Nan of Music Mountain

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN

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DE SPAIN GOES TO MORGAN GAP AND TAKES A BAD MAN BUT HE HAS AN ENCOUNTER WITH NAN

The region around Sleepy Cat, a railroad division town in the Rocky Mountain mining country, is infested with stage coach robbers, cattle rustlers and gunmen. The worst of these belong to the Morgan gang, whose hangout is in Morgan Gap, a fertile valley about 20 miles from Sleepy Cat, and near Calabasas, a point where the horses are changed on the stage line from the Thief River mines to the railroad. Jeffries, superintendent of the Mountain division, decides to break up the depredations of the bad men and appoints Henry de Spain general manager of the stage line. De Spain goes to Calabasas with John Lefevre as his assistant. Soon the trouble starts, when Sassoon of the gang cuts the throat of a coach driver. De Spain, Lefevre and Scott, an Indian, start to Morgan Gap at night to arrest Sassoon.

CHAPTER IV—Continued.

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Scott was the first to reach the trees. The little grove spreads across a slope half a mile wide between the base of one towering cliff, still bearing its Spanish name, El Capitan, and the gorge of the Purgatoire. To the east of this point the trails to Calabasas and to Sleepy Cat divide, and here Scott and Lefever received De Spain, who had ridden slowly and followed Scott's injunctions to keep the red star to the right of El Capitan all the way across the sinks.

Securing their horses, the three stretched out on the open ground to wait for daylight. De Spain meditated first on how he should capture Sassoon at daybreak, and then on Nan Morgan and her mountain home into which he was about to break to drag out a criminal. Sassoon and his malice soon drifted out of his mind, but Nan remained. Her form outlined in the

Scott Was the First to Reach the Trees.

mists that rose from the hidden creek seemed to hover somewhere near until Scott's hand laid on the dreamer's shoulder drove it suddenly away. Day was at hand.

De Spain got up and shook off the chilliness and drowsiness of the night. It had been agreed that he, being less known in the gap than either of his companions, could best attempt the difficult capture. Bob Scott, who knew the recess well, repeated his explicit directions as to how De Spain was to reach Sassoon's shack. He repeated his description of its interior, told him where the bed stood, and even where Sassoon ordinarily kept his knife and his revolver.

De Spain gave his horse his head—it was still too dark to distinguish the path—and advanced at a snail's pace until he passed the base of El Capitan, when of a sudden, as he rode out from among high projecting rocks full into the opening, faint rays of light from the eastern dawn revealed the narrow, strangely inclosed and perfectly hidden valley before him.

De Spain caught his breath. No description he had ever heard of the nook that screened the Morgans from the outside world had prepared him for what he saw. From side to side between the frowning cliffs which rose, at points, half a mile into the sky, it was several miles, and the gap was more than as much in depth, as it ran back to a mere wedge between unnamed Superstition peaks.

Every moment that he pushed ahead warned him that daylight would come suddenly and his time to act would be short. The trail he followed broadened into a road, and a turn brought him up startled and almost face to face with a long, rambling ranch-house. The gable end of the two-story portion of the building was so close to him that he instantly reined up to seek hiding from its upper and lower windows.

From Scott's accurate description he knew the place. This was Duke Morgan's ranch-house, set as a fortress almost at the mouth of the gap. To pass it unobserved was to compass the most ticklish part of his mission, and without changing his slow pace he rode on. No bullet challenged him and no sound came from the silent house. He cantered away from the peril, thinking with a kind of awe of Nan, asleep, so close, under that roof—confident, too, he had not been seen—though, in matter of fact, he had been.

Other cabins back toward the north wall could be seen dimly to his right, but all were well removed from his way. In due time, as Scott had advised, he saw confronting him, not far ahead, a small, prison-looking cabin alone. Dismounting before this, he [illegible] himself a little and walked up to the cabin door. It was open.

De Spain called gruffly to the cabin inmate. There was no answer. He hitched his trouser band near to the butt of his revolver with his right hand, and laid his left on the jamb of the door, his eyes meantime boring the darkness to the left, where Sassoon's bed should be. The utmost scrutiny failed to disclose any sign of it or any sound of breathing from that corner. He took a few steps toward where the man should be asleep, and perceived beyond a doubt that there was no bed in the corner at all. He turned toward the other corner, his hand covering the butt of his gun. "Hello, Shike!" he called out in a slightly strained tone of camaraderie, addressing Sassoon by a common nickname. Then he listened. A trumpeting snore answered. No sound was ever sweeter to De Spain's ear. The rude noise cleared the air and steadied the intruder as if Music mountain itself had been lifted off his nerves.

He tried again: "Where are you, Shike?" he growled. "What's this stuff on the floor?" he continued, shuffling his way ostentatiously to the other side of the room. He felt his way toward the inner door. This was where he expected to find it, and it was closed. He laid a hand gingerly on the latch. "Where are you, Shike?" he demanded again, this time with an impatient expletive summoned for the occasion. A second fearful snore answered him. De Spain, relieved, almost laughed as he pushed the door open, though not sure whether a curse or a shot would greet him. He got neither. And a welcome surprise in the dim light came through a stuffy pane of glass at one end of the room. It revealed at the other end a man stretched asleep on a wall bunk—a man that would, in all likelihood, have heard the stealthiest sound had any effort been made to conceal it, but to whose ears the rough voices of a mountain cabin are mere sleeping potions.

The sleeper woke to feel a hand laid lightly on his shoulder. The instinct of self-preservation acted like a flash. His eyes opened and his hands struck out like cat's paws to the right and left: no knife and no revolver met them. Instead, in the semidarkness a strange face bent over him. His fists shot out together, only to be caught in a vise that broke his arms in two at the elbows, and forced them back against his throat. A knee, like an anvil, pushed inexorably into his stomach and heart and lungs. Another lay across his right arm, and his struggling left arm he could not, though his eyes burst with the strain from their sockets, release from where, eaglelike claws gripped at his throat and shut off his breath. He lay still.

"Are you awake, Shike?" Sassoon heard from the gloom above him. But he could not place the voice. "You seem to move around a good deal in your sleep. If you're awake, keep still. I've come from Sleepy Cat to get you. Don't mind looking for your gun and knife. Two men are with me. You can have your choice. We've got a horse for you. You can ride away from us here inside the gap, and take what hits you in the back, or you can go to Sleepy Cat with us and stand your trial. I'll read your warrant when the sun gets a little higher. Get up and choose quick."

Sassoon could not see who had subdued him, nor did he take long to decide what to do. With less trouble than he expected, the captor got his man sullenly on horseback, and gave him severely plain directions as to what to do. Sassoon, neither bound nor gagged, was told to ride his horse down the gap closely ahead of De Spain and neither to speak nor turn his head no matter what happened right or left.

In the growing light the two men trotted smartly a mile down the trail without encountering a sign of life. When they approached the Morgan ranch-house De Spain rode close to his prisoner, told him what would happen if he made a noise, and even held him back in his pace as they trotted together past the gap stronghold. When they left the house behind and the turn in the road put them out of range of its windows, he closed up the distance between himself and Sassoon, riding close in to his side, and looked back for a fraction of a second. When he looked ahead again he saw confronting him, not a hundred yards away, a motionless horseman.

CHAPTER V.

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Mecis for It.

With a sudden, low command to Sassoon to check his horse, De Spain pressed the muzzle of his gun to his prisoner's side. "You've got one chance yet, Shike, to ride out of here alive," he said composedly. "You know I am a rustler—cousin of John Rebstock's. My name is 'French'; I belong in Williams cache. I rode in last night from Thief river, and you are riding out with me to start me on to the Sleepy Cat trail. If you can remember that much—"

De Spain stopped half-way through his sentence. The figure revealed in the half-light puzzled him at first. Then it confused and startled him. He saw it was not a man at all, but a woman—and a woman than whom he would rather have seen six men. It was Nan Morgan.

With her head never more decisively set under her mannish hat, her waist never more attractively outlined in slenderness, she silently faced De Spain in the morning gray. His face reflected his chagrined perplexity. He could already see Nan's eyes. They were bent keenly first on him, then on his companion, and again on him. De Spain kept his face down as much as he dared, and his hat had been pulled well over it from the beginning.

They were now almost abreast. The very instinctive knowledge that her eyes were bent on his made him steal a glance at her in spite of himself. The next instant he was shamefacedly touching his hat. Though nothing was lost on her, Nan professed not to see the greeting. When she spoke her tone was dry with suspicion.

"Wait a moment, Sassoon. Where are you going?" she demanded. Sassoon hitched with one hand at his trousers band. He inclined his head sulkily toward his companion. "Starting a man on the trail for Sleepy Cat."

"Stop," she exclaimed sharply, for De Spain, pushing his own horse ahead, had managed without being observed, to kick Sassoon's horse in the flank, and the two were passing. Sassoon at the resolute summons stopped. De Spain could do no less; both men, halting, faced their suspicious inquisitor. She scrutinized De Spain keenly. "What is this man doing in the gap?"

"He came up from Thief river last night," answered Sassoon monotonously.

"What is he doing here with you?" persisted Nan.

"He's a cousin of John Rebstock's from Williams Cache," continued Sassoon. The yarn would have sounded decently well in the circumstances for which it was intended, but in the searching gaze of the eyes now confronting and clearly recognizing him, it sounded so grotesque that De Spain would fully as lief have been sitting between his horse's legs as astride his back.

"That's not true, Sassoon," said his relentless questioner. Her tone and the expression of her face boded no friendliness for either of the two she had intercepted.

De Spain had recovered his wits. "You're right," he interposed without an instant's hesitation. "It isn't true. But that's not his fault; he is under arrest, and is telling you what I told him to tell you. I came in here this morning to take Sassoon to Sleepy Cat. He is a prisoner, wanted for cutting up one of our stage-guards."

Nan, coldly skeptical, eyed De Spain. "And do you try to tell me"—she pointed to Sassoon's unbound hands—"that he is riding out of here, a free man, to go to jail?"

"I do tell you exactly that. He is my prisoner—"

"I don't believe either of you," declared Nan scornfully. "You are planning something underhand together."

De Spain laughed coolly. "We've planned that much together, but not, I assure you, with his consent."

"I don't believe your stories at all," she declared firmly.

De Spain flushed. The irritation and the serious danger bore in on him. "If

He Saw It Was Not a Man at All, but a Woman.

you don't believe me it's not my fault," he retorted. "I've told you the truth. Ride on, Sassoon."

He spoke angrily, but this in no wise daunted Nan. She wheeled her horse directly in front of them. "Don't you stir, Sassoon," she commanded, "until I call Uncle Duke."

De Spain spurred straight at her; their horses collided, and his knee touched hers in the saddle. "I'm going to take this man out of here," he announced in a tone she never had heard before from a man. "I've no time to talk. Go call your uncle if you like. We must pass."

"You shan't pass a step!"

With the quick words of defiance the two glared at each other. De Spain was taken aback. He had expected no more than a war of words—a few screams at the most. Nan's face turned white, but there was no symptom even of a whimper. He noticed her quick breathing, and felt, instinctively, the restrained gesture of her right hand as it started back to her side. The move steadied him. "One question," he said bluntly, "are you armed?"

She hated even to answer, and met his searching gaze resentfully, but something in his tone and manner wrung a reply. "I can defend myself," she exclaimed angrily.

De Spain raised his right hand from his thigh to the pommel of his saddle. The slight gesture was eloquent of his surrender of the issue of force. "I can't go into a shooting-match with you about this cur. If you call your uncle there will be bloodshed—unless you drop me off my horse right here and now before he appears. All I ask you is this: Is this kind of a cutthroat worth that? If you shoot me, my whole posse from Sleepy Cat is right below us in the aspens. Some of your own people will be killed in a general fight. If you want to shoot me, shoot—you can have the match all to yourself. If you don't, let us go by. And if I've told you one word that isn't true, call me back to this spot any time you like, and I'll come at your call, and answer for it."

His words and his manner confounded her for a moment. She could not at once make an answer, for she could not decide what to say. Then, of a sudden, she was robbed of her chance to answer. From down the trail came a yell like a shot. The clatter of hoofs rang out, and men on horses dashed from the entrance of the gap toward them. De Spain could not make out distinctly, but he knew Lefever's yell, and pointed. "There they are," he exclaimed hurriedly. "There is the whole posse. They are coming!" A shot, followed closely by a second, rang out from below. "Go," he cried to Nan. "There'll be shooting here that I can't stop!" He slapped Sassoon's pony viciously with his hand, spurred past her himself, and was away. White with consternation and anger, she steadied herself and looked after the fleeing pair. Then whirling in her saddle, she ran her pony back to the ranch-house to give the alarm.

Yelling like half a dozen men, Lefever and Scott, as De Spain and his prisoner dashed toward them, separated, let the pair pass, and spurred in behind to cover the flight and confront any pursuers. None at the moment threatened, but no words were exchanged until the whole party, riding fast, were well past El Capitan and out of the gap. For some unexpressed reason—so strong is the influence of tradition and reputation—no one of the three coveted a close encounter with the Morgans within its walls.

"It's the long heels for it now, boys," cried De Spain. His companions closed up again.

"Save your horses," cautioned Scott, between strides. "It's a good ways home."

"Make for Calabasas," shouted Lefever.

"No," yelled Scott. "They would stand us a siege at Calabasas. While the trail is open make for the railroad."

A great globe of dazzling gold burst into the east above the distant hills. But the glory of the sunrise called forth no admiration from the three men hurrying a fourth urgently along the Sleepy Cat trail. Between breaths De Spain explained his awkward meeting with Nan, and of the strait he was in when Lefever's strong lungs enabled him to get away unscratched. But for a gunman a narrow squeak is as good as a wide one, and no one found fault with the situation. They had the advantage—the only question was whether they could hold it. And while they continued to cast anxious glances behind, Scott's Indian eyes first perceived signs on the horizon that marked their pursuit.

"No matter," declared Lefever. "This is a little fast for a fat man, anyway." He was not averse, either, to the prospect of a long-range exchange with the fighting mountaineers. All drew rein a little. "Suppose I cover the rear till we see what this is," suggested Lefever, limbering up as the other two looked back. "Push ahead with Sassoon. These fellows won't follow far."

"Don't be sure about that," muttered Scott. "Duke and Gale have got the best horses in the mountains, and they'd rather fight than eat. There they come now."

Dashing across a plain they themselves had just crossed, they could see three horsemen in hot chase. The pursued men rode carefully, and, scanning the ground everywhere ahead, felt assured of their escape. Though their pursuers rode in at times with a show of rushing, the chase was a stern one, and could be checked whenever necessary. Halting at times to breathe their horses, De Spain with his two companions and their prisoner rode into Sleepy Cat, locked Sassoon up, and went to the Mountain house for breakfast.

CHAPTER VI.

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Maintaining a Reputation.

The abduction of Sassoon, which signalized De Spain's entry into the stage-line management, created a sensation akin to the exploding of a bomb under the range. The whole mountain country, which concentrates, sensibly, on but one topic at a time, talked for a week of nothing else.

Experienced men in the high country—men of that class who, wherever found, are old in the ways of the world, and not promptly moved by new or youthful adventure—dismissed the incident after hearing the details, with the comment or the conclusion that there would hardly be for De Spain more than one additional chapter to the story, and that this would be a short one. The most active Morgans—Gale, Duke and the easy-going Satterlee—were indeed wrought to the keenest pitch of revengeful anger. It was an overwhelming insolent invasion—and worst of all, a successful invasion, by one who had nothing but cool impudence, not even a budding reputation to justify his assault on the lifelong prestige of the gap clan.

De Spain himself, somewhat surprised at the storm he had kicked up, heeded the counsel of Scott, and while the acute stage of the resentment raged along the trail he ran down for a few days to Medicine Bend to buy horses. Both Gale and Duke Morgan proclaimed, in certain public places in Sleepy Cat, their intention of shooting De Spain on sight; and as a climax to all the excitement of the week following his capture, the slippery Sassoon broke jail and, after a brief interval, appeared at large in Calabasas.

This feat of the Morgan satellite made a loud laugh at De Spain's expense. It mitigated somewhat the humiliation of Sassoon's friends, but it in no wise diminished their expressed resolve to punish De Spain's invasion. Lefever, who as the mixer among the

They Locked Sassoon Up.

stage men, kept close to the drift of public sentiment, decided after De Spains' return to Sleepy Cat that the stage-line authorities had gained nothing by Sassoon's capture.

"We ought to have thought of it before, Henry," he said frankly one night in Jeffries' office, "but we didn't think."

"Meaning just what, John?" demanded De Spain without real interest.

> **If De Spain is wise will he shoot on sight any member of the Morgan gang he meets, without waiting to ask questions or see what his opponent is going to do?**

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

WROTE OF YANKEE POLITICS

Briton of the Eighties Who Had No Qualifications as a Critic, Was Humorous.

Brander Matthews, writing his "London Memories" in Scribner's, recalls a period in the early eighties when he was a contributor to the London Saturday Review, at that time, under the editorship of Walter Pollock, a journal of marked distinction. Such names as Lang, Dobson, Gosse, H. D. Traill, W. E. Henley illuminated its columns. Mr. Matthews was the only American connected with the staff of the "Saturday," as the Review was familiarly called.

"I may confess frankly now that it was great fun for me, an American of the Americans," writes Mr. Matthews, "to say my say about American topics in the columns of the most British of British periodicals. About American politics I rarely expressed any opinion, because that topic had been for years in the care of one of the oldest contributors to the paper, although his long service had not equipped him with knowledge of the subject.

"Pollock called my attention once to an article on American affairs in the current number and wondered whether it was not all at sea in its opinions, and I had to answer that I had counted fifteen mistatements of fact in the first column, whereupon he shrugged his shoulders and explained that he was powerless, since he had inherited that contributor from the preceding editors.

"I was told, although I forget by whom, that the ancient light who thus devoted his mind to the misunderstanding of American politics was G. S. Vanables, otherwise unknown to fame except as the man who had broken Thackeray's nose."

Just Two Women.

There are two women—just two women in the world. One is a Desert and one is a Valley. The desert women take them all. They thirst and thirst—and give nothing; but the valley women are fruitful. They are the deep, wet valleys that bring forth. They are all Marys. . . . Sometimes they shall know what they can do. The fruitful valleys do not know yet. . . . They shall say to all those who do not belong, "No. You will not do. I am waiting for my man who comes. . . . They will wait for the true husbandman. There is one for every fruitful valley, but they do not know yet, and they bring forth the seed that falls. . . . But they are all Marys. . . . Hah! they should let the Marys tend to these things. These are not men-matters. Men should run away and play with the deserts until they are called.—"Doctor Nick."

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An excellent preparation is made as follows: Salycilic acid, 20 grains; alcohol, one-eighth ounce; flexible collodion, one ounce. Mix together and apply with camel's-hair brush over hard surface of wart or corn for three nights. Soak in hot water, when a layer of skin will come off. Then repeat as before until wart or corn is removed.

Safe Bet.

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No Chance.

"So the judge sent your husband to prison for ten years, Mandy?"

"Yes, he did. Dat's a powerful long time to have to get along widout a husband, missus."

"It does seem like a long time, but, maybe, he can shorten it by good behavior."

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An Unlooked-For Present.

Among little Willie's numerous birthday presents were a toy tomahawk, an air gun and a lasso—these being sent by a sport-loving uncle who knew the youth's proclivities.

Shortly after breakfast Willie's mother heard a crash in the greenhouse at the foot of the garden, and went to investigate. On the way she passed a few uprooted bushes and a flower-bed trampled out of recognition, and in the greenhouse itself many assoed flower-pots. Following the trail she found Willie hiding behing a tree stump.

"What are you doing, Willie?" she cried in horrified tones.

"Looking for Redskins," replied the youngster.

With a grim look she took Willie by the ear and led him indoors.

"Looking for red skins!" she repeated ominously, as she took up a cane. "Well, I'll give you one."

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