here from Amsterdam, N. Y., and taken the child out of school on the plea that she was wanted at home.

Approximately 2500 men are to be employed on the $5,000,000 dam project, which the Pennsylvania Power and Light company has undertaken at Wilsonville, near Hawley. This is 100 more persons than the normal population of Hawley. The dam is being constructed to furnish power to a giant hydro-electric plant. The reservoir to be created by the dam is to be known as Lake Wallenpaupack, and its circumference, including the coves, will be about fifty-four miles. The Hawley division of the Pennsylvania Power and Light company includes several chartered companies in Wayne, Pike, Monroe, Lackawanna and Luzerne counties.

Philadelphia as a medical center has been signally honored in being chosen by the medical section of the League of Nations as the model city in America in which to study public health conditions. The section, which is perhaps the most representative medical body in the world, will meet here for two weeks beginning November 11. Arrangements for the visit of the delegates and a program for their stay are now being formulated by Dr. J. Blair Spencer, director of the department of public health.

Eight persons were injured and cut by flying glass when two street cars collided in a fog on the Greenwood Hill of the Scranton Railway company. Lawrence Lynch, one of the motormen, was the most seriously injured and was taken to a hospital. The cars met head-on in the fog, throwing more than fifty passengers into a panic.

A total of $161 has been contributed in Mifflin county to the Pinchot enforcement fund of the W. C. T. U.

Gloria, 3-year-old daughter of Raymond Ramsey, of Reading, is in a critical condition as the result of swallowing a safety pin.

Regis Belter and Peter Kopchak, of Portage, were killed and two other men injured by a fall of rock in a mine.

Plans for a sanitary sewer system and treatment works for Elizabethtown and the Masonic Home have been approved by the state department of health.

The Union Paving company of Philadelphia has signed the contracts for two asphalt paving jobs in Pottsville, which will be rushed to completion this year.

Twelve-year-old Michael Matrone of Hazleton, lost three fingers from his right hand when he exploded a cap he had picked up at a fireworks display.

Stealing an automobile from the garage of Harry Herr at Engleside, near Lancaster, burglars robbed three places along the Lincoln Highway. A large quantity of shoes were stolen from the store of E. P. Kemmer, of Paradise. Myrtle Stein, proprietor of a restaurant near Gap, reported the theft of stores rob her place, and the Mount Vernon Hotel near Gap, also was robbed.

To make death sure, George Bridge, of Washington, D. C., who went to Connellsville a short time ago, used both a rope and a revolver in his suicide.

Captain Harry A. Kurtz, of Lebanon, commander of battery H, 213th coast artillery, Pennsylvania national guard, forwarded his resignation to Adjutant General Beary.

When her clothing caught fire as she was assisting her mother in jelly-making, Miss Agnes Travis, aged 20, of South Connellsville, was probably fatally burned.

The Parade street business section of Erie was threatened with destruction by fire when flames swept through the large store of the Stanley Furniture company, Twelfth and Parade streets, and leaped across two streets, causing damage to a score of buildings. The Stanley store was completely destroyed with its contents with a loss estimated at $150,000. Damage of $50,000 was caused to adjoining property.

A tentative program of addresses which Governor Pinchot will deliver during October, announced at the governor's office in Harrisburg, provides for speeches in Reading, Wilkes-Barre, Erie, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, as well as several cities outside the state. On October 3 he plans to attend the 175th anniversary of Reading, and the next day will go to Philadelphia to attend the world's dairy conference. He is scheduled to speak before the state convention of the Women's Christian Temperance Union at Erie October 8, and the next day to attend the session of the State Federation of Women's Clubs in Erie. On October 11 the governor expects to go to the Columbus Day celebration in Pittsburgh, and on October 14 to a citizenship conference in Washington, D. C.

William Minor, negro, who pleaded guilty to a charge of selling drugs was sentenced to pay a fine of $1000 and serve four years in the workhouse by Judge H. H. Rowand, in Pittsburgh. In passing sentence, Judge Rowand said: "You have ruined many lives and the court must do its part in putting an end to the activities of men like you."

John Hazar was murdered as he stepped from a gambling house in Verona, according to the police. The assailant escaped. Hazar, the police reported, had been gambling and they believe a disgruntled loser killed him.

The Franklin branch of the Wild Life League received thirty cans of small catfish, which will be placed in French creek, Sugar creek, and Big Sandy creek. Within a few days a large consignment of bluegills is expected.

On the plea of insanity George Ribarovich was found not guilty by a Lebanon county jury of the murder on the night of May 12 of Steve Wessmere and Mike B. Bongavic. Ribarovich ran amuck in the foreign colony at Annville and, after fracturing Lazo Volatic's skull, stabbed Wessmere and Bogavic.

G. A. Miller, a general foreman of the West Penn Power company, pleaded guilty to false pretense and the fraudulent conversion of $83,000 in criminal court in Pittsburgh, and was sentenced by Judge Josiah Cohen to serve not less than three years and ten months nor more than eight years in the penitentiary. Miller had charge of sixteen gangs of men working for the company in remote sections of Western Pennsylvania, Maryland and West Virginia. Since 1915 he had placed fictitious names on the payroll, the court was told.

An indignation meeting held by forty employes of the state highway department who have received no pay for three weeks. On investigation they found that the supply of blank checks which must be forwarded to the treasury before their vouchers can be made out had become exhausted.

Buried beneath an avalanche of dirt when the sides of a cellar which he was digging gave way, Andrew Chesonick, aged 52, of the West Side, Wilkes-Barre, was rescued by fellow-employes. Though suffering from severe injuries of the back, it is believed he will recover.

Harold E. Patrick, aged 9 years, died at the home of parents, Mr. and Mrs. Leroy H. Patrick, in Charleston, near Phoenixville, from internal injuries which he received several days ago when he fell about six feet from the mow of his father's barn, when he and several other boys were playing there.

Louis, 5-month-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. George Grsham, of Easton, was found dead in bed, where she had been sleeping with her mother.

Governor Pinchot announced the appointments to the following state boards: Public school employes' retirement board, Samuel Goodyear, Carlisle; board of examiners of public accountants, Frank W. Main, Pittsburgh; board of teterinary medical examiners, Dr. H. B. Cox, Philadelphia.

Dorothy Ferrick, aged 17, was killed at Sharon when she was struck by an automobile as she alighted from a street car.

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