

The Desert Moon Mystery

CHAPTER I

The Cannezianos

I knew, that evening in April, when Sam got home from it at all and came stamping snow into my kitchen, his good old red, white and blue face stretched long and wide in its usual grin, that he had brought some bad news with him.

"I had a letter today," he said, "from the Canneziano twins."

I am like a lot of folks who say that they are not superstitious, who just happen to think that it is bad luck to walk under a ladder. More than likely the shivery, creepy sensation I felt when Sam said that, was due to the cold he brought in with him, and was not due to the fact that those words of his were the forerunners for all of the grim mysteries and the tragedies that made the Desert Moon ranch, before the end of July, a place of horror.

"How much do they want?" I questioned.

"No, Mary; they want to come here to live. Danielle wrote the letter. She says they want to come here and rest, indefinitely. She says she longs for it with all her soul, or something like that."

"Danielle," I said, "always was the best of the two. You going to let them come, Sam?"

"Anything else for me to do?"

"Not a thing—for you. There'd be plenty of others. Those girls are no kin of yours. Let me see—eight years old when they were here in 1895, makes them twenty-four years old now, according to my figures. Why a couple of women twins, aggregating forty-eight years, should decide to come here and rest their souls, at your expense, is beyond me."

"I have plenty."

"So has Henry Ford. Why don't they get rest their souls with him? They've got as much claim on him as they have on you. None. Leave those girls rest their souls right where they are, Sam."

"No—I don't know, Mary. I guess I'll write them a letter and tell them to come along. Lots of room."

I didn't argue any more about it. For twenty-five years I had been housekeeper of the Desert Moon ranch, and I had learned, during that time, that there was only one subject, concerning Sam, or the place, on which I could never hope to have any say-so.

When Sam wanted to keep the children, he offered to adopt them. Margarita would not consider it.

When Margarita died, in France, seven years after she had paid us her blackmailing visit, Sam, the mimic, wrote to Canneziano and again offered to adopt the girls and give them a good home on the Desert Moon. He got a few insulting, insinuating lines for an answer. Canneziano had his own plans for his daughters, who had developed into rare beauties.

But, if Sam was soft with the women, he was not soft with Canneziano. He had showed up here, beaming and broke, about three years ago. He had left, suddenly, after having seen Sam and no one else, less beaming but quite as broke as he had been when he had come. I thought, maybe, Sam was forgetting that side of the family, and that this might be a good time to remind him.

"Is Canneziano planning to come on later, too, and rest?" I asked.

"Just at present he is in San Quentin, serving a three years' term. Danielle didn't say for what devilry. His term's up this summer. Poor little girls," Sam went on, "I reckon we haven't any idea of what they've been through, all these years."

"I reckon not," I agreed. "But they aren't little girls any more. Seems queer to me, with all the beauty they father was bragging about, that neither of them has married. Twenty-four is getting along."

"I'll bet," Sam answered, "it is because they have never had any decent opportunities. Considering the life that they've had to lead, and all, I think it speaks pretty well for them that they have come through straight and clean."

Instead of asking him how he knew that, I said, "You'd be willing, then, to have John marry one of them?"

John, Sam's adopted son, was the apple of Sam's eye. He would have the ranch, and Sam's fortune, other dependents provided for, when Sam died. Whether or not the girl he married would be contented to live on the ranch, and help John carry it on and keep up its traditions, making it one of the proudest spots in Nevada, was a slightly important thing to Sam.

He waited so long before answering my question that I was sure I had hit the nail on the head.

"John," he finally said, "is old enough to take care of himself."

With that he turned and went out of my kitchen, not giving me a chance to say that, though I had lived through fifty-six years, I had never yet seen a man at the age he had just mentioned, who came to the Desert Moon, they would bring trouble with them. I was right. A merciful Providence be thanked that, for a time at least, the knowledge of how terribly right I was, was spared me.

I am not an admirer of men. Looking at most any man, I find myself thinking what a pity it was he had to grow up, since as a little, helpless child he would have made a complete success.

Sam Stanley is different. There is some of the child left in Sam, just as there is, I think, in any good man or

ters one day, and had Sam invite him up to the house to play. She accompanied him on the grand piano that Sam had bought for her.

Before long, Dan Canneziano was spending a good part of his time at the ranchhouse. Sam, being nobody's fool, soon saw how the land lay; but he, according to his custom then and now, kept his mouth shut and his eyes open. Sure enough, one evening they tried to elope together. Sam went after them and brought them back. The three of them had about half an hour's talk together. Then Sam herded Canneziano down to the outfit's quarters and, I suppose, told the men to keep him there, for there he stayed until Sam was ready for him again.

The next morning Sam started to the county seat. He reached there that evening. The following morning he got his divorce. He came back to the Desert Moon on the third morning, with his divorce and with a preacher. He sent for Canneziano, and stood by while the preacher married Margarita Stanley to Daniel Canneziano, decent and regular, according to the laws of Nevada.

There it should have ended. It didn't, because Sam never got over loving Margarita. So when, nine years later, she came back to the Desert Moon, with twin girls, Danielle and Gabrielle, and said that Canneziano had deserted her and the children Sam took them all right in. I don't know, yet, whether or not they took him in.

Certainly he did not show much surprise when, in about ten days, Canneziano put in an appearance. Sam allowed him to get a good start with his threats, and then he took him across his knees and gave him a sound spanking, and passed him over to Margarita to dry his tears, and washed his own hands and went fishing.

That evening he had one of the men hitch up and take the whole kit and caboodle of Cannezianos to Rattail in time to catch the east-bound train. I am ashamed to say that Sam gave them money. I don't know how much. A tidy sum, I'll be bound, for shortly after we heard that Canneziano had opened the finest gambling house south of the Mason and Dixon line, in New Orleans.

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by Kay Cleaver Strahan

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woman—a little seasoning of simplicity, really, is all it amounts to—but there is a quality about Sam that makes a person feel that he set out, early in life, to follow the recipe for being a man, and that he has made a thorough job of it.

Why he, as a young man, with a pretty fair education and a tidy sum of money left him by his father, who had been a well-thought-of lawyer in Massachusetts, should come out here to Nevada, take up his homestead land, and settle content for the rest of his life, has always been more or less of a mystery to me, unless you take Sam's explanation of it.

He says that, while his father died, it left him without a relative, whom he knew of, in the world. He was twenty years old, and he owned a set



He Left Suddenly After Having Seen Sam and No One Else.

of roving toes and an imagination. So he went to California, seeking romance and gold. Finding neither, he came down here to Nevada.

He staked out his hundred and sixty acres with Boulder creek tumbling and roaring through them. He built his cabin. He hired help, and built fences, and dug ditches, and planted crops, and bought stock. He bought more land. He hired more help, dug more ditches, planted bigger crops, bought more stock. He has been doing that regularly ever since. And, of course, he located the lead and silver mine, on his property, that made him millions if it made him a cent, before it played out. But, in spite of the money that "Old Lady Luck," as he called his mine, made for him, Sam never gave his heart to it. It was the Desert Moon ranch that he loved, and the money he made from it that he was proud of. That was why, when the honor of the ranch went under, during those terrible weeks last summer, Sam all but went under with it.

After Margarita left the place from her visit of 1903, taking the twins with her, Sam went around for a week or two, with his head cocked to one side as if he was listening for something. I knew what he was missing, and I was not surprised when, one day, he told me he had decided to send to San Francisco and get a couple of children and adopt them.

He wrote to a big hospital in San Francisco and got in touch with a trained nurse who would be willing to come up and live on the ranch and take care of the two children. He had her go to an orphan's home and select the children and bring them with her when she came.

The nurse came early in September with two brown-eyed children named Vera and Avila. Sam at once re-named them. John, he said, was the only name for a boy, and Mary the only name for a girl. But since my name was Mary, he would let the little girl have Martha, which meant, according to Sam, "Boss of the Ranch."

The nurse's name was Mrs. Ollie Ricker. I don't know how old she was then. I don't know how old she is now. She never talked. I do not mean that she never chatted, or gossiped, or that she never said one as good a description as any I can give of John at twenty-five, if you will draw his height up to six feet, and put on weight accordingly.

The papers from the orphanage gave Martha's age as five years; but even I, who knew less about children than it was decent for any woman to know, soon saw that something was wrong. She walked well enough, but she could scarcely talk at all. Her ways and her habits were those of a two-year-old infant, yet she was far too large for that age. Before she had been with us a week I knew that Martha was not quite right in her mind.

Mrs. Ricker knew it, too. Her excuse was that she had chosen Martha because she was so pretty; that she had had no opportunity to judge her other characteristics. She insisted that she thought, with proper care, Martha would develop normally.

I knew better. Sam knew it, too. But, when I begged and besought him not to adopt her, he brought out an argument good only to convince for him.

"I don't adopt her, and take care of her," said Sam, "who the heck would?"

So adopt her he did. And he spent a small fortune on doctors, specialists, for her. None of them could do anything. It was, they said, a hopeless case of retarded development. So, at twenty-one years of age, Martha, though the care and doctoring had given her a fine healthy body, had the mind of a child five or six years—not too bright a child, either. That was a bad nut. At present—Vera no more. Entirely harmless, the doctors said; but I always had my doubts.

CHAPTER II

Arrivals at the Ranch

It was three years after Mrs. Ricker came to the ranch, bringing John and Martha, that Hubert Hand put in his appearance. He had got Mr. Indian Chat Chin, as everybody called him, to bring him up from Rattail in his old surrey.

Mr. Indian Chat Chin stopped his old nag at the entrance to the driveway, and Hubert Hand climbed carefully down and came up the road, swinging a walking cane like he was leading a parade.

Sam and I, as was our custom, went walking down to meet him.

Phrase "Stone Age" Not Literal in Application

The Stone Age is a term commonly used to denote the earliest recognized stage in the development of human culture as defined by the materials used by man for weapons, utensils, etc. The phrase is somewhat misleading, since it is probable that primitive man made use of wood and other perishable materials to a far greater extent than of stone, and consequently the stage is defined by the prevailing material of the relics, not by that of actual implements in common use. The term "Stone Age" represents in no sense a chronological division of human progress, but is a loose equivalent for a stage of cultural development varying widely in duration in different parts of the world. There are, e. g., tribes still in the Stone Age, while, on the other hand, some groups had outgrown it before the dawn of history.

It is also worth noting that some tribes commonly classed as belonging to the Stone Age produced objects of a superior artistic and industrial merit to those who had advanced to the use of metals. The evidence for the existence of such an age in most parts of the world is conclusive, but it is from the prevalence and character of the relics in certain parts of Europe rather than in America that the idea and term have come into general use.

Famous Song Not Burns'

Although the words of the song for "Auld Lang Syne" appear in Burns' works, he himself admitted that he wrote only the second and third stanzas. A song of the same title can be traced to the latter part of 1600. In a letter to George Thomson, September, 1793, Burns says "One song more I have done, 'Auld Lang Syne.' The air is but mediocre but the following song, the old song of the olden times, and which has never been in print or even in manuscript until I took it down from an old man's singing, is enough to recommend any air."

Mark of Gentleman

We are just men and women dealing with just ordinary human beings like ourselves. Let's treat them just like we would want them to treat us. Consideration for others is the distinguishing trait of the gentleman.—P. S. Zirkwright.

Man Hooks Fish as It Is Eating Bird

Garden.—Earl Ansell did not kill two birds with one stone but he has a recent accomplishment that rivals it. While fishing he landed a nine-inch trout which had a bird in its mouth, the wing of which was still protruding. The fish's appetite was sufficient to cause it to grab the worm before it had disposed of the bird, a small one which had not yet fully feathered out.

WIFE IS SILENCED BY COURT DECREE

Forbidden to Speak to Husband Seeking Divorce.

Des Moines, Iowa.—A wife's tongue was stilled by court order recently. The decree was meted out by Judge Lester L. Thompson, who decided that if Mrs. Josephine Hawkins had any more to say to do she must direct her remarks at somebody else besides her husband, Nelson Hawkins.

The order was issued by Judge Thompson on application of Mr. Hawkins who filed suit for divorce a short while before. Hawkins' counsel complained that Mrs. Hawkins had threatened her husband with death and had made abusive remarks that "shook" his nervous system.

The application asked that Mrs. Hawkins be restrained from speaking to the plaintiff or molesting him in other ways. Mrs. Hawkins was further ordered by the court to allow Hawkins to "pack his trunk in peace" without interference from Mrs. Hawkins.

Hawkins declared that he wanted to leave the premises he and his wife occupied, and that she had prevented him from obtaining his belongings.

In his divorce petition, Hawkins charges his wife with cruel and inhuman treatment.

Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins were married at Baltimore, Md., July 21, 1924, the divorce petition stated. Both have been residents of Des Moines for more than a year.

Storm Produces Miracle

When Lightning Strikes

Budapest.—During a recent thunderstorm, lightning played havoc in a wayside calvary in O-Buda, a suburb of the city. The station representing Christ on the cross between the two thieves was struck. Although the figure of the unrepentant thief was smashed to fragments, the figure of Christ was unharmed, and the lamp burning perpetually beneath it remained alight.

The incident, which is regarded as little short of a miracle, is attracting crowds to the spot to search in the bushes for fragments of the smashed figure. The finders are confident that they will be preserved from being struck by lightning—a commoner form of death in Hungary than in countries farther west.

Rooster With Freak

Bill Upsets Thieves

Canton, Ohio.—Four men made the mistake of stealing a young rooster with a deformed bill.

Sheriff Ed Gibson of Stark county was baffled by a series of chicken thefts until Ben Steiner, a farmer residing near Smoketown, reported that a rooster whose beak was twisted until the upper part formed a circle was among twelve stolen from his coop.

Deputies saw the missing fowl on a meat stand here and learned James Merritt, thirty-one, had sold it to the dealer. With Merritt the deputies arrested Sherman Schilling, thirty-one, and Jess and Delbert Deardorff, brothers, age twenty-one and seventeen.

The four men confessed.

Bedtime Tale—Bunny

Bit Naughty Python

Lincoln, Neb.—When he was turned by mistake into a pen with rattlesnakes and a 15-foot python at the state fair here, a little white rabbit cowed the rattlers in one corner and then bit the python. Since he already had dined, the python overlooked the insult and the rabbit swaggered out of the cage into the hands of an astonished keeper.

Dog Goes to Jail With Master; Escapes Fine

Kansas City.—Arrested on a charge of driving while intoxicated, Pearl Couch was protected by his bull dog, Prince, who defied police, refusing to be separated from his master. They occupied a cell together.

Appearing for trial without the aid of Prince, Couch was fined \$25, sentenced for 30 days on the municipal farm.

Kills Giant Rattler

Lynchburg, Va.—Mrs. Lucy Stinnette recently killed a rattlesnake on Chestnut mountain, which had 23 rattles. She brought the rattles to Lynchburg as proof of the age of the snake.

Uncle Saves Niece

New York.—Her uncle, Lawrence Decker, twelve years old, saved the life of Lorraine McGinn, four, when her skirts caught fire from the sparks of a bonfire.

TO BE CONTINUED

YOU HAVE A DOCTOR'S WORD FOR THIS LAXATIVE



In 1875, an earnest young man began to practice medicine. As a family doctor, he saw the harm in harsh purgatives for constipation and began to search for something harmless to the sensitive bowels.

Out of his experience was born a famous prescription. He wrote it thousands of times. It proved an ideal laxative for old and young. As people saw how marvelously the most sluggish bowels are started and bad breath, headaches, feverishness, nausea, gas, poor appetite, and such disorders, are relieved by the prescription, it became necessary to put it up ready for use.

Today, Dr. Caldwell's Syrup Pepsin, as it is called, is the world's most popular laxative. It never varies from Dr. Caldwell's original effective and harmless formula. All drugstores have it.

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Removes Dandruff, Stops Hair Falling, Restores Color and Beauty to Gray and Faded Hair. 50c and \$1.00 at Drugists. Hilcox Chemical Works, Patchogue, N. Y.

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HEAD NOISES Leonard EAR OIL

USED AT NIGHT MAKES SORE AND INFLAMED EYES DISAPPEAR BY MORNING.

At Druggists or 372 Pearl St., N. Y. City.

ROMAN EYE BALMS

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At Druggists or 372 Pearl St., N. Y. City.

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Wright's Indian Vegetable Pills are not only a purgative. They exert a tonic action on the digestion. Test them yourself now. Only 25c a box. 372 Pearl St., N. Y. Adv.

Not So Cheap

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