

Stains
of sand
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Are Women Fit to Judge Guilt?

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"Sight of him so pale and hollow-eyed—stung me with remorse"

STAIRS of SAND

*In lonely desert wastes a woman
pursues her quest of happiness*

By Zane Grey

ILLUSTRATED BY DANIEL CONTENT

RUTH LAREY was a beautiful girl with great possibilities for good or evil. Because she is married to Guerd Larey, a man whom she fears and hates, and because the great desert seems to be driving her mad, she elopes with Hal Stone. Adam Wansfell, a desert wanderer, saves her from Stone and takes her to her home. He knew her as a young girl and is in love with her, but he is horrified and hopeless when he sees Ruth's husband, Guerd Larey. For it is his own brother!

LOST LAKE slumbered at noontide under a June sun. The vast desert sky, like a copper lid, shut down close, hiding the limits of the wasteland in the haze of obscurity. The heat veils waved up from the sand like transparent smoke. An Indian stood motionless in the shade of an adobe wall. The wind whipped puffs of sand across the open square before the post. The desert brooded, as if forbidding life and movement.

Merryvale awoke from his *siesta* and folded his bed neatly on the brush mattress. He was always in a brown study these days, absorbed in his loyalty to Adam and Ruth, and the fateful tangle of their lives. Merryvale had been forty years on the desert. He loved it even as Adam, but he did not dwell on the heights. It was the people of the desert that interested Merryvale and he saw them clearly, in the raw, elemental, physical—answering to the law of this barren, hot, lonely and fierce environment.

While he sat there thinking, he heard the freighting wagons lumber by. It reminded him that the stages were due, one from Yuma going north and the other coming south. Lost Lake was an important post, because it possessed the only abundant water on a hundred mile stretch of desert, the last northern fifty miles of which was below sea level.

Merryvale sauntered on toward the post where the freighters had hauled up. Passing under the *palo verdes* to an adobe house, Merryvale halted to address a Mexi-

can woman, who sat in the shade, busy with bright colored clothes. A half-naked child, dusky-haired and with skin like brown ivory, played in the sand at her feet.

"*Buenas tardes, senora,*" Merryvale greeted her, "May I look in?" And he indicated the open door.

"*Si, senor,*" she replied, showing her white teeth.

Merryvale entered. Upon a bed under the window lay a young man, haggard of face, with uncut beard and hollowed eyes.

"Wal, Stone, how are you today?" inquired Merryvale.

"Oh, God, it's hot lyin' here," returned Stone, wearily, as he rolled his head from side to side.

"Are you still in pain?"

"No. That's most gone, I guess. It's just the infernal heat."

"Wal, boy, you're gettin' better fast," said Merryvale, cheerfully.

"Yes, I must be," replied Stone, hopefully. "Ruth was here this mornin'. She said so."

"Ahuh! An' Ruth was down? Wal, that was shore good of her."

"Oh, she's kind. She took the blame for Larey's shootin' me. But I don't want her kindness."

"Reckon she wasn't all to blame, Stone. You talked about Ruth, so I'm told. Larey shore meant to kill you for that an' not for runnin' off with her. He nearly done for you, too. Lucky that doctor was passin' through on

the stage or you'd been fodder for the vultures."

"I'm not thankin' anybody, Merryvale," returned the young man, sullenly.

"So I see," drawled Merryvale, with a little coldness creeping into his

voice. "What're you goin' to do when you get on your feet again?"

"What'd I do before I stopped these bullets?" snapped Stone.

"Wal, you sold hosses an' gambled some an' looked at red liquor more'n you ought, an' you ran after a young woman heah," replied Merryvale, in his lazy drawl.

"Yes, and that's what I'll do again."

"Not as regards the last, Stone," said Merryvale, with some sharpness. "You'd show sense to leave Lost Lake. But if you won't, then take advice an' leave Ruth alone. She may have led you on, flirtin', even bein' soft an' sweet to you, as women always did an' always will. But she couldn't go through with the deal as you wanted, an' when she got back heah she took the blame."

"Bah! You're an old fool, Merryvale," retorted Stone. "You don't know women, much less Ruth Larey. She's like this desert. She has as many moods as the wind. She'd purr at me one minute and the next scratch my eyes out."

Merryvale left the bedside and went out, satisfied that Stone's love for Ruth had turned to hate, and that he would be an enemy whom it would be well to watch. He lounged in the shade of the porch, which ran along the front of the post, and played the part he had chosen—that of an idle old man, past labor or activity, and not particularly interested in anything save rest. One of the grimy drivers halted near Merryvale to catch his breath and wipe his dripping face.

"Warm day, old timer," he remarked.

"Reckon so, for you. It's only fair to middlin' warm for me. Lots of freight you're handlin'?"

"More comin' all the time," he replied, nodding vigorously. "We left the dock stacked full. You see, freight is comin' to Yuma on the railroad now."

"You don't say. Wal, that's news. So the railroad's built far as Yuma?"

"Yep, an' she's headed north."

"Wal, then, there was somethin' in the talk we've been heahin' for years. Where do they aim to build this way?"

"Don't know for sure," replied the teamster. "But course the rails will have to go between the Chocolate Range an' the sand dunes. They couldn't run no railroad over them."

"Shore couldn't. It'd be buried every day. Reckon they'll lay tracks round the west end of the dunes, an' mebbe cut north across the valley this heah way."

"I heard a railroad man say Lost Lake was in line," replied the freighter, and went his way.

Here was extraordinary news. A railroad north through the valley meant an enormous increase in value of property. Merryvale saw that the water rights on the land belonging to Hunt would be worth a fortune. Guerd Larey had long been trying to buy Hunt out; and of late, according to Ruth, had been offering more, and nagging Hunt to sell.

Then the stage came rolling up with its six horses caked with dust and lather, and the driver looking like a snow man.

Dust flew in clouds as the stage door opened to emit, first, a tall man in a long frock coat. He was a one-eyed man, grim, evil, square-jawed, more striking for a hideous scar that blotted out his left eye.

Merryvale controlled the start with which he recognized Collishaw, the sheriff who had been Guerd Larey's ally at Picacho years before. Collishaw had not changed much, except to grow grayer. Merryvale's mind flashed back, bringing a picture of the fight between Guerd and Adam. Again he saw Adam fall back from the ghastly brother and fling the gun with terrific force in Collishaw's face. He would carry that mark, that loss to his grave. His one eye burned with the spirit of an implacable and ruthless man.

Merryvale remembered well indeed the part Collishaw had played in Ruth's narrative. He and Guerd Larey had identical interests, if they were not hand and glove. Moreover Collishaw conducted one of the many gambling saloons in Yuma. Merryvale saw Collishaw met by Larey with outstretched hand, and led toward the bar. Merryvale decided to follow. In the crowded saloon he contrived to edge close to the couple.

"Guerd, heah's to luck," Collishaw was saying, low-voiced, holding up his glass. "The S. P. is shore goin' to take in Lost Lake!"

"The deuce you say!" whispered Larey, hoarsely, lifting his glass; and a light brightened the heat from his face.

"Shore. I got inside information," replied Collishaw. "For reasons of their own the directors have let it go they were runnin' the railroad up the east side of the valley. But it's comin' on this side."

"We want Lost Lake, Salton Spring and Twenty Nine Palms . . . Drink!" returned Larey.

Merryvale edged away and waited until the two men emerged, evidently in high spirits, and hurried out and into the storeroom of the post, where Hunt was still receiving and recording freight.

"Hunt, I've a bit of news for your ear," said Merryvale.

"Ah! Merryvale. How do. Thank you, I'll be at your service presently," rejoined Hunt.

Merryvale did not choose to speak while they were walking along in front of the post, where there were passers-by, and dark figures of Indians leaning against the railing. But when they turned the corner to pass on toward the hedge he said: "Mr. Hunt, shore there's a lot of freight comin' in."

"Indeed there is. We're handling twice the volume of business we used to."

"Who's it all billed to?" asked Merryvale, curiously.

"Most of this lot today is billed to names I don't know. Struck me queer. And now I have time to think, I see it is most unusual."

"Wal—I reckon it is. Mebbe I can give you a hunch about it."

"Ah, that's your bit of news," replied Hunt.



*He was a one-eyed man,
grim, evil, square-jawed*

It was dark inside the hedge, so that Merryvale had to peer down to locate the narrow path. The tinkle of running water fell pleasantly on the sultry air. Far to the north sheet lightning flared along a dark battlemented horizon. They reached the porch, where a slender white figure stood out from the gloom.

"Who's with you, Grandad?" came the query in Ruth's soft voice.

"Merryvale, my lass. I've asked him to supper."

"Oh—I've looked for you all day, Merryvale," she said, taking his arm and squeezing it. "I'm lonelier than ever. I used to go down to the post. But now I stay in the yard."

"Ruth, lass, go tell Marta to hurry supper," requested Hunt, taking a seat. Opening his shirt at the neck and brushing back his hair, he met the faint breeze with evident gratitude. "Now tell me the hunch and the bit of news."

"Wal, I reckon that excess freight is for railroad men," replied Merryvale.

Hunt leaned forward in his chair so abruptly that Ruth, returning from the house, marked it and stopped short.

"Your faith in this water-hole is justified," went on Merryvale, impressively. "The S. P. is going to run the railroad through heah."

He gave vent to a hard expulsion of breath. "Merryvale, how do you know?"

"Collishaw came on the stage. An' I overheard him tell Larey that he had inside information."

"Well, Well! I always believed it'd come. . . . And what did Larey say?"

Merryvale leaned forward to whisper: "He said 'We want Lost Lake, Salton Spring, an' Twenty Nine Palms.'"

Hunt uttered an imprecation that was unintelligible and sank back in his chair. "He named the three best water-holes in the valley. These will be important railroad stations and eventually towns. For the valley above here has rich soil. All it needs is water. I can see it green over and blossom like the land of Canaan."

"Wal, Hunt, I reckon you had better vision than most desert prospectors. For you bought Lost Lake."

"Yes, and I have a clear title. I took the Indians to Yuma. I own this water and when I die it'll go to Ruth. She'll be rich some day."

"Hush, Grandad. You are full of life and energy," said Ruth. "Oh, I am so glad. . . . yet it troubles me. If Guerd Larey said he wanted Lost Lake, and those other places, he meant something."

"Ruth, he has always wanted it. You see the post was built on my land. He always disputed this, but the Indians can verify it. These six acres I own constitute the value of Lost Lake."

"Wal, all I say is you're goin' to hang on to it," interposed Merryvale, doggedly.

"My friend, as yet the only law on this desert is the law of might," replied Hunt.

"Shore. An' that's where Wansfell will come in."

Merryvale saw the girl's face flash at him and her eyes widen and gleam in the gloom. She put out an entreating hand.

"I don't understand you, Merryvale," said Hunt.

"Never mind. My temper was up. Shore I talk too much, anyhow. But I jest had to tell you the news—good an' bad," returned Merryvale, apologetically.

At this juncture the Indian woman called them to supper. They went into the little dining room where, in the light of the lamps, Merryvale looked across the table at this girl who had begun to twine herself about his heart. He was old and he had traveled, but never had he seen so lovely and so disturbing a creature as Ruth. The pliant form, slender yet full, the beautiful lines of her golden throat, the oval face with its curved red lips, drooping and sweet, the delicate nostrils, the wide purple eyes and the rippling hair of gold—these he felt stir his pulse and gladden his sight.

After the meal they again repaired to the porch where Hunt talked a few moments, then went down to his work at the post.

"Let us go," said Ruth, "some one might come." And she led him beyond the house, up a path to the dark hedge, where in the shadow of *palo verdes* there was a bench.

"I can hear him—when he comes," whispered Ruth, panting a little.

"Ruth, I dropped in to see Stone today," said Merryvale, low-voiced. "He told me you had been there."

"Yes, I went to see him and took him some fruit. I felt sorry for him. Sight of him so pale and hollow-eyed, with those bandages on him, stung me with remorse."

"Wal, it's to your credit, but you mustn't go again. An' you must avoid him heaafter. He's bad medicine, Ruth, an' doesn't deserve your pity."

"I have two task masters, now," she replied, with a little laugh. "But, oh, if you only knew how I need and want to be guided and helped."

"Wal, I'll shore try to live up to that," returned Merryvale.

"God knows it's hard enough to [Turn to page 124]



*The two men
emerged,
evidently in
high spirits*



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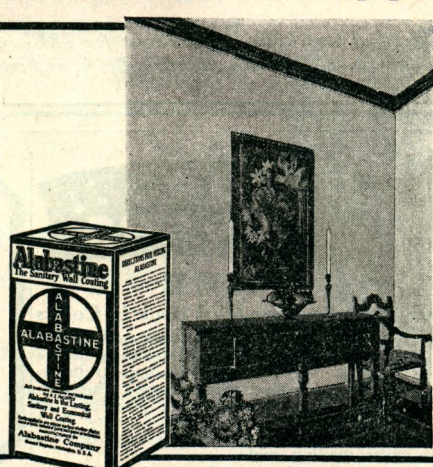
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STAIRS OF SAND

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stay here," she said, twisting her hands in her dress. "I resigned myself. I let Adam dominate me. But I didn't realize I'm shut in, walled up by the desert. I try to work, read, sleep, but I can't do anything for any length of time. By day the sun glares down—the monotony of barren ground ever meets my eyes. By night I hear the tinkle of this spring that means so much to Granddad. It haunts me. Then the dead silence and after that the wind. You know the wind—how mournful—how it sweeps the sand—how it rustles the leaves! I am alone—alone. And I feel I'll go mad. Then the night turns gray and then—that awful rose of dawn."

Merryvale racked his mind for a suggestion that might lend some ray of comfort. "But, Ruth, heah are those who love you," he said, feelingly. "Your grandfather an' Adam . . . an' wal, I reckon me."

"You, Merryvale," she replied in soft surprise. "Oh, you are good. And I feel so worthless, useless, helpless. I don't fit here. Just today I've had a thousand thoughts, all faithless to you who care for me. It would be better if I didn't know it. I used not to know or I didn't care. But now I have other kinds of discontent. I—"

"Listen," interrupted Merryvale, in a husky whisper. "I heah a step."

In the silence which ensued Merryvale felt her hands trembling on his. They had a clinging quality of which she seemed unaware. A soft footfall sounded outside the hedge.

"Adam?" she whispered, rising to meet him.

"Yes, Ruth," he answered.

They clasped hands. And Merryvale, standing close, saw with his nighthawk eyes that they had forgotten him.

But he broke the spell, saying: "There's hell a hatchin' down at the post. Collishaw is heah, drinkin' with Larey."

"Collishaw?" muttered Adam. He drew Ruth out into the starlight close to Merryvale.

"Shore. Listen pard," began Merryvale, and in forceful whisper he told what little he had seen and heard, and how much he suspected. "I'm an old hand at figurin' such men. An' you know, Adam, how I feel toward you an' Ruth. I seen through Guerd Larey! I read his mind. When he said 'Drink!' he meant to the possession of Lost Lake Spring, an' of the lass whose hand you're holdin' now."

"I can't speak for the water-hole, but he shall never have Ruth," returned Adam.

"If he did get me, it'd be only my dead body," said Ruth, her face pale, and her great eyes mirroring the brilliance and mystery of the stars as she gazed up at Adam.

"Wal, I'll walk up an' down outside the hedge," said Merryvale.

"You needn't leave us alone," objected Adam. "If anyone did surprise us I'd rather you'd be here."

"No one is goin' to surprise you, I'll swear to that," rejoined Merryvale. "Not with my eyes an' ears peeled."

Merryvale stood in the shadow listening while his thoughts revolved round his friends. There was no light now in the Hunt house. Evidently the Indian woman had gone down to visit her people, as was her habit. Hunt, no doubt, was at work at the post. The usual silence characteristic of Lost Lake was disrupted this night. He heard the gurgle and tinkle and murmur of running water. Hunt's spring! The water-hole which the Indians claimed had never gone dry! It had turned out to be a well-spring of gold, a treasure mine.

Merryvale saw trouble hovering over this water-hole. In his day he had known of countless feuds over water rights. The desert recorded more bloodshed over water than over all its other treasures. Larey and Collishaw would stop at nothing to gain their ends.

Merryvale also pondered over Ruth's fear. She had not betrayed the all of Guerd Larey's villainy. She knew that Adam still loved this brother and playmate of his childhood—loved him because in his great heart love was ineradicable. And if, through her, Adam should really kill this brother, for whose supposed murder he had been an outcast for fourteen years, he must go on to a lonelier, more terrible wandering, the misery of

which even God could not assuage.

So Merryvale, pacing to and fro in the shadow, alert to outside things, formulated a plot of his own, matched his wits against the craft of Collishaw and Larey, dedicated the last service of his waning years to the happiness of his friends.

AS Merryvale sauntered toward the post in the morning he ventured to approach Dabb, whom he had distrusted at first glance.

Soon he had inveigled the latter into careless prophecy: "There's going to be a change here soon. Besides it's on the edge of the sand dunes. Never will be anything but a water station. Important, yes, and a gold mine for somebody. But there'll never be any development of the land here. A man wants to look ahead. There's a big future for this old prospectors' trail through the valley."

"Shore. I know the railroad's comin'," ventured Merryvale, sagely. "That's one reason for my idee."

"How'd you find that out?" queried Dabb, surprised.

"Wal, I'm posted from Yuma."

"So . . . You're on the right track, Merryvale. Suppose you meet me tonight for supper. We'll have a little talk. Maybe I'll take you in with me. Keep mum about your idee," he said, and bending nearer to Merryvale he whispered. "It'd never do for Larey to get wind of this."

"Ahuh. Wal, I'll meet you aboot sundown," returned Merryvale, and went out, to find a seat in one of the windows in front of the post.

Merryvale knew that Dabb was employed by Hunt, and he suspected that he was dominated by Larey. What had Dabb meant by a change at the post? The answer was not difficult to find. Dabb's whispered words, however, were not so easily analyzed to their exact purport. Recalling Dabb's air of mystery, his crafty look and assurance, Merryvale arrived at the conclusion that Dabb knew of a prospect of gain which Larey would be quick to snap up.

Whereupon Merryvale went on his way to see Ruth.

Before Merryvale was half way up the winding, green-bordered path he espied Ruth on the porch. She had seen him. No doubt she kept a sharp lookout for visitors, some of whom she might not want to meet.

"Wal, lass, I told Adam last night if I was younger he'd shore have a rival. An' this mawnin' you look like a desert lily," drawled Merryvale, as he took the chair she pulled forward for him.

"Merryvale, I slept and I dreamed—and awoke almost happy," she replied, resting her elbows on her knees and her chin on her hands, while she looked gravely into his eyes.

"I'm glad, lass. An' so you should after last night," returned Merryvale. "Shore Adam was out of his haid."

"Oh! What—how?" she queried, startled out of her reverie.

"Wal, I went off on the desert with him for a while," replied Merryvale, watching her with a little twinge. But he could not depart from the deliberate course he had set. "I wanted to talk about your grandpa an' trouble impendin' heah. But Adam never ketched a word. He was like a man in a trance."

"Why—what was the matter?" asked Ruth, her eyes opening wide.

"Wal, he jest loves you so turrible, Ruth."

She was startled. A great wave of scarlet spread under the golden tan, and she covered her face a moment. "Merryvale—I—you—" she faltered. Then she looked up, trying to meet his gaze, to laugh something away.

"Ruth, lass," he began, very seriously. "I'm a blunt old desert rat. You musn't mind my way. I'm Adam's pard, an' I'm heah to plan an' work an' spy for you. . . . An' as I was sayin', Adam loves you turrible. It almost struck me dumb to see him. An' if I hadn't got mad, I'd shore been tongue-tied. Wal, we talked then, of course, about you an' your bein' together. An' presently I got a hunch that the darn fool didn't even tell you he loved you."

"Not last night," murmured Ruth. "We

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STAIRS OF SAND

[Continued from page 124]

talked of—the trouble brewing here. How to meet it—to help Grandfather—and I guess that's about all. The time flew by.

"Adam's a strange man," went on Merryvale, in apparent wonder and disdain. "After four years of huntin' for you all over the southwest he can't tell you the truth. An' he can't demand even a kiss from you. Wal, I would. Of course, you're married—even it is only a name—an' you couldn't belong to Adam till you're free. But jest the same you do belong to him. Not only because your mother gave you to him. But because of the agony he has lived an' the mighty love for you that's come out of it. An' now the desert has fetched him to you, his best an' last an' greatest opportunity. He will save you. This Lost Lake is hell for a woman, let alone such as you. Some day he'll take you away from it—when he can do so without hurtin' your good name. He's foolish about that. But it's because of your mother. That's why he can't make love to you an' be like other men."

"Oh, I don't want him—to be," she cried, bowing her head.

"It's love you need, Ruth," went on Merryvale, without mercy. "Wal, make Adam love you—in the little tender ways a woman craves. Make him. Make him give in to love. Then you can fight this battle heah to beat Larey, to save your grandfather."

"What can I do?" cried Ruth. "All you say, and more, has filled my mind, shaming me . . . I have trifled with man after man. Oh, if only I had not! . . . How could I sink to such miserable guile—to move and hold him?"

"Look! Two men coming in the gate," she exclaimed, suddenly. "Guerd Larey!"

"Yes, an' the other is Collishaw," returned Merryvale, rising. "If you don't mind I'll jest step inside the door." He suited words to quick action. "Don't let them upset you, Ruth."

Merryvale took a seat on the couch where he could not be seen unless some one entered the door. Footsteps and low voices sounded without, and then:

"Howdy, Ruth," said her husband, genially. "You know Collishaw. I've fetched him up to see you."

"Maw'nin', Mrs. Larey," replied Collishaw, blandly. "Reckon I haven't seen you for weeks. An' shore I'm the loser for that. If it were possible, you grow handsomer all the time."

"Thank you, Mr. Collishaw. But surely you didn't call upon me to pay compliments," returned Ruth, with faint sarcasm.

"Wal, no. It's business, an' I'll take your hint an' get to it. We've had a talk with your grandfather about buyin' him out. He won't listen to no reasonable offers."

"Why should he?" queried Ruth. "He has slaved here for years. And now when the property has suddenly increased a hundred percent in value he would be a fool to sacrifice it."

"You know about the railroad comin'?" inquired Collishaw.

"Yes."

"Wal, there's no gainsayin' the sense in your argument. But you don't know every angle to this deal. This heah water-hole belonged first to an old Spanish grant. Indian Jim an' his family didn't have a clear title. Fact is they didn't have anythin' in writin'. I've looked it up in Yuma. That Spanish grant has gone to the state, an' I've staked a claim for Larey. Wal, if Larey throws your grandfather off this land, nothin' could be done about it. It's like a minin' claim. If you let some one jump it, you lose."

"I don't believe you," retorted Ruth.

"Naturally. But all the same I'm speakin' gospel."

"Ruth, it's news to me, and I believe it's a fact," spoke up Larey, with conviction. "I know Hunt hasn't a patent to this land. He can't get one short of another year, if he can at all."



"Please come to the point," said Ruth, impatiently. "You can't scare me with your arguments. Why do you approach me?"

"Wal, the whole deal hangs on you, Mrs. Larey," continued Collishaw.

"Ruth, that's true, but he doesn't put it very nicely," said Larey, suavely. "Hunt and I did not get along well, as you know. I have not pressed claims against him for the simple reason that I've not despaired of a reconciliation with you. But this railroad proposition forces my hand. The freighting business will be killed, eventually, but the water right is worth a fortune. Now I'll agree, if you'll come back to me, not to drive Hunt off this property."

A moment of tense silence ensued, during which Merryvale felt the blood boil in his veins.

Collishaw cleared his throat. "There you are, Mrs. Larey. You see how the deal hangs on your going back to your husband."

"Back to him," retorted Ruth, in ringing scorn. "I never was his wife."

"Wal, he gave me a different notion about that."

"I've heard so from other sources. He lied."

"Oh now, Ruth," interposed Larey, "don't get riled. I didn't mean what—"

"I know what you meant. When I ran out of your house on your wedding night you lied to save your face, you lied to save your vanity. You lied to make me out what I was not."

"Curse you, Ruth!" ground out Larey. "Of course I lied. What could you expect? You ran off from me two hours after you married me. You made me the laughing-stock of gamblers, greasers, freighters, all the riff-raff of this desert. And I've never forgiven you. And what's more I'll drag you back by the hair. And I'm not going to quarrel with you again. I'm through. My patience is gone. For three years I've begged. I've accepted your insults. I've watched you flirt with this and that man, and swallowed my jealousy—when I wanted to kill. I took my medicine. I'd have hated you if I could. But the rottener you were to me the more I loved you. That's what brought me to your feet. Do you understand that? I could be as noble and good as I am base and crooked—if you loved me. I have that in me. You couldn't believe me. I see the ridicule in your eyes. Guerd Larey to change his spots! That's the cursed paradox of my miserable state. I could do it. But all that is of no avail . . . I'm at the end of my rope. Will you give in to me to save your grandfather?"

"No. Not to save his life or mine!"

"Very well, I'm answered."

Larey cursed mutteringly and his heels savagely crunched the gravel, followed by Collishaw.

Ruth came stumbling into the room, to slam the door, and sink upon the couch beside Merryvale. Then she slipped to her knees on the floor, quivering all over, with eyes tight shut yet streaming tears, and her face drawn by conflicting passions.

Merryvale stayed a few minutes to comfort her, then left on the trail of her husband and Collishaw.

BEFORE Merryvale entered the freight-post he heard Collishaw talking rapidly, forcibly, in speech of which the content was not always distinguishable. There was enough, however, for Merryvale to gather that it concerned Hunt's invalid title to the water rights on the former Spanish land grant.

"It's a devilish scheme to ruin me," declared Hunt, shrilly. But his voice rang with shock and alarm.

Larey laughed coarsely. "Prove it, Caleb. Now you get out of here."

A chair scraped the floor, a shuffling of feet and an exclamation followed. The door flew open and Hunt catapulted out.

[Continued on page 126]



Nothing Cleans Teeth Like POWDER

Just ask your dentist

If you want the whitest, cleanest teeth possible, just try this; the oldest and most reliable way of all to clean teeth.

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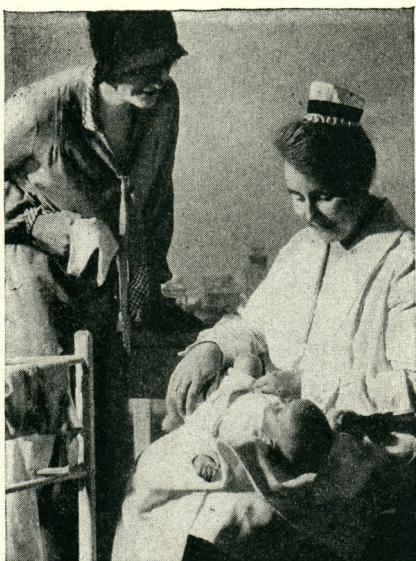
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mildness count most,
doctors say, "Use Lux"

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STAIRS OF SAND

[Continued from page 125]

His face was red, his white hair ruffled, his demeanor one of mingled fury and alarm.

Merryvale had slipped behind a pile of bales, from which vantage point he saw Larey make good his threat. Hunt was shoved out, if not thrown, and with violence.

Merryvale glided stealthily from his post and gained the door without betraying his presence.

"Whew!" he muttered, moving leisurely away. At first he meant to go to Hunt, but on second thought he went on toward the Indian shack where he lodged, and seated himself on his bed to ponder over what he had learned.

The Spanish grant claim as set forth by Collishaw was evidently a ruse to discourage Hunt and render Larey's scheme easier of accomplishment. Indeed it had worried Merryvale, for it might well have been true. Hunt had showed himself vulnerable in this regard. Nevertheless, even if it was false, the very idea itself had powerful advantages for an unscrupulous man. Sooner or later Larey would act upon it, despite Collishaw's advice. Then, all depended on what happened to Ruth, whether or not Adam would stalk into the scene. A leap of Merryvale's pulse attended the thought of seeing Adam meet his brother. To Merryvale there did not seem to be anything more desirable, outside of Ruth's happiness, than the death of this treacherous Guerd Larey.



MERRYVALE kept his appointment that night, but it was almost sundown when Dabb joined him, and led him hurriedly to the Mexican's restaurant, where they occupied a table in a corner.

Dabb came to the point immediately: "Larey an' Collishaw are goin' to get hold of Lost Lake. You seen a sample of their methods today. Then same with Salton Spring up the Valley an' Twenty Nine Palms. I'm not sure about Salton bein' easy to get, but I know Twenty Nine Palms could be bought cheap. Coachella Indians, poor as Job's turkeys, an' no whites there at all. Lots of water, an' a hot spring that alone will be worth a fortune when the railroad fetches the people. What d'ye think?"

"Shore, I think what you say, if it's true, is plumb interestin'," replied Merryvale, guardedly.

"Suppose you go up to Twenty Nine Palms an' look the ground over. Make friends of the Indians. You can prospect a little on the side," proposed Dabb.

"Dabb, it's a good idee. I'll take you up," returned Merryvale, heartily, and took his leave.

Merryvale at length made his thoughtful way up through the dark yard to Ruth's home. He knocked, and spoke his name. The door opened and Ruth came out, again in white. The flash of white showed her bare neck and arms. The glimpse he had of her face reassured him.

"Evenin', Ruth, I reckon it's time for us to meet Adam."

They took the pale path winding among the trees, with Merryvale leading and Ruth behind him.

"Merryvale, I'm weak as water," she whispered. "I've surrendered. What you told me has been—too much—for me."

"You mean about makin' Adam love you?" he whispered, low and eager, bending to her.

Ruth bowed her head.

"I've fought all day. I've tried to kill my old self. Perhaps I did. . . . But I want more than anything ever before in my life—that he may find a little joy in me."

Merryvale drew her arm within his and led her on, mute for once, one instant stricken with remorse, and the next tingling with a rapture for his friend.

They reached the hedge, and then the wide-spreading *palo verde*. Adam stepped out of the gloom.

"Heah she is, pard," said Merryvale,

huskily, giving Ruth a little shove, and he started to glide away, savage in his glee, yet conscious of that blade in his heart.

"Don't go," called Adam, softly. "Stay close by, Merryvale."

So Merryvale paced a short beat between the hedge and the tree. Upon his return Adam and Ruth were sitting on the bench, faintly discernable to eyes growing accustomed to the darkness. He heard their low whispers, and once Ruth's sweet contralto laughter, suddenly hushed. Strange deep happiness stirred in Merryvale's breast.

MIDNIGHT, when Adam parted from Ruth! If the hours had sped fleetly even for Merryvale, they must have been but moments for these two.

Merryvale found himself unable to engage Adam's attention to any extent.

"Say, pard, suppose I'd need to find you any time. Where'd I come?"

Adam might as well have been walking alone. In fact, he was not of the earth. Merryvale repeated his query, louder, and accompanied it by a tug at Adam's arm.

"Follow the wash to where it runs out of the canyon," replied Adam. "Go up the canyon till it forks. Take the left fork."

"Ahuh. All right. Reckon we'll see you tomorrow eve?"

Merryvale tarried as he spoke, but he got no answer. Adam strode on, like a blind giant, to be swallowed up by the black mantle of night.

FOUR days passed swiftly by. Merryvale saw Adam only once, the second night. Ruth reacted bewilderingly to her conquest of Adam. She was wildly gay and eloquently silent and passionately gloomy by turns. Merryvale spent hours with her, some of which were dismaying.

Larey did not attempt to gain audience with Ruth, though he sent messages by Indians for Hunt to come and confer with him. These were ignored. On the fifth day of that week Collishaw left Lost Lake in a light canvas-covered wagon, drawn by four horses, and driven by a taciturn Mexican who, Merryvale had observed, was devoted to Larey. They headed north, a circumstance Merryvale at once connected with Larey's scheme to get hold of important water rights up the valley. Dabb was not cast down by this circumstance; he informed Merryvale that he had more than one string to his bow.

Stone was up and about again, very pale and handsome after his narrow escape, and a subject of considerable interest around the post, which he evidently had no compunctions whatever about visiting.

One evening at twilight Merryvale met Ruth in her accustomed seat on the porch. She was pale and had deep shadows under her eyes. Merryvale attributed her mood to the fact that Adam was not to come this evening; and after talking a little while to Hunt he said good-night to Ruth and started to leave.

She caught up with him, and clung to his arm, and walked with him down the path to the hedge gate.

Merryvale could see her eyes gleaming large and dark from her pale face. They were as deep as the desert night, and held infinite mystery. She was at the mercy of a complexity of emotion increasing day by day. Merryvale's disappointment merged into pity.

"If I knew the way out to Adam's camp I'd go," she said, dreamily.

"Aw, no, lass. Don't say that."

"I would, and right now," she flashed, awakening to his antagonism.

"But, my dear, that would be folly," rejoined Merryvale, trying to control both alarm and temper.

"No women should be left alone, much less I," she said, sombrely.

"Shore, I agree. I told Adam so," replied Merryvale, earnestly. "But he's mad about

[Continued on page 129]

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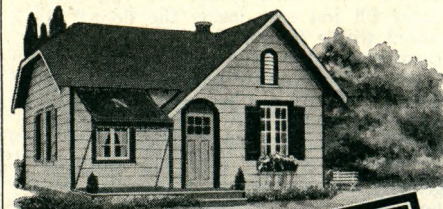
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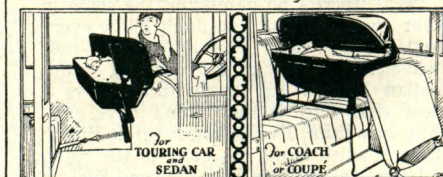
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STAIRS OF SAND

[Continued from page 126]

you, Ruth. An' I reckon the trouble is he's afraid he'll disgrace you."

"How, in heaven's name?"

"Wal, Adam's afraid Guerd Larey will find out your friend Wansfell is really Adam Larey. Then nothin' on earth or in heaven could prevent catastrophe. Guerd would never believe in your innocence."

"Merryvale, Guerd will find out," declared Ruth. "And sometimes—when I'm like this—I don't hate the terrible thought."

"Natural. Reckon you're a woman," said Merryvale, betraying bitterness.

It did not touch her.

"Merryvale, you never told me why Guerd hated Adam. You've spoken often of Adam's love from childhood for his brother—how it survived the bitter fury at Picacho—how it lived and grew all those awful years on the desert. But why Guerd's hate? It seems unnatural. I've wondered and wondered. Surely it couldn't have been jealousy."

"Ruth, I've often worried about tellin' you," pondered Merryvale, slowly surrendering to the inevitable.

"Then tell me," she demanded.

"Guerd Larey was an illegitimate child," replied Merryvale, in suppressed voice, as if the hedge had ears to hear. "All his mother's love was lavished on Adam. As a child Guerd knew it. But Adam never found out till they grew to manhood."

Ruth was stunned by the information and begged Merryvale's pardon, and said good-night.

The hedge gate hung open when Merryvale went up the path the next morning.

Hunt came out of the door of Ruth's room, his face and movement expressing extreme agitation.

"Merryvale! Ruth's gone!" he ejaculated.

"Hunt, when did you see or hear Ruth last?" queried Merryvale tensely.

"At nine o'clock she came in to say good-night. Then, when she went out, she spoke to some one. I recognized that as Stone's voice."

"I couldn't understand what he said, but I'd heard that tone often. Ruth answered him sharply. Then they had hot words. I caught enough to gather that Stone wanted her to intercede for him in some way, or get something for him from Larey. He was most persistent and begging. I called to Ruth once, wanting them to know I was awake. After that they talked lower. Presently I heard Ruth's footsteps on the porch. She went to her room. After a little I heard her in there. That was the last, for I went to sleep."

"Wal, I'm shore stumped," pondered Merryvale. "There's some tall thinkin' ahead."

"Merryvale, she's run off again with Stone," declared Hunt, in anger and distress.

"Hunt, it shore looks bad—but no—no! It can't be that."

"Merryvale, you run down and see if Stone is gone. If he is—"

"Easy enough. I'll go pronto," replied Merryvale, hurrying off.

When he reached the little adobe house where Stone had his lodgings, Merryvale was out of breath. The bright-eyed senora could not understand him at first. When she comprehended his breathless query she replied:

"Senor Stone go las night an' no come back."

Merryvale retraced his steps, but now he lagged, suddenly feeling old and hopeless and heart-broken. Who was to tell Adam? The thought made him writhe.

An uproar in the post halted him before the door. He heard the thud of blows, then a crash. Striding in, Merryvale was in time to see Dabb sink down at the foot of the wall, against which he evidently had been knocked. Larey moved forward, towered over him, his fist doubled.

"Where's that money you stole?" he roared. Dabb lifted his battered face and babbled: "I didn't take it—Stone did!"

At this Merryvale hurried back to Hunt and found him, crouched on the porch, pale and downcast.

"Wal, what'd you find out?" queried Merryvale.

"Ruth did not take her bag, or any of her toilet things. Not even a coat! She had only the clothes on her back."

"Did you find Stone?" asked Hunt.

"No. He's gone."

"I knew it. I felt it."

"An' he's not all that's gone. Larey has been robbed of some money," said Merryvale, and went on to narrate the incident at the post. He kept to himself, however, his own deductions and speculations.

"Worse!" gasped Hunt. "Stone's a thief. I heard him speak of money and Larey . . . Ruth has gone with a thief. My God!"

"Listen Hunt," said Merryvale. "The stage from up north is due today. Reckon it'll be late gettin' in. But if it comes you see who's in it. I'll make a bee-line to find Adam. An' you can bet your life there's goin' to be a reckoning for some one."

[Continued in MAY McCALL'S]



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By ARIGAIL CRESSON

There was a miracle of loaves and fishes,
A miracle of water turned to wine . . .
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Slim as a sword and delicate and fine . . .

From a brown seed no larger than a pin point,
A leaf, a stem, a bud, a flower, and then
From flower a seed in rhythmical rotation
To leaf and stem and bud and flower again . . .

There was a miracle of loaves and fishes;
But I have *seen* the miracle of spring!
The wonder that is life itself unfolding—
I have no room for doubt of anything!

de vivre, music laughter and Italian wines and cooking, go on a one-cabin class Italian liner via the Mediterranean (most inexpensive boats are Northern Atlantic route, however).

If you are bent on improving your French, you can pay as little as \$177 round trip on a French one-cabin boat (or pay more and get more) and begin eating, drinking, thinking, speaking in a deliciously different language as soon as you leave New York. The German and Dutch boats offer perhaps the best service of all, and if you are so pro-British as to love impeccable cleanliness, clear blonde skins, perpetual deck sports and tasteless cooking, choose an English cabin boat or take "tourist third" passage on one of their large liners—by far the greatest number of boats offering economical passage are British, and there are American lines for those who prefer sailing under the stars and stripes.

Since 1924, "tourist third" travel has increased like magic, steerage quarters, no longer needed with our recent immigration laws, are now cleaned to glistening whiteness, refurbished, refurnished, and yearly filled with increasing numbers of artists, architects, musicians, professors and students of all sorts. Food, cabins, deck space, lounges are obviously satisfactory. Four exclusively "tourist third" ships give you the run of an entire boat (\$210 round trip according to latest quotation). These are slow and so are the numerous "cabin class" (monocabin ranging between second and third) boats, but a large six-day liner carries "tourist third" and comfortable American freight liners take a few passengers from New York to London for \$100. Class distinction in ocean travel today is as blurred as in royal marriages!

The new Europe, bent on capitalizing her old world charms, has developed a fine art of catering to transients' needs. As you sail into your first European harbor and thrill to buildings of new beauty silhouetted against the heights, you may hear on the deck a Babel of tongues, but always the English of hotel porters and interpreters. Here and everywhere are potential wayside friends whose livelihood depends on meeting you smilingly and efficiently ... for a gratuity, yes, but smaller by far than in America. Truly the correct tip graciously bestowed brings homage in the servants' hall, while the lavish tip of the unsophisticated makes him a laughing stock.

Europe has her great hotels de luxe which cater to the cosmopolite, giving him electricity, elevators, modern baths, interior decoration à la mode, unrivalled cuisine and service. But the small inn or *pension* where mine host welcomes you with one hand and wields a skillet with the other preserves the local flavor of a place, just as folk tales and dialects exist among its peasants. Seasoned travellers do not sniff at lodgings which at home we'd rate second or third class. For a court with fruit trees pleached against lichen walls, a genial host and a famous wine may offer all the comforts you need between sallies forth to galleries, cathedrals, museums, etc. Tourist talk to the contrary, few of us are so mundane as to travel in quest of food and rooms and rates of exchange ... all of which come automatically. In Italy, Austria and Czechoslovakia and France you can still live for \$2.00 a day and it is said for less at simple fishing villages if you are content to feast on scenic beauties and native diet. Switzerland and England are more expensive, but \$10 to \$15 a day should cover travel and living in general, allowing for the average ten to fifteen percent tipping. Don't imagine it bemeaning to bargain with your landlord as to what the quoted rate includes, for wine, coffee, fires, taxes and service may be added and assuredly your breakfast egg.

ABOVE all choose a living place with atmosphere, a room with a view, whether of placid fields, turbulent seas or terraced garden; in cities an inside or court room if you want to escape the jargon of staccato street noises. In the converted *schloss*, *chateau*, *palazzo*, or monastery the ghosts of a leisured past will cast their magic spell upon you. Here, forgetting that office phones and splitting the minute, ever existed, you will feel yourself re-living the history of the place as from bal-

MADAME, YOUR SHIP AWAITS YOU!

[Continued from page 31]

conied window you watch a gondola gliding silent as a swallow—as in Venice.

Quoting costs of hotels and *pensions* is impossible because of fluctuating rates of exchange and shifting price scale. The Woman's Rest Tour Association is a purely non-commercial organization which furnishes its members with an annually investigated and compendious list of accredited living places, with price and brief description of each. Studying this encyclopedia of living expenses will show you how and where so many women live comfortably on \$100 a month. And with this pilgrim scrip in hand you can go from door to door in *voiture* or taxi until you find what you want. Dartmouth House in London offers its hospitality at reasonable rates to members of the English-Speaking Union, has bureaus on the continent and gives practical assistance through travel, shopping and general service. A quite different assurance against travel uncertainties is the "hotel coupon," (which can be bought from tourist agencies), for first and second-class hotels, a saving to those too proud or too linguistically tongue-tied to bargain or to inquire at random.

Moving from place to place swells the bills, both checking in and out and transportation, though this is on the whole less than in America. Trains vary in price according to class (first, second and third, in Germany even fourth for farmers and market produce). And according to speed and appointments there are *trains de luxe*, *Rapides*, *Expresses*, *trains*, *omnibus*

days. Circular and round trip tickets reduce cost, and meals of all sorts can be picked up: excellent meals in the diners; baskets and bag luncheons; even hot food in dishes poked in train windows from platforms. You will find taxis cheap and numerous in the cities and towns.

Taking your own car or renting one there, is always a great expense, though some students revel in motor-cycling. European railways have established motor-bus routes in connection with their train service, and you may jaunt from Nice up the Riviera to Grenoble, thence to the heart of the Swiss Alps, also through the "Chateaux Country," and out of London and Paris to many places, from Venice to the Dolomites, through the hill towns near Florence.

Personally I find nothing more delightful than the little boat trips along the Seine, Rhine, Rhone, Thames, etc. You can zigzag your way across the Italian lakes from one inspiring peak to another, and travel in this way on the Swiss and English lakes.

Anglo-Saxon women make a mistake in imagining dangers lurking in such spontaneous excursions. The tourist terrors attributed to a strange tongue, a darkly rolling eye and a few unfamiliar gestures are self-made, and the American traveler abroad is safeguarded more vigilantly than she realizes. The duties of our consuls over there include help and protection of all sorts, if you've lost your passport or your baggage, your good health or what not. You are ludicrously mistaken

if you think every Venetian gondolier, Parisian taxi driver and suave voiced shopkeeper a potential pirate or adventure hunter. Anyway, there are usually *vigili*, *gendarmes*, "Bobbies" and their co-freres to mete justice to the woman tourist. Even in Venice when you don't know it at all, protective *vigili* are following in another gondola where they suspect danger.

And if you want to enjoy yourself to the fullest, "when in Rome wear a Roman nose"; that is, do adapt and yield to the customs, cuisine and courtesies of the countries visited. Don't chase all over Europe waiting for "the pies that mother used to make," nor yet demanding doughnuts, fried chicken; waffles and corn on the cob. Instead remember that American cooking is in its infancy compared to continental which is supported by an agricultural peasantry and where long-distance food transportation and canned foods are eliminated. Let your explorations be gastronomic as well as historic and artistic.

For you do not travel to take America with you, but rather to learn to evaluate afresh both yourself and your native land.

Wherever, whenever, however you go, with a large escorted tour, or vagabonding on your own, you will return home with a new-found joy in anchoring yourself afresh to desk or domestic duties. The trip with its prelude of planning, its glorious reality, its fragrant aftermath remains forever yours.

Once lost in the harness of routine life you will feel that the trip has been a wonderful, unbelievable dream, palaces, laces, galleries, peasant dances, ruins, shops, strange faces and words all jumbled in a delicious *melee*. But the kaleidoscope of your own little problems will have shifted inevitably, miraculously into fresh pictures. You will have strength renewed like the eagle's for whatever task is yours, and you will agree that there is, all in all, nothing more gloriously invigorating than traveling away and away "for to admire an' for to see, for to be old this world so wide." With Kipling you sing:

"There be triple ways to take, of the eagle or the snake,
Or the way of a man with a maid;
But the sweetest way to me is a ship's upon the sea."

Europe-bound at vacation time! And while people may prate of the thrill of the first trip, I'd stake my all you'd know those same breath-taking ecstasies on the hundred and first—I would!

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