

# Nan of Music Mountain

By FRANK H. SPEARMAN

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## DE SPAIN LEARNS HOW MUCH NAN REALLY LOVES HIM AND DISCOVERS THAT HIS PLANS FOR PACIFYING OLD DUKE MORGAN WON'T WORK OUT AT ALL.

Henry de Spain, general manager of the stagecoach line running from Thief River to Sleepy Cat, a railroad division town in the Rocky mountains, is fighting a band of cattle thieves and gunmen living in Morgan gap, a fertile valley 20 miles from Sleepy Cat and near Calabasas, where the coach horses are changed. De Spain has killed two of the gang and has been seriously wounded. Pretty Nan Morgan, niece of the gang leader, and De Spain are in love secretly—but her uncle finds it out and raves and rants.

### CHAPTER XVIII—Continued.

She whirled. "I won't put it down. This hulking bully! I know him better than you do." She pointed a quivering finger at her cousin. "He insulted me as vilely as he could only a few months ago on Music Mountain. And if this very same Henry de Spain hadn't happened to be there to protect me, you would have found me dead next morning by my own hand. Do you understand?" she cried, panting and furious. "That's what he is!" Her uncle tried to break in. "Stop!" she exclaimed pointing at Gale. "He never told you that, did he?" "No, nor you neither," snapped Duke hoarsely.

"I didn't tell you," retorted Nan, "because I've been trying to live with you here in peace among these thieves and cutthroats, and not keep you stirred up all the time. And Henry de Spain faced this big coward and protected me from him with an empty revolver! What business of yours is it whom I meet, or where I go?" she demanded, raising her words with flaming eyes on her belligerent cousin. "I will never marry you to save you from the hangman. Now leave this house," she stamped her foot. "Leave this house, and never come into it again!"

Gale, beside himself with rage, stood his ground. He poured all that he safely could of abuse on Nan's own head. She had appraised her wrath and made no attempt to retort, only looking at him with white face and burning eyes as she breathed defiance. Duke interferred. "Get out!" he said to Gale harshly. "I'll talk to her. Go home!"

Not ceasing to mutter oaths, Gale picked up his hat and stamped out of the house, slamming the doors. Duke, exhausted by the quarrel, sat down, eying his niece. "Now what does this mean?" he demanded hoarsely.

She tried to tell him honestly and frankly all that her acquaintance with De Spain did mean—dwelling no more than was necessary on its beginning, but concealing nothing of its development and consequences, nothing of her love for De Spain, nor of his for her. But no part of what she could say on any point she urged softened her uncle's face. His square, hard jaw from beginning to end looked like stone.

"So he's your lover?" he said harshly when she had done.

"He wants to be your friend," returned Nan, determined not to give up. Duke looked at her uncompromisingly. "That man can't ever be my friend of mine—understand that! He can't ever marry you. If he ever tries to, so help me God, I'll kill him if I hang for it. I know his game. I know what he wants. He doesn't care a pinch of snuff for you. He thinks he can hit me a blow by getting you away from me."

"Nothing could be further from the truth," exclaimed Nan hopelessly. Duke struck the table a smashing blow with his fist. "I'll show Mr. de Spain and his friends where they get off."

"Uncle Duke, if you won't listen to reason, you must listen to sense. Think of what a position you put me in. I love you for all your care of me. I love him for his affection for me and consideration of me—because he knows how to treat a woman. I know he wouldn't harm a hair on your head, for my sake, yet you talk now of bloodshed between you two. I know what your words mean—that one of you, or both of you, are to be killed for a senseless feud. He will not stand up and let any man shoot him down without resistance. If you lay your blood on his head, you know it would get a stain between him and me that never could be washed out as long as we lived. If you kill him I could never stay here with you. His blood would cry out every day and night against you."

Duke's violent finger shot out at her. "And you're the gal I took from your mammy and promised I'd bring up a decent woman. You've got none of her blood in you—not a drop. You're the brat of that mixing brother of mine, that was always riding horseback and showing off in town while I was weeding the tobacco beds."

Nan clasped her hands. "Don't blame me because I'm your brother's child. Blame me because I'm a woman, because I have a heart, because I want to live and see you live, and to see suspicion, distrust, feuds, quarrels, and worse. I'm not ungrateful as you plainly say I am. I want to get out of what you are in

here—I want to be out of it. I'd rather be dead now than to live and die in it. And what is this anger all for? Nothing. He offers you his friendship—She could speak no further. Her uncle, with a curse, left her alone. When she arose in the early morning he had already gone away.

### CHAPTER XIX.

#### A Try-Out.

Sleepy Cat is not so large a place that one would ordinarily have much trouble in finding a man in it if he searched well. But Duke Morgan drove into town next morning and had to stay for three days waiting for a chance to meet De Spain. Duke was not a man to talk much when he had anything of moment to put through, and he had left home determined, before he came back, to finish for good with his enemy.

De Spain himself had been putting off for weeks every business that would bear putting off, and had been forced at length to run down to Medicine Bend to buy horses. Nan, after her uncle left home—justly apprehensive of his intentions—made frantic efforts to get word to De Spain of what was impending. She could not telegraph—a publicity that she dreaded would have followed at once. De Spain had expected to be back in two days. Such a letter as she could have sent would not reach him at Medicine Bend.

As it was, a distressing amount of talk did attend Duke's efforts to get track of De Spain. Sleepy Cat had but one interpretation for his inquiries—and a fight, if one occurred between these men, it was conceded, would be historic in the annals of the town. Its anticipation was food for all of the rumors of three days of suspense. For the town they were three days of thrilling expectation; for Nan, isolated, without a confidant, not knowing what to do or which way to turn, they were the three bitterest days of anxiety she had ever known.

Desperate with suspense at the close of the second day—wild for a scrap of news, yet dreading one—she saddled her pony and rode alone into Sleepy Cat after nightfall to meet the train on which De Spain had told her he would return from the east. She rode straight to the hospital, instead of going to the livery barn, and leaving her horse, got supper and walked by way of unfrequented streets downtown to the station to wait for the train.

When the big train drew slowly, almost noiselessly, in, Nan took her place where no incoming passenger could escape her gaze and waited for De Spain. But when all the arrivals had been accounted for, he had not come.

She turned, heavy-hearted, to walk back uptown, trying to think of whom she might seek some information concerning De Spain's whereabouts, when her eye fell on a man standing not ten feet away at the door of the baggage room. He was alone and seemed to be watching the changing of the engines, but Nan thought she knew him by sight. The rather long, straight, black hair under the broad-brimmed hat marked the man known and hated in the gap as "the Indian." Here, she said to herself, was a chance. De Spain, she recalled, spoke of no one oftener than this man. He seemed wholly disengaged.

Repressing her nervous timidity, Nan walked over to him. "Aren't you Mr. Scott?" she asked abruptly.

Scott, turning to her, touched his hat as if quite unaware until that moment of her existence. "Did Mr. de Spain get off this train?" she asked, as Scott acknowledged his identity. "I guess he didn't come tonight," Nan noticed the impassive manner of his speaking and the low, even tones. "I was kind of looking for him myself."

"Is there another train tonight he could come on?"

"You don't know me?" she said tentatively.

His answer concealed all that was necessary. "Not to speak to, no."

"I am Nan Morgan."

"I know your name pretty well," he explained; nothing seemed to disturb his smile.

"And I came in—because I was worried over something and wanted to see Mr. de Spain."

"He is buying horses north of Medicine Bend. The rainstorm yesterday likely kept him back some. I don't think you need worry much over anything though."

"I don't mean I am worrying about Mr. de Spain at Medicine Bend," disclaimed Nan with a trace of embarrassment.

"I know what you mean," smiled Bob Scott. She regarded him questioningly as if he was confident of his ground. "Did your pony come along all right after you left the foothills this afternoon?"

Nan opened her eyes. "How did you know I came through the foothills?"

"I was over that way today." Something in the continuous smile enlightened her more than the word. "I noticed your pony went lame. You stopped to look at his foot."

"You were behind me," exclaimed Nan.

"I didn't see you," he countered prudently.

She seemed to fathom something from the expression of his face. "You couldn't have known I was coming in," she said quickly.

"No." He paused. Her eyes seemed to invite a further confidence. "But



De Spain Laughed at Her Fears.

after you started it would be a pity if any harm came to you on the road."

"You knew Uncle Duke was in town?" Scott nodded. "Do you know why I came?"

"I made a guess at it. I don't think you need worry over anything."

"Did you follow me down from the hospital tonight?"

"I was coming from my house after supper. I only kept close enough to you to be handy."

"Oh, I understand. And you are very kind. I don't know what to do now."

"Go back to the hospital for the night. I will send Henry de Spain up there just as soon as he comes to town."

"Suppose Uncle Duke sees him first. I am deathly afraid of their meeting."

"I'll see that he doesn't see him first."

Even De Spain himself, when he came back the next night, seemed hardly able to reassure her. When she had told all her story, De Spain laughed at her fears. "I'll bring that man around, Nan. Don't worry. Don't believe we shall ever fight. I may not be able to bring him around tomorrow, or next week, but I'll do it. It takes two to quarrel, you know."

"But you don't know how unreasonable Uncle Duke is when he is angry," said Nan mournfully. "He won't listen to anybody. He always would listen to me until now. Now, he says, I have gone back on him, and he doesn't care what happens. Think, Henry, where it would put me if either of you should kill the other. Henry, I've been thinking it all over for three days now. I see what must come. It will break both our hearts. I know, but they will be broken anyway. There is no way out, Henry—none."

"Nan, what do you mean?"

"You must give me up."

They were sitting in the hospital garden, he at her side on the bench that he called their bench. It was here he had made his unrebuked avowal—here, he had afterward told her, that he began to live. "Give you up," he echoed with gentleness. "How could I do that? You're like the morning for me, Nan. Without you there's no day; you're the kiss of the mountain wind and the light of the stars to me. Without the thought of you I'd sicken and faint in the saddle, I'd lose my way in the hills; without you there would be no tomorrow. No matter where I am, no matter how I feel, if I think of you strength wells into my heart like a spring. I never could give you up."

He told her all would be well because it must be well; that she must trust him; that he would bring her safe through every danger and every storm, if she would only stick to him. And Nan, sobbing her fears one by one out on his breast, put her arms around his neck and whispered that for life or death, she would stick.

It was not hard for De Spain next morning to find Duke Morgan. The difficulty was to meet him without the mob of hangers-on whose appetite had been whetted with the prospect of a death, and perhaps more than one, in the meeting of men whose supremacy with the gun had never been successfully disputed. It required all the diplomacy of Lefever to "pull off" a conference between the two which should not from the start be hopeless, because of a crowd of Duke's partisans whose presence would egg him on, in spite of everything, to a combat.

But toward eleven o'clock in the morning, De Spain having been concealed like a circus performer during every minute earlier, Duke Morgan was found, alone, in a barber's hands in the Mountain house. At the moment Duke left the revolving chair and walked to the cigar stand to pay his check, De Spain entered the shop through the rear door opening from the hotel office.

Passing with an easy step the row of barbers lined up in waiting beside their chairs, De Spain walked straight down the open aisle, behind Morgan's back. While Duke bent over the case to select a cigar, De Spain, passing, placed himself at the mountain-man's side and between him and the street sunshine. It was taking an advantage, De Spain was well aware, but under the circumstances he thought himself entitled to a good light on Duke's eye.

De Spain wore an ordinary sack street suit, with no sign of a weapon about him; but none of those who considered themselves favored spectators of a long-awaited encounter felt any doubt as to his ability to put his hand on one at incomparably short notice. There was, however, no trace of hostility or suspicion in De Spain's greeting.

"Hello, Duke Morgan," he said frankly. Morgan looked around. His face hardened when he saw De Spain, and he involuntarily took a short step backward. De Spain, with his left hand lying carelessly on the cigar case, faced him. "I heard you wanted to see me," continued De Spain. "I want to see you. How's your back since you went home?"

Morgan eyed him with a mixture of suspicion and animosity. He took what was to him the most significant part of De Spain's greeting first and threw his response into words as short as words could be chopped: "What do you want to see me about?"

"Nothing unpleasant, I hope," returned De Spain. "Let's sit down a minute."

"Say what you got to say."

"Well, don't take my head off, Duke. I was sorry to hear you were hurt. And I've been trying to figure out how to make it easier for you to get to and from town while you are getting strong. Jeffries and I both feel there's been a lot of unnecessary hard feeling between the Morgans and the company, and we want to ask you to accept this to show some of it's ended." De Spain put his left hand into his side pocket and held out an unsealed envelope to Morgan. Duke, taking the envelope, eyed it distrustfully. "What's this?" he demanded, opening it and drawing out a card.

"Something for easier riding. An annual pass for you and one over the stage line between Calabasas and Sleepy Cat—with Mr. Jeffries' compliments."

Like a flash, Morgan tore the card pass in two and threw it angrily to the floor. "Tell Mr. Jeffries," he exclaimed violently, "to—"

The man that chanced at that moment to be lying in the nearest chair slid quietly but imperiously out from under the razor and started with the barbers for the rear door, wiping the lather from one unshaven side of his face with a neck towel as he took his hasty way. At the back of the shop a fat man, sitting in a chair on the high, shoe-shining platform, while a negro boy polished him, rose at Morgan's impetuous and tried to step over the bootblack's head to the floor below. The boy, trying to get out of the

way, jumped back, and the fat man fell, or pretended to fall, over him—for it might be seen that the man, despite his size, had lighted like a cat on his feet and was instantly half-way up to the front of the shop, exclaiming profanely but collectively at the lad's awkwardness, before De Spain had had time to reply to the insult.

The noise and confusion of the incident were considerable. Morgan was too old a fighter to look behind him at a critical moment. No man could say he had meant to draw when he stamped the card underfoot, but De Spain read it in his eye and knew that Lefever's sudden diversion at the rear had made him hesitate; the crisis passed like a flash. "Sorry you feel that way, Duke," returned De Spain, undisturbed. "It is a courtesy we were glad to extend. And I want to speak to you about Nan, too."

Morgan's face was livid. "What about her?"

"She has given me permission to ask your consent to our marriage," said De Spain, "some time in the reasonable future."

It was difficult for Duke to speak at all, he was so infuriated. "You can get my consent in just one way," he managed to say, "that's by getting me." "Then I'm afraid I'll never get it, for I'll never get you, Duke."

A torrent of oaths fell from Morgan's cracked lips. He tried to tell De Spain in his fury that he knew all about his underhand work, he called him more than one hard name, made no secret of his deadly enmity, and challenged him to end their differences then and there.

De Spain did not move. His left hand again lay on the cigar case. "Duke," he said, when his antagonist had exhausted his vituperation, "I wouldn't fight you, anyway. You're crazy angry at me for no reason on earth. If you'll give me just one good reason for feeling the way you do toward me, and the way you've always acted toward me since I came up to this country, I'll fight you."

"Pull your gun," cried Morgan with an imprecation.

"I won't do it. You call me a coward. Ask these boys here in the shop whether they agree with you on that. You might as well call me an isosceles triangle. You're just crazy sore at me when I want to be friends with you. Instead of pulling my gun, Duke, I'll lay it out on the case, here, to show you that all I ask of you is to talk reason."

De Spain, reaching with his left hand under the lapel of his coat, took a Colt's revolver from its breast harness and laid it, the muzzle toward himself, on the plate-glass top of the cigar stand. It reduced him to the necessity of a spring into Morgan for the smallest chance for his life if Morgan should draw; but De Spain was a desperate gambler in such matters even at twenty-eight, and he laid his wagers on what he could read in another's eye.

"There's more reasons than one why I shouldn't fight you," he said evenly. "Duke, you're old enough to be my father—do you realize that? What's the good of our shooting each other up?" he asked, ignoring Morgan's furious interruptions. "Who's to look after Nan when you go—as you must, before very many years? Have you ever asked yourself that? Do you want to leave her to that pack of wolves in the gap? You know, just as well as I do, the gap is no place for a high-bred, fine-grained girl like Nan Morgan. But the gap is your home, and you've done right to keep her under your roof and under your eye. Do you think I like to pull a trigger on a man that's been a father to Nan? Damnation, Duke, could you expect me to do it, willingly? Nan is a queen. The best in the world isn't good enough for her—I'm not good enough, I know that. She's dear to you, she is dear to me. If you really want to see me try to use a gun, send me a man that will insult or abuse her. If you want to use your own gun, use it on me if I ever insult or abuse her—is that fair?"

"Damn your fine words," exclaimed Morgan slowly and implacably. "They don't pull any wool over my eyes. I know you, De Spain—I know your breed—"

"What's that?"

"Morgan checked himself at that tone. "You can't sneak into my affairs any deeper," he cried. "Keep away from my blood! I know how to take care of my own. I'll do it. So help me God, if you ever take anyone of my kin away from me—it'll be over my dead body!" He ended with a bitter oath and a final taunt: "Is that fair?"

De Spain finds he will have to use different tactics if he can hope ever to make Nan his wife. What he sets out to do to solve this big personal problem is described in the next installment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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