

# The Desert Moon Mystery

by **KAY CLEAVER STRAHAN**  
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## SYNOPSIS

Sam Stanley, wealthy owner of the Desert Moon ranch, informs his housekeeper, Mary Magin, that his former wife's twin daughters, 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's adopted boy, John, has grown to manhood, and a girl, Martha, weak-minded, Mrs. Ollie Ricker, Martha's nurse, Hubert Hand and Chadwick Caulfield are the other members of the household. The girls arrive, John becomes engaged to Danielle, Gabrielle seeks to win John from her sister, and her actions when she receives a letter from France mystify Mrs. Magin. Sam learns Canneziano is soon to be released from the penitentiary. Mrs. Magin finds Gabrielle, choked to death, with tobacco ashes beside her. She realizes that the ashes must be from Sam's pipe, he being the only pipe smoker, and conceals them before calling the household. Chadwick commits suicide. The coroner's verdict is murder and suicide. Sam finds a note left by Gabrielle confessing he killed Gabrielle, but the rancher proves he could not have done it, and the entire household is under suspicion.

## CHAPTER VIII—Continued

"I know. I thought it was only her disappointment. But now—Who could be quite sane with such a fear confronting her? Yet—she left all of her things in order; as if, deliberately, she prepared for death. She burned her papers and letters. See—" Danny pointed to the fireplace.

I crossed the room and looked into it. Papers had recently been burned there. I took the poker and stirred in the fluttering, black bits; but nothing had escaped the flames.

"I believe," said Danny, "that you are the only one in the house who hasn't looked at what Gaby had in her bag—"

She walked to the table by the window. I followed her, I dreaded seeing that bag again; but I was curious about its contents. It was lying limp on the table.

She picked it up, brushed it flickeringly with the tips of her fingers, and blew on it, as if she were trying to blow something off of it. "Everything," she explained, "sticks to the like pointed beads."

"I looked at her from her and looked at it closely; but I could see no speck of ash, no minute particle of tobacco, nor of dust.

"It is a beautiful thing," I said. "I've wondered why it was that Gaby had all the beautiful, expensive things, such as this. Your clothes are pretty and tasty, but they aren't near the quality of Gaby's."

She hesitated a moment before answering. "I have been in England for the past eight years, while Gaby has been on the continent, where beautiful things are more plentiful, and cheaper."

"Lands alive! I thought you girls had lived together, all these years."

"No," she said, and picked up Gaby's cigarette case, and handed it to me.

It was made of dull gold with her monogram, "G. C." set in tiny black opals, with green and blue lights flickering in them as if they were alive.

"I set it down and picked up another little gold box. It had powder, rouge, lipstick, and a mirror in it. I had seen it often enough before. I put it back on the table, and took up a beaded coin purse that matched the large bag. It was entirely empty.

"Isn't it queer that that should be empty?" Danny asked. And her billfold is missing. She surely would not start to go anywhere with not a cent of money. Doesn't it look as if she had been robbed?"

"Only," I said, "if anyone had robbed her, why would he have left the valuable gold cigarette case, and vanity case?"

"He might have thought they would be hard to dispose of, Mary," Danny's voice, always low, grew lower still with her intensity, "there is one thing that no one has thought of. Daniel Canneziano could have reached here from California in a few hours, by airplane."

"I had thought of that. But, Danny, no airplane ever came within twenty miles of the ranch without every man-jack of us hearing it, and rushing out with our heads tipped back to gaze at it. Airplanes aren't stealthy things, you know, that people can slip up in, and slip off again."

"But, on the third of July, two airplanes passed over, going to the Telko celebration."

"On the third," I reminded her, "was advertised. And you know how much noise they made. And how we all went out and watched them, from tiny specks in the south until they were tiny specks and lost in the north again."

I picked up the carved ivory cigarette holder. It fell to pieces in my fingers.

"Was this broken in her bag?" I questioned.

"Yes. Snapped in two. And she loved it."

Gaby, and meet me this afternoon, around four thirty, in the cabin. H. H."

"Well!" I said.

"Yes, I know," Danny answered, "but Hubert Hand swears that he wrote that note several weeks ago. Too, we know that he was playing chess with Uncle Sam at half-past four."

"He could have gone to the cabin later, when the men went to do the chores. Or was he right with Sam and Chad all the time?"

"I suppose so. He must have satisfied the coroner's jury, at the inquest, of his innocence. Mary," her voice went all tense again, "does it seem to you that the jury was very readily satisfied?"

I spoke sharply, too sharply to her in answer to what I had imagined I saw in her attitude. "Never mind about the jury being easily satisfied. Sam is not going to be. He told me this morning that he would find the murderer if it took every dollar he had in the world to do it. Sam is going to get to the bottom of this. Be sure of that."

"I wonder," she said.

"What do you wonder?"

"Mary!" she exclaimed, close to a reproach. "I merely wonder whether or not Uncle Sam will succeed."

I looked at her brown eyes, all red and swollen from tears, and at the deep, dark circles under them, and I was ashamed.

I put my arm around her shoulders and drew her close to me. "Honey," I said, "overstrung, overwrought. I didn't mean to speak so sharply."

"I know. Were you looking for something else, on the table? There was nothing else in her bag."

"I was wondering," I said, "about that foreign-looking letter she got on the second of July. Did she burn it, with the other things?"

"Oddly, she didn't. I found it in her desk; or, rather, beneath her typewriter. Either she forgot about it; or knew that none of us could read it. It was written in code. Here it is."

Code, indeed! When I took it from its envelope, this is what met my eyes:

"Flaxxazlyt f-y nyx orragro, m fgaio af jan f-asn, abzgo zkg e-c, abhalo, vikt nyx ciplzrg zkg zkyppulzae, zkaz nyx palf, vlxk nyxo lrlzazgt r-ya e-lpa prlag, p-pyoon, yef fgaio, l-rafg—"

I have copied only the first lines on the first page. There were four sneaky pages, all closely typewritten. Not a scratch of handwriting on it.

What I judged to be the signature, was, "Sirs!"

"Do you know who wrote this?" I asked.

"I am sure, if I dare be sure of anything, that it was written by a man named Lewis Bauermont."

I counted the letters of "Lewis" on my fingers. Five. The number of letters in the signature, "Sirs!"

"If he signed his name 'Lewis,'" I said, "then 'S' would be 'L,' and 'I' would be 'e' and so on. Get a pencil, dear. Let's see if we can work it out."

"No," she said, "you see, the letter 's' comes twice in the last word, and there are no duplicate letters in it. Lewis. She didn't read the signature, when she read the letter to me. At least she don't remember—"

"She read it to you!" I exclaimed.

"I thought that she did. Now—I don't know. I can't be sure of anything. She read to me what she said was a copy of the letter; that is, the worked-out code. She may have left out entire paragraphs. She may have changed it, in any way, in order to keep her terrible secret from me."

"Yes, but what did she tell you the letter contained?"

"It is too long even to begin to tell, now. And—I don't want to tell it again; not today. I have told John all about it, you see. Later of course—Or you may ask John to tell you. It—it was an insult from beginning to end. An insult to her. I can't bear thinking of it, any more; not today."

"Mary," her voice changed suddenly as did her manner, "do you know why Uncle Sam asked me to be in the living room at three o'clock today?"

"No, Danny, I don't. But he told Mrs. Ricker and me to be there, too. I guess he just wants to talk to all of us, together."

"What did Hubert Hand think that I had overheard in the cabin?"

"Mrs. Ricker's threat. 'Contents of the beaded bag. Empty match-box. Empty purse. Missing bill-fold. (Robbery.)"

"Crumpled handkerchief. (Tears?) Pleading?"

"Broken cig. holder. 'Hubert Hand's note. 'The code letter. 'Gabrielle's note to Danny."

My face burns, even yet, when I realize that, at half-past two o'clock on the afternoon of the fifth of July, if I had been possessed of just one lick of sense, I could, instead of writing that list of clues, have written another one; a list that, step by step, just as sure as straight ahead, would have led to the guilty person.

Why did I not take into consideration the fact that, for two months, the Canneziano girls had been searching for something on the Desert Moon; something which I was all but certain they had not found?

Why did I not give a thought to the fact that John, after a secret conversation with Gaby—according to



What Had Become of the Key to the Attic Door?

Mrs. Ricker—had been clean and clear away off the place since early afternoon until evening?

Why did I not include in my list the fact that Gaby had given the gold monkey to Martha?

Why, instead of trying to puzzle out the code letter, did I not read between the lines of Gabrielle's last note to Danny?

However, at the time, since it was of my own making, I was quite well satisfied with my list. I took it to the table to check over the items. Sam had put the key, with which I had opened the attic door, alongside the other things there.

I picked it up, now, and looked at it for the first time. I had not looked at it, I had merely used it, the night before. My heart jumped up in my throat. It was not the key to the attic door. It was a rusty old pass key that had hung on a nail in the broom closet, off the kitchen, for more years than I could remember.

Whoever had put this key in my pocket, must have been well acquainted with the Desert Moon kitchen, to have found that old key, under the brooms, and mops, and dust rags, and chamolis skins, and the rest, that hung around it and over it in the broom closet.

What had become of the key to the attic door?

## CHAPTER IX — The Session

When I went down to the living room, at five minutes before three, Danny, John, Mrs. Ricker and Martha were all there. Martha was on the biggest davenport, playing with the monkey charm.

Sem and Hubert Hand came into the room together. Sam looked around, counting noses.

"All here," he said, and locked the door he and Hubert had come through, and dropped the key in his pocket. He went all around the room, closing and locking the doors and windows. He moved a chair to the foot of the stairway, pulled a small table over beside it, took his six-gun out of his back pocket, put it on the table, and sat down in the chair.

No one had moved nor had said a word. I know that I was frightened. I was not afraid of Sam, and I was not afraid of that six-gun. Mostly, I guess, I was afraid of being made afraid; partly, I was afraid of myself.

Hubert Hand spoke first. "Cannon ought," he sneered.

"That's all right, Hand," Sam answered. "This is here, mostly I think, for ornamental purposes. 'Daddy,' Martha piped up, 'aren't we going to have the fireworks tonight?'"

Sam frowned at her. "Not tonight, daughter."

She opened her mouth and began making those dreadful noises she always made whenever she was crossed in anything.

Sam rapped on the table. "Shut that up, here and now," he said. "Not another whimper out of you. Hear me, Martha?"

She closed her mouth with a snap. I thought those immense eyes of hers would pop out of her head. I am sure the others of us all felt the way she looked. In all the years we had lived on the Desert Moon, it was the first time any one of us had ever heard Sam speak impatiently to Martha. As for scolding her, being stern with her, up to this minute it had never been in the book.

"I reckon," Sam began, "that all of you in here know that anyone could walk up to any man or woman in here and call him or her a murderer, and that not one of us could give him the lie, right now."

"I reckon that you know, too, as everyone in the country knows that, at this hour, the Desert Moon ranch is rotten with the muck of crime and suspicion. Maybe you don't know that it is not going to say that way for many more hours."

"We have called the law in, as was right and proper. And the law has been real polite, and blinks its eyes, and departed. 'Folks' its hints like the Arabs, and silently state away. Well, that's all right. I didn't much care about having these fellows mix into my private business; anyway, not until I had found out that I couldn't attend to it myself. I am not going to find that out. I can attend to it. I am going to, right here and now. Later on, when we need the law again, we'll call on it. The innocent in this room will have their names cleared. The Desert Moon will be a fit place for a white man to live on."

"Now this gun here may look like I felt violent or something. I don't. And I'm not going to act violent. This gun is here for just one purpose, and I'm dead certain it won't be used for that. A word to the wise, though. No person, barring the innocent in this room, will have their names cleared. The Desert Moon will be a fit place for a white man to live on."

"Not by a d—n sight he isn't," Sam interrupted. "But never mind. Go on."

"At four o'clock Gaby came down through the room. While she was still in sight, Danny called down, trying to get her to come back. Now this is just another suspicion; I don't know whether anyone will back me up in it or not—probably not," he added the last in a hateful, slurring way—but I noticed that her voice sounded strange, like she was excited, maybe, or else afraid."

Sam asked, "Did anyone else here notice anything of that kind?"

Mrs. Ricker spoke. "I noticed it," she said.

Hubert bowed at her, in a sort of mocking way. "Knowing what I knew, I thought Hubert Hand more harm than good. But, of course, the others did not know what I knew."

"Let me see," Hubert Hand continued, "where was? I Gaby, after going through the room, stopped on the porch for a minute to talk to Chad. He came into the house in a fine humor. Gaby then went around the house to the rabbit hutch, and for some reason, gave her bracelet to Martha. Martha was in the house again within five or ten minutes. Danny had come down by that time. From four to five, then, you and I were playing chess. Chad was at the piano. Danny and Mary were over there, talking together. Mrs. Ricker was tattling. Martha was just fooling around the room. I'm pretty certain not one of us left this room during that hour."

"At five we three men went together to let the cows in and to milk, Mary, I believe, was in the kitchen alone, getting supper, during that time. Mrs. Ricker, Danny and Martha remained here in the living room. Is that right?"

"Maybe it is, and maybe it isn't," Sam said. "There is the hour in there, before supper, that we'll all have to account for, right accurately, before any of us has that water-tight alibi you were talking about, Hand."

"All right," Hubert Hand agreed. "You and Chad and I went down to the barns together. We let the cows in. We milked them. At least, you and I did. Chad stayed with you and was kidding around down in your end of the barn. I heard you laughing and talking down there, together, the whole time."

"(TO BE CONTINUED)

if can get here. All I'm asking of everybody here, is that you all tell the truth. You'll have to, sooner or later. Better make it sooner."

"During this speech my dander had been rising. It had got up pretty good and high by this time. 'Sam Stanley,' I spoke out, 'you ought to know that you can't force truth out of anybody at the point of a gun, nor by keeping them locked up. We'll get hungry. We'll get thirsty. And when we do we'll eat and drink and go about our affairs. At least I will—unless you shoot me. I'm not fixed to put up with this kind of foolishness."

"Mary," Sam roared at me. "That's enough out of you. You be quiet. You are going to do as you are told. So are the others."

Sam had never spoken like that to me before. It left me limp as a drained jelly bag. Before I could get my breath for an answer, Hubert Hand was talking.

"Changed your mind since morning, haven't you, Sam? You were dead sure morning that no one on the place had had anything to do with the murder."

"Never mind about my morning's opinions, Hand. You are right. Dead right. I've changed my mind. Now, since you are already going pretty good, I'll begin with you and work around the room, taking each one in turn. I want you to tell everything you know, and everything you suspect concerning the murder."

"Sorry," Hubert Hand said, "but I don't know a d—n thing except that, apparently, she was strangled to death some time between four o'clock yesterday afternoon and eight o'clock yesterday evening. We saw her alive at four. We found her dead at eight. That's the extent of my knowledge."

"All right. Now go ahead with what you suspect."

"I can't see," Hubert Hand objected, "that suspicious have any place here. Beyond stirring up a rumour and hard feelings, they wouldn't get me of us any place."

"That is for me to decide," Sam said. "You were mighty busy for a while this morning, throwing out hints and sturs. It this session doesn't do anything else, it can anyway clear out all this whispering that is going around. Come on now, Hand. Come clean."

"Well," Hand said, "I can talk all right, but I don't want to start with this understanding. I don't know any facts that amount to a d—n. You're right that I have suspicions, and since you are determined to have them now, at the point of a gun, I'll say that I think John did it, and that somebody else in the house is shielding him."

Danny gave a thin, sick little shriek and threw her arm around John in a protecting way. John straightened. Under the tan I could see the color seeping out of his face. Gently, he removed Danny's arm.

Sam lowered his white eyebrows until his eyes looked like two slits of blue light, glinting out from away behind his face. When he spoke his voice was iron.

"Why do you think John killed her?"

"In the first place, John is the only one here who hasn't a water-tight alibi—"

"Not by a d—n sight he isn't," Sam interrupted. "But never mind. Go on."

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(TO BE CONTINUED)

## POULTRY

### TURKEY RAISING SHOULD DEVELOP

#### Survey Reveals Industry One of Most Profitable.

That "turkey production in the West should become one of the major farm enterprises if economic conditions remain as good as they have been during the past three years" is the belief of F. B. Headley, chief of the department of farm development of the University of Nevada agricultural experiment station.

Headley says, in a cost of production study carried on by his department during the last three years on five farms in Churchill county. Other profitable enterprises on the farms surveyed, according to the experiment station man, were alfalfa production, dairying and the raising of chickens, but turkeys brought in greater return for capital and labor expended.

Cost of producing the average turkey, which weighed 13 pounds dressed, on the basis of more than 5,000 birds covered by the study, was \$3.52, or approximately 27 cents a pound.

"The bulk of the cost in producing turkeys is for feed," Headley says. "On most farms pasture constitutes an essential part of the ration and it is probable that the low cost of production is due in large part to the excellent alfalfa and grain stubble pasture that has been available."

Other conclusions concerning turkey production drawn by Headley from the survey are that the interest on investment is low, that "large flocks require less time per bird than the smaller flocks, and that over 75 per cent of all costs is for labor and feed."

#### Popularity of Frozen Eggs Fast Increasing

While at one time practically all eggs kept in Pennsylvania cold storage warehouses were "in shell," several million pounds of eggs "out of shell" have been reported in storage each year during the past few years, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. On June 30, 1928, the cold storage report for the state showed 4,637,000 pounds of eggs out of shell in storage, just ten times more than were in storage on the corresponding date in 1914.

The increasing popularity of the frozen eggs is explained by the bureau of markets as follows: "In the spring when eggs are plentiful, surplus eggs are purchased by breaking establishments which break and place the eggs in containers to be frozen as whole eggs, egg yolks, or egg whites for the use of the baking industry. After being frozen solid, the eggs are kept at a temperature ranging from zero to five degrees below. These are then made available to bakers at any time during the year. Many bakers report that these eggs give the most satisfactory results when kept in a frozen condition for about three months."

#### Well-Ventilated House Needful During Winter

A warm poultry house that will help to keep egg production high during the winter months must be well ventilated, says Prof. E. R. Gross, agricultural engineer at the New Jersey experiment station, New Brunswick.

To maintain a warm, well-ventilated henhouse three things are needed, advises Professor Gross: "Tight walls, doors, and windows; ventilating flues, which may be constructed of wood at a low cost, and limited overhead space. To make the building tight, close all the cracks, cover the outside walls with roll roofing, or cell the inside walls. Reduce the air space by ceiling overhead or by constructing a straw loft."

Ventilation and warmth go together. If the house is tightly built and has all doors and windows closed, the birds will give off heat enough to raise the inside temperature considerably above that on the outside. But when the house is tightly closed, moisture will begin to accumulate and the air become stale. Ventilation is needed, therefore, to carry away the moisture and to bring in fresh air.

#### Disappointment Sure

Compounding the ration of the laying hen, particular attention should be paid to the inclusion of the necessary vitamins. Yellow corn and green feeds provide much of vitamin A. Vitamin B is carried in wheat, corn, green feeds, alfalfa meal, alfalfa leaf flour and others. Vitamin D, or its equivalent, is supplied by making use of direct sunshine or by resorting to cod liver oil, the latter being an outstanding source of this most essential substance.

#### Keep Ground Clean

Clean and fresh ground may be made available by moving the house or houses to new ground each year, or by having a regular rotation of sown crops.

Sanitary ground is particularly necessary in the handling of all chicks and growing stock.

All poultry runs should be disced and plowed with a heavy moldboard or similar crops. Disceding or plowing once a year is not sufficient for best results.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

## Garfield Tea

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Even in passing compliments, don't make them too long. Short ones seem more sincere.

All false praise wounds an honest mind.—Boileau.