The Desert Moon Mystery

by KAY CLEAVER STRAHAN

SYNOPSIS

Sam Stanley, wealthy owner of the Desert Moon ranch, tells his bousekeeper, Mary Magin, that his former wife's twin daughters, Danielle and Gabridaughters, Danielle and Gabrielle, are coming to the ranch to live, their mother being dead and their father, Daniel Canneziano, who had been the cause of Sam's divorcing his wife, in the penitentiary. Sam has adopted a boy, lohn, now grown to manhood, and a girl, Martha, physically healthy but weak-minded. Mrs. Olile Ricker, Martha's nurse, lives with them. Hubert Hand, a wanderer, and Chadwick Caufield, John's wartime buddy, an a wanderer, and Chadwick Cau-field, John's wartime buddy, an expert ventriloquist, are the oth-er members of the household. The girls arrive. Mrs. Magin has cause to believe there is a sin-ister motive in the twins' pres-ence at the ranch. John becomes engaged to Danielle, Caufield shows a pronounced liking for Gabrielle.

CHAPTER IV

The Cabin

The girls had been on the Desert Moon a little better than six weeks when, one evening. Sam came out into my kitchen where I was setting bread. "Mary," he began, real solemn for him, "the ancients used to have cities that they called cities of refuge. No matter what a fellow had done, if he could get inside into one of those cities, he was safe. Your kitchen always kinda seems like that to me-a city of refuge." "Lands, Sam," I said, "what have

you been up to that you are heading this safety first movement?"

"I haven't been up to anything," Sam answered, "and I don't aim to be. But, Mary, some time ago you came to me with some suspicions. I laughed them off. I am not laughing now I'm worried. Queer things are going on around here. What I want to know, now is what do you know?"
"Nothing. What do you know?"

"What do you suspect, then, Sam?" "Nothing. What do you?"

That, I see now, wouldn't have been a bad place for us both to laugh.

Neither of us did. "Have you any idea," Sam ques tioned, "why the girls go prowling all over the place, afoot and horseback,

daytimes, and nighttimes, too, when they should be in their beds?" "Well, all I know is fust what I've known all along. They are hunting

for something." "Sure they are hunting for some thing. But what?"

"I don't know. But whatever it is, they are going to use it to get revenge, to injure maliciously somebody." "Revenge, h-11" Sam said.

"Have it your own way. Only I happened one night to hear Gaby say to Danny that they had come to this ranch for the purpose of revenge."

"Revenge, h-1!" Sam repeated bimself. "Unless they are sore at me about Canneziano. What else did they say, when you happened to overhear this revenge remark?"

If he was ready, at last, to listen I was more than ready to tell what little I knew. I told; even to confess. ing about hiding in the clothes closet. "Well, well," he drawled, when I

had finished my story, "we are probably making a mountain out of a molehill. I wouldn't go pussy-footing around after them, any more, if I were you, Mary. There's a screw loose somewhere, that's sure; but it is not in the Desert Moon's machinery We've got nothing on our consciences

Don't need to worry! Sam and I, sitting in that peaceful kitchen, talk, ing so smart and frivolous, and deciding that we did not need to worr; is a memory I could well be shed of We didn't need to worry a bit more than if I'd used arsenic in my covered pan of bread; not a bit more than if there had been a den of rattlesnakes in the curboard under the sink or gasoline instead of water in the tank on the back of the stove. That is how safe and peaceful we really were a that minute. If we had had sense enough to know it. When I realize that four weeks from that very eve-

But I guess it would be better to tell things straight along, as they hap It seems to me a good book cannot be hurried, any more than good cake can "Mix and sift the dry ingredients," is the way all recipes for

For bree days, beginning with the Fourth of July, there was to be a big celebration and rodeo at Telko. Sam suggested at noon on the sec

ond of July while we were at dinner that maybe all of us would like to go: all, that is except Martha and himself. Celebrations were never good

I spoke right up and said to count me out. I know the deserts in July But the boys were enthusiastic about it, and Danny was interested. Gaby. coming in late, greeted the idea with

the same enthusiasm with which a! woman greets moths in the clothes

"Whence the crave for a Fourth of July celebration?" she asked. "We have never seen a rodeo," Dan-

"Go, by all means," Gaby said. Buy pink lemonade. March in the

parade. Ride in the Liberty car. Mrs. Magin would be stunning as the god-dess of Liberty, with—" "Don't let my stunningness stop anything," I said. "I am not going."

"We'll think it over," Danny said. "It would be a long, hot ride. Probably we should all have a pleasanter time, right here at home." But there was something in the way

she had said it, too quickly in an swer to a look from Gaby, that made me think there was more to her backing out of the plan than had appeared on the surface. Gaby nad just begun her dinner. The rest of us had finished; so, according to our custom, we excused

ourselves and went our ways. Chad tried to stay with Gaby, but Martha fussed and insisted that he come with I had a sure feeling that Danny would return, and that she and Gaby would have something to say to each other. I went into the kitchen, stepped back into the pass-pantry, and

opened the pass-window a crack. Just as I opened the window I heard John say, "I thought Danny was in "No," Gaby said. "But won't you come in and talk to me?"

"About-this." I dared not peek, so I did not know what she meant until she said, "Why won't you kiss me?"

"Shall I say, I don't want to pick flowers in Hubert Hand's yard?" "I hate you!" "Don't be sore at me, Gaby," John

said. "But I'm telling you, that's a lot nearer the truth than-than what you usually say." John was one of the poorest talk-

ers ever heard. One of those strong, silent men supposed to abound in the West, and who are likewise supposed count. If John's did, they counted "My dear, haven't I proven over and

over again that I love you? In every way. I have made myself ridiculor here, because I haven't been able to conceal my feelings for you." "I think," John said, "that most of

that stuff you pull is just to spite Danny. It doesn't spite her, though. She knows she's the only girl in the world for me. I wish you'd cut it out—all of that, Gabby. Won't you, and just be good friends?" "You'd not want me for an enemy,

"Getting at anything, going any place, Gaby?"

"Perhaps. If Danny should hear that you have made love to me-" think Danny would take mine, if it came to a showdown. Listen here. child; don't you try to make trouble between Danny and me."

"Meaning?"

"Nothing. Except that it wouldn't be healthy for anyone who tried it." "Boo-oo! Dangerous Dan McGrev stuff? Out where men are men? loose tonight-all that, eh, Johnnie?"

A door opened. "John." came in Danny's voice, "uncle is looking everywhere for you."
"What," Damny questioned, when

the door had closed behind John, "made you both look so angry, just

"Never mind. Are you going to that fools' celebration, with only a day or two left, now?"

"I suppose not, if you don't want me to. I'd love going. I know there is no use in staying here." "In other words, you would sacrifice my future for a rodeo? I more than

half believe that you know-' "What possible object could I have?" "Many, my dear. Very many Phough I think that getting rid of me would outweigh the others. Listen to me, Danielle Canneziano, if I thought that you were keeping this from me. in order to bury me alive in this God-

forsaken hole, and force me to watch "I've been a fool! Why can't I earn to take into consideration your Dan. Don't fancy for one instant that

d-n moralities? Understand failure is going to keep me here. Did you think, with a weapon like that in my nands, that I'd stand for anything less than a fifty-fifty proposition? Our original plan would have been better -easier, simpler. But I'll have my share out of this, anyway. So, if you

"Gaby,"I don't know. I'll swear that I don't. How could 1? But surely you wouldn't-wouldn't attempt-"

"That is for you to say, darling." Darling, as she said it then, was as wicked a word as I had ever his

"Give John to me. I've changed my here, and settle down, and do an imitation of a moral, model wife that

> would satisfy even you." "Gaby, you speak as if John were a child's toy, to be passed about. I couldn't give him to you, if I were willing to."

"You could, and you know it. You won't. So, that's that. But keep your righteous fingers out of my life; stop your d-n preaching, and meddling. I would better come with me."

"We've searched that cabin a thou-

sand times." "All the same, it is the one logical place; far removed, and under cover." The cabin is the one Sam built to live in when he first came to the val-

ley. It is up Boulder creek, about half a mile from the ranchhouse. Sam has kept it in repair, inside and out: owing, I think, to sentimental memories, though he declares it is because he dislikes wreckage on the place. When John and Martha were little things, Sam used to hide their Christmas presents up there, under the shelf in the kitchen. The shelf, about three feet wide, is

built across one end of the kitchen. It served Sam for a table, pantry, and sink. Being a man, he built it right handily, like a chest, so that the entire top of it had to be raised to get to the storage place underneath. There was no secret about it. All anyone had to do, was to move everything off the top of it, and lift the lid. But had read how the hardest problems for detectives always turned out to be something that had been too simple to notice; so my plan was to go up there and raise the lid.

On my way, I met the girls coming home. I imagined that they looked at me with suspicion. I passed a remark about the sweet-smelling clover hay, and hurried right along.

Half an hour later, when I was expecting instant death at any minute. thought about that sweet clover smell, and how unappreciative I have been of it, and of the blue sky and fresh air, and of the green things, lighted yellow with sunshine, and I took a vow that, if I ever did get a chance to enjoy them again, I would spend the remainder of my life in so doing, and in being grateful to the Creator of them.

In the cabin, I went at once to the kitchen; and, removing fish-baskets, fly-books, and reels from the shelf, lifted it back.

I am sure that I had expected to find it empty. What I had not expected to find, and what I certainly had never hoped to find, was what was there: any number of neatly wrapped packages, addressed to Mr. Sam Stanley, sent by express, and labeled, variously, "Danger." "Explosives." "Handle with Care."

It did not take any common sense to know, straight off, that, sent to him or not, Sam was not mixed up in any "I have never made love to you. It business that had to do with explosives, bombs, and Bolshevism. It was easy enough to remember, then that been making the trips down for the mail, expressage, and supplies. Just as he came into my mind, I

of animals with some means of self-

preservation. The bold overcome the

enemy by fighting "tooth and claw";

the timid escape by rapid flight. Some

creatures take shelter behind a plat-

ing of armor; others rely mainly upon

their protective coloration. Some in

ject deadly poisons; others emit nau

seating fluids and even electric shocks.

But probably the most remarkable

of all methods of evading the enemy

is that of shamming death; and one

need not necessarily travel beyond

the confines of one's own garden for

proof of the fact that some creatures

do sham death, for quite a number

of caterpillars, spiders, toads and

snakes are addicted to the habit, says

is a well-known fact that cer

M. D. D. in the Times of India Illus-

tain hirds will pretend to be lame or

wounded in the wing in order to draw

away intruders from the vicinity of

Had Few Nerves in Teeth

Study of the teeth of the saber

tooth cats and of the giant wolves

that lived and died in prehistoric

times, has shown why these animals

and their descendants knew no such

Examination of teeth found in as

phalt pits in California revealed that.

n every case, the teeth of an adult

of the species had only a scanty sup

ply of nerves. As the animal grew

ip, the root canal, which is the main

route for the nerves into the only

chamber of the tooth, became com-

paratively shut off.-Popular Mechan

trated Weekly.

things as toothache.

ever did a more foolish thing than I lid then. I climbed into that chest. along with those packages, and lowered the lid down over me. If I had any idea, I suppose it must have been a desire not to let him know that I had discovered his secret-his and Gaby's together, undoubtedly-but I

can't remember having any thought at all until, just as the lid closed, I remembered the sad poem about the bride and the mistletoe chest. Then 4 heard, through the thin boards, Hubert Hand, talking to some have me lead him?"

ne, come into the kitchen. I chose death by suffocation or combustion. "My dear woman," were the first words I heard from him, "you may set your mind at rest. I am not going to marry the girl. I am not a marrying man, as you know; and, if I were, she wouldn't have me."

"You leave her alone, then. Understand me. Leave her alone.

If I believed my ears, that was Mrs. Ricker's voice; that was Mrs.



Am Sure That I Had Expected Find It Empty.

Ricker, not only talking, but talking like that to Hubert Hand.

"You flatter me." he said. "Jealous, still, after all these years? I told you that I wouldn't marry her and that she wouldn't have me. if I were willing to."

"Wouldn't she, though? Wouldn't she? She is mad about you. She can't look at you without love in her eyes. nor speak to you without love in her voice. She tries to hide it; but she can't hide it from me. I know. She

I am not sure whether I read it, or whether I figured it out for myself; but I do know it is a fact that no woman ever accuses another woman of being in love with a man unless she could imagine being in love with him herself.

"As to that," Hubert Hand said, what possible difference would it make to you, Ollie?" "Only that I would kill her, and

you, too, before I would let her have "Easy on, there, my girl. Your last attempt at murder-at least I hope that was your last attempt. was not,

you may recall, very successful." "I would be successful another

ed, in there by explosives, and out Sam had not been to Rattail for the there by people who talked of murder past ten days; that Hubert Hand had as calmly and as comfortably as if they were discussing moss-roses, very quiet did not seem half quiet enough.

They went into the other room of heard his voice. It was a startling the cabin and stayed there for a few coincidence; but I need a better ex- | minutes. I could not hear what they

ground dove, the ruffled grouse, the

green plover and the wild duck are

among those that practice this art of

deception. Among birds that actually

sham death may be mentioned the

So Simple

Mrs. Suburbs, who was absorbed in

romance of the Seventeenth century,

"George," she remarked, "listen to

this: 'By my halidom, exclaimed Sir

Percival, "it is past the hour of 12!"

"What do you suppose it is?" he re-

sponded. "Doesn't the context tell

you? Sir What's his name said it was

past 12 by his halidom, didn't he?

Well, I should have thought anybody

could have seen that halldom was the

Sight Influences Handwriting

If the average handwriting of a

person with normal vision is taken as

standard, that of the individual suf-

fering from nearsightedness will be

found to be much smaller and that

of the farsighted individual much

The nearsighted person does no

realize that his writing is small, for

he sees it enlarged, and the farsighted

person does not know that he writes

large, for his eyes reduce the image

Pointer for Executives

B. C. Forbes

If you encountered no difficulties.

office boy could take your place .-

Now, what is a balidom, George?"

suddenly looked up at her husband.

land rail and the water rail.

Feign Death to Escape Its Actual Visitation

Nature has provided the majority | their eggs or young. The American

were saying, but I did not budge an window, and was sure that they had left the cabin, I remained, very quiet, longer before climbing out of it. I was progressing toward home,

shivering in every bone, limping, since both my legs had gone to sleep, when Sam, riding his bad-tempered bronco named Wishbone, came up behind me

"Corns bad, Mary?" he questioned. "Want to climb up on Wishbone and

"When I go to meet death," I told him, "I sha'n't go on the back of a nasty-tempered bronco. Considering that everyone on the Desert Moon is at this minute, in mortal danger of their lives, all your lighthearted jestting seems pretty much out of place."

I told him, then, about the packages of explosives hidden under the shelf. I had not told him about my climbing in with them; so I was in no way prepared for his actions.

He stopped. He dropped Wishbone's bridle. He put both his hands on his stomach and leaned over and burst into uproarious laughter. "Ho-ho-ho." it rolled out, seeming to fill the entire

"Fireworks," he gasped. "I got them for Martha. Going to surprise her on the Fourth. Sent for them months ago. Hid them up there. Ho-ho-ho! I told you to stop pussyfooting around, Mary. Ho-ho-ho! 'Do not look for wrong and evil, you will find them if you do-" With as much dignity as a heavy

voman, with both of her legs asleep, could muster, I turned and left him. His words and his actions had certhis time on, I would tell Sam Stanley When I got back to the house, John

was driving up the road in the sedan. He had been to Rattail for supplies and for the mail. He tossed the mailbag out to me and drove around to the kitchen door to unload. There was a letter for Gaby, postmarked France. About a month before this, Gaby had received another letter that was a duplicate of this one; the same gray paper, the same sprawling handwriting. Instead of taking it indifferently, as she did other letters, and reading it wherever she happened to be, she had snatched it out of my hand and had run off to her room. All that evening she had seemes to be preoccupied, and worried. Sending only two letters in close to two months, it seemed to me that whoever had written them did not write unless he or she had something of importance to say. I was still puzzling over it, when Gaby came into the room

Sure enough, she snatched it out of my hands, just as she had done with the other letter, and ran straight upstairs with it. When John and Danny came in.

few minutes later, I went upstairs. Habit stopped me at Gaby's door for a minute, with my ear to the keyhole. Faintly, sounds don't come plainly through our thick doors, I heard the portable typewriter that she brought with her when she came to the ranch. click, clicking away.

I was tuckered and tired. So, after dephoning some instructions to the kitchen, I took plenty of time to tidy myself up. I dawdled in my bath, and I cut my corns, and rubbed hair tonic into my scalp. But, when on my way downstairs again, I stopped for a sec ond at Gaby's door, the typewriter was still going. There was nothing to be made out of it, so I went along. It was fortunate that I did, because, be stairway, Gaby's door flung open and she called to me, with something in her voice that made me shake in my

I turned and looked at her. He face wore an expression that was pot human; an expression that would have made any decent woman do as I did, and turn her eyes quickly away "Tell Danny to come up here," she

I hurried off downstairs, and de livered the message to Danny who was with John in the living room. "What's the matter, Mary?" Johr questioned, when Danny had gone up stairs. "You look as if you had seen

"I think." I answered, "that I have -the ghost of Sin." "Doggone that girl," he said. "I wish she were in Jericho." "Gaby, you mean?"

"You're darn right. She's causing all the trouble around here." "What trouble?" I asked, just for a

"I don't know-exactly She keen Danny miserable. But that isn't it, or not all of it. Don't you seem to fee trouble around here all the time? thought everyone did. I do, Gost knows." "I know," I said. "I feel it, too.

think Sam does, though he won't alto gether admit it. Just the same, John there isn't a thing we can put our "I suppose not. Sometimes, though when I see Danny looking as she

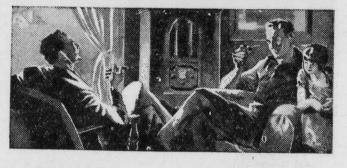
looked when she went upstairs just now. I feel as if it would be a good thing if somebody would put their fingers around that vixen's throat." "John," I spoke sharply to him, 'don't say things like that. You don't mean it. It is wrong to say it."

I was sure that he did rot mean it. I was sure that only the voice of one of his rare ugly moods had spoken, and that the wicked thought had died with the wicked words But from that day to this, I have never repeated these words to a living soul. Because that was the way that Gaby was murdered: choked to death, with great brutal bruises left on her throat. (TO BE CONTINUED)

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terrupted performance month after month, year after year. This holds true for the millions of Atwater Kent Radios sold in

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Since Chief of Motor Vehicles Shook started the fad, California has gone questionnaire crazy. They have them for everything anyone can think of. In Fresno, it was thought to be a good idea to acquaint the children with the traffic rules, especially the ights of motorists and those of edestrians. Naturally one question

"What is a pedestrian?" To this question a girl gave the "A pedestrian is a girl who won't

The Real Question Father-I shall allow my daughter hundred a year when she marries. Prospective Suitor-That's very fair

ir. And what were you thinking of

lowing her husband?-London Opin-

Why, You Idiot! Herbert-Would you marry an idiot or the sake of money? Rita-Oh, this is so sudden.

Everything Fixed for Speed in Elopement

The modern Romeo was making arangements for eloping with his Juliet. "Now, darling," he said, "we'll run ver our schedule for the last time. The car will be at the door just be fore midnight. You understand that?" "Yes, precious."

"I'll creep round to your window and throw a handful of stones up against it to let you know I'm there. Do you follow me, swetheart?" "Absolutely, my own." "You will the creep downstairs

ready with it when I arrive, won't She nodded. "Quite, dearest," she replied. "Moth-

with your suitcase. You'll be quite

er is packing it for me now!"

Better Had Mabel-Now that I'm all dressed, where shall we go? Jack-Er, let's go swimming.

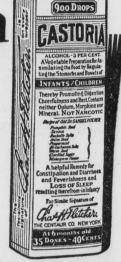
People with sharp tongues make

cutting remarks.



Children hate to take medicine as a rule, but every child loves the taste of Castoria. And this pure vegetable preparation is just as good as it tastes; just as bland nd harmless as the recipe reads. (The wrapper tells you just what When Baby's cry warns of colic,

a few drops of Castoria has him soothed, asleep again in a jiffy. Nothing is more valuable in diarrhea. When coated tongue or bad breath tell of constipation, invoke its gentle aid to cleanse and regulate a child's bowels. In colds or children's diseases, use it to keep the system from clogging. Your doctor will tell you Castoria



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Clan

MICKIE

FINNE

THE FE