

Spearman Frank Hamilton

Nan of Music Mountain



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Frank H. Spearman

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CHAPTER I

FRONTIER DAY

Lefever, if there was a table in the room, could never be got to sit on a chair; and being rotund he sat preferably sidewise on the edge of the table. One of his small feet—his feet were encased in tight, high-heeled, ill-fitting horsemen's boots—usually rested on the floor, the other swung at the end of his stubby leg slowly in the air. This idiosyncrasy his companion, de Spain, had learned to tolerate.

But Lefever's subdued whistle, which seemed meditative, always irritated de Spain more or less, despite his endeavor not to be irritated. It was like the low singing of a tea-kettle, which, however unobtrusive, indicates steam within. In fact, John Lefever, who was built not unlike a kettle, and whose high, shiny forehead was topped by a pompadour shock of very yellow hair, never whistled except when there was some pressure on his sensibilities.

The warm sun streaming through the windows of the private office of the division superintendent at Sleepy Cat, a railroad town lying almost within gunshot of the great continental divide, would easily have accounted for the cordial perspiration that illumined Lefever's forehead. Not that a perspiration is easily achieved in the high country; it isn't. None, indeed, but a physical giant, which Lefever was, could maintain so constant and visible a nervous moisture in the face of the extraordinary atmospheric evaporation of the mountain plateaus. And to de Spain, on this occasion, even the glistening beads on his companion's forehead were annoying, for he knew that he himself was properly responsible for their presence.

De Spain, tilted back in the superintendent's chair, sat near Lefever—Jeffries had the mountain division then—his elbows resting on the arms of the revolving-chair, and with his hands he gripped rather defiantly the spindles supporting them; his feet were crossed on the walnut rim of the shabby, cloth-topped table. In this attitude his chin lay on his soft, open collar and tie, his sunburnt lips were shut tight, and above and between his nervous brown eyes were two little, vertical furrows of perplexity and regret. He was looking at the dull-finish barrel of a new rifle, that lay across Lefever's lap. At intervals Lefever took the rifle up and, whistling softly, examined with care a fracture of the lever, the broken thumb-piece of which lay on the table between the two men.

From the Main Street side of the large room came the hooting and clattering of a Frontier Day celebration, and these noises seemed not to allay the discomfort apparent on the faces of the two men.

"It certainly is warm," observed Lefever, apropos of nothing at all.

"Why don't you get out of the sun?" suggested de Spain shortly.

Lefever made a face. "I am trying to keep away from that noise."

"Hang it, John," blurted out de Spain peevishly, "what possessed you to send for *me* to do the shooting, anyway?"

His companion answered gently—Lefever's patience was noted even among contained men—"Henry," he remonstrated, "I sent for you because I thought you could shoot."

De Spain's expression did not change under the reproach. His bronzed face was naturally amiable, and his mental attitude toward ill luck, usually one of indifference, was rarely more than one of perplexity. His features were so regular as to contribute to this undisturbed expression, and his face would not ordinarily attract attention but for his extremely bright and alive eyes—the frequent mark of an out-of-door mountain life—and especially for a red birthmark, low on his left cheek, disappearing under the turn of the jaw. It was merely a strawberry, so-called, but an ineradicable stamp, and

perhaps to a less preoccupied man a misfortune. Henry de Spain, however, even at twenty-eight, was too absorbed in many things to give thought to this often, and after knowing him, one forgot about the birthmark in the man that carried it. Lefever's reproach was naturally provocative. "I hope now," retorted de Spain, but without any show of resentment, "you understand I can't."

"No," persisted Lefever good-naturedly, "I only realize, Henry, that this wasn't your day for the job."

The door of the outer office opened and Jeffries, the superintendent, walked into the room; he had just come from Medicine Bend in his car. The two men rose to greet him. He asked about the noise in the street.

"That noise, William, comes from all Calabastas and all Morgan's Gap," explained Lefever, still fondling the rifle. "The Morgans are celebrating our defeat. They put it all over us. We were challenged yesterday," he continued in response to the abrupt questions of Jeffries. "The Morgans offered to shoot us offhand, two hundred yards, bull's-eye count. The boys here—Bob Scott and some of the stage-guards—put it up to me. I thought we could trim them by running in a real gunman. I wired to Medicine Bend for Henry. Henry comes up last night with a brand-new rifle, presented, I imagine, by the Medicine Bend Black Hand Local, No. 13. This is the gun," explained Lefever feebly, holding forth the exhibit. "The lever," he added with a patient expletive, "broke."

"Give me the gun, John," interposed de Spain resignedly. "I'll lay it on the track to-night for a train to run over."

"It was a time limit, you understand, William," persisted Lefever, continuing to stick pins calmly into de Spain. "Henry got to shooting too fast."

"That wasn't what beat me," exclaimed de Spain curtly. And taking up the offending rifle he walked out of the room.

"Nor was it the most humiliating feature of his defeat," murmured Lefever, as the door closed behind his discomfited champion. "What do you think, William?" he grumbled on. "The Morgans ran in a girl to shoot against us—true as there's a God in heaven. They put up Nan Morgan, old Duke Morgan's little niece. And what do you think? She shot the fingers clean off our well-known Black Hand scout. I never before in my life saw Henry so fussed. The little Music Mountain skirt simply put it all over him. She had five bull's-eyes to Henry's three when the lever snapped. He forfeited."

"Some shooting," commented Jeffries, rapidly signing letters.

"We expected some when Henry unslung his gun," Lefever went on without respecting Jeffries's preoccupation. "As it is, those fellows have cleaned up every dollar loose in Sleepy Cat, and then some. Money? They could start a bank this minute."

Sounds of revelry continued to pour in through the street window. The Morgans were celebrating uncommonly. "Rubbing it in, eh, John?" suggested Jeffries.

"Think of it," gasped Lefever, "to be beaten by an eighteen-year-old girl."

"Now that," declared Jeffries, waking up as if for the first time interested, "is exactly where you made your mistake, John. Henry is young and excitable—"

"Excitable!" echoed Lefever, taken aback.

"Yes, excitable—when a girl is in the ring—why not? Especially a trim, all-alive, up-and-coming, blue-eyed hussy like that girl of Duke Morgan's. She would upset any young fellow, John."

"A girl from Morgan's Gap?"

"Morgan's Gap, nothing!" responded Jeffries scornfully. "What's that got to do with it? Does that change the fire in the girl's eye, the curve of her neck, the slope of her shoulder, John, or the color of her cheek?" Lefever only stared. "De Spain got to thinking about the girl," persisted Jeffries, "her eyes and neck and pink cheeks rattled him. Against a girl you should have put up an old, one-eyed scout like yourself, or me, or Bob Scott."

"There's another thing you forget, John," continued Jeffries, signing even more rapidly. "A gunman shoots his best when there's somebody shooting at him—otherwise he wouldn't be a gunman—"

he would be just an ordinary, every-day marksman, with a Schuetzenverein medal and a rooster feather in his hat. That's why you shoot well, John—because you're a gunman, and not a marksman.”

“That boy can shoot all around me, Jeff.”

“For instance,” continued Jeffries, tossing off signatures now with a rubber stamp, and developing his incontestable theory at the same time, “if you had put Gale Morgan up against Henry at, say five hundred yards, and told them to shoot *at* each other, instead of against each other, you'd have got bull's-eyes to burn from de Spain. And the Calabasas crowd wouldn't have your money. John, if you want to win money, you must study the psychological.”

There was abundance of raillery in Lefever's retort: “That's why you are rich, Jeff?”

“No, I am poor because I failed to study it. That is why I am at Sleepy Cat holding down a division. But now that you've brought Henry up here, we'll keep him.”

“What do you mean, keep him?” demanded Lefever, starting in protest.

“What do I mean?” thundered Jeffries, who frequently thundered even when it didn't rain in the office. “I mean I need him. I mean the time to shoot a bear is when you see him. John, what kind of a fellow is de Spain?” demanded the superintendent, as if he had never heard of him.

“Henry de Spain?” asked Lefever, sparring innocently for time.

“No, Commodore George Washington, General Jackson, Isaac Watts de Spain,” retorted Jeffries peevishly. “Don't you know the man we're talking about?”

“Known him for ten years.”

“Then why say 'Henry' de Spain, as if there were a dozen of him? He's the only de Spain in these parts, isn't he? What kind of a fellow is he?”

Lefever was ready; and as he sat in a chair sidewise at the table, one arm flung across the green baize, he looked every inch his devil-may-care part. Regarding Jeffries keenly, he exclaimed with emphasis: “Why, if you want him short and sharp, he's a man with a soft eye and a snap-turtle jaw, a man of close squeaks and short-arm shots, always getting into trouble, always getting out; a man that can wheedle more out of a horse than anybody but an Indian; coax more shots out of a gun than anybody else can put into it—if you want him flat, that's Henry, as I size him.”

Jeffries resumed his mildest tone: “Tell him to come in a minute, John.”

De Spain himself expressed contemptuous impatience when Lefever told him the superintendent wanted him to go to work at Sleepy Cat. He declared he had always hated the town; and Lefever readily understood why he should especially detest it just now. Every horseman's yell that rang on the sunny afternoon air through the open windows—and from up the street and down there were still a good many—was one of derision at de Spain's galling defeat. When he at length consented to talk with Jeffries about coming to Sleepy Cat, the interview was of a positive sort on the one side and an obstinate sort on the other. De Spain raised one objection after another to leaving Medicine Bend, and Jeffries finally summoned a show of impatience.

“You are looking for promotion, aren't you?” he demanded threateningly.

“Yes, but not for motion without the 'pro,’” objected de Spain. “I want to stick to the railroad business. You want to get me into the stage business.”

“Temporarily, yes. But I've told you when you come back to the division proper, you come as my assistant, if you make good running the Thief River stages. Think of the salary.”

“I have no immediate heirs.”

“This is not a matter for joking, de Spain.”

“I know that, too. How many men have been shot on the stages in the last six months?”

“Why, now and again the stages are held up, yes,” admitted Jeffries brusquely; “that is to be expected where the specie shipments are large. The Thief River mines are rotten with gold just now. But you don't have to drive a stage. We supply you with good men for that, and good guards—men willing to take any kind of a chance if the pay is right. And the pay is right, and yours as general manager will be right.”

“I have never as yet generally managed any stage line,” remarked de Spain, poking ridicule at the title, “no matter how modest an outfit.”

“You will never learn younger. There is a fascination,” declared Jeffries, ignoring the fling, and tilting his chair eloquently back to give ease and conviction to his words, “about running a good stage line that no railroad business can ever touch. There is, of course, nothing in the Rocky Mountains, for that matter in the United States—nothing, I guess, in the world—that approaches the Thief River line in its opportunities. Every wagon we own, from the lightest to the heaviest, is built to order on our particular specifications by the Studebaker people.” Here Jeffries pointed his finger sharply at de Spain as if to convict him of some dereliction. “You’ve seen them! You know what they are.”

De Spain, bullied, haltingly nodded acquiescence.

“Second-growth hickory in the gears,” continued Jeffries encouragingly, “ash tongues and boxes—”

“Some of those old buses look like ash-boxes,” interposed de Spain irreverently.

But Jeffries was not to be stopped: “Timkin springs, ball-bearing axles—why, man, there is no vehicle in the world built like a Thief River stage.”

“You are some wagon-maker, Jeff,” said de Spain, regarding him ironically.

Jeffries ignored every sarcasm. “This road, as you know, owns the line. And the net from the specie shipments equals the net on an ordinary railroad division. But we must have a man to run that line that can curb the disorders along the route. Calabasas Valley, de Spain, is a bad place.”

“Is it?” de Spain asked as naively as if he had never heard of Calabasas, though Jeffries was nervily stating a fact bald and notorious to both.

“There are a lot of bad men there,” Jeffries went on, “who are bad simply because they’ve never had a man to show them.”

“The last ‘general’ manager was killed there, wasn’t he?”

“Not in the valley, no. He was shot at Calabasas Inn.”

“Would that make very much difference in the way he felt about it?”

Jeffries, with an effort, laughed. “That’s all right, Henry! They won’t get you.” Again he extended his finger dogmatically: “If I thought they would, I wouldn’t send you down there.”

“Thank you.”

“You are young, ambitious: four thousand a year isn’t hanging from every telegraph-pole; it is almost twice what they are paying me.”

“You’re not getting shot at.”

“No man, Henry, knows the hour of his death. No man in the high country knows when he is to be made a target—that you well understand. Men are shot down in this country that have no more idea of getting killed than I have—or you have.”

“Don’t include me. I have a pretty good idea of getting killed right away—the minute I take this job.”

“We have temporized with this Calabasas outfit long enough,” declared Jeffries, dropping his mask at last. “Deaf Sandusky, Logan, and that squint-eyed thief, Dave Sassoon—all hold-up men, every one of them! Henry, I’m putting you in on that job because you’ve got nerve, because you can shoot, because I don’t think they can get you—and paying you a whaling big salary to straighten things out along the Spanish Sinks. Do you know, Henry—” Jeffries leaned forward and lowered his tone. Master of the art of persuading and convincing, of hammering and pounding, of swaying the doubting and deciding the undecided, the strong-eyed mountain-man looked his best as he held the younger man under his spell. “Do you know,” he repeated, “I suspect that Morgan Gap bunch are really behind and beneath a lot of this deviltry around Calabasas? You take Gale Morgan: why, he trains with Dave Sassoon; take his uncle, Duke: Sassoon never is in trouble but what Duke will help him out.” Jeffries exploded with a slight but forcible expletive. “Was there ever a thief or a robber

driven into Morgan's Gap that didn't find sympathy and shelter with some of the Morgans? I believe they are in every game pulled on the Thief River stages."

"As bad as that?"

Jeffries turned to his desk. "Ask John Lefever."

De Spain had a long talk with John. But John was a poor adviser. He advised no one on any subject. He whistled, he hummed a tune, if his hat was on he took it off, and if it happened to be off, which was unusual, he put it on. He extended his arm, at times, suddenly, as if on the brink of a positive assertion. But he decided nothing, and asserted nothing. If he talked, he talked well and energetically; but the end of a talk usually found him and de Spain about where they began. So it was on this trying day—for Lefever was not able wholly to hide the upsetting of his confidence of victory, and his humiliation at the now more distant yells from the Calabasas and Morgan Gap victors.

But concerning the Morgans and their friends, Lefever, to whom Jeffries had rudely referred the subject at the close of his talk with de Spain, did abandon his habitual reticence. "Rustlers, thieves, robbers, coiners, outlaws!" he exclaimed energetically.

"Is this because they got your money to-day, John?" asked de Spain.

"Never mind my money. I've got a new job with nothing to do, and plenty of cash."

De Spain asked what the job was. "On the stages," announced Lefever. "I am now general superintendent of the Thief River Line."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that I act for the reorganization committee in buying alfalfa for the horses and smokeless pipes for the guards. I am to be your assistant."

"I'm not going to take that job, John."

"Yes, you are."

"Not if I know it. I am going back to Medicine Bend to-night." Lefever took off his hat and twirled it skilfully on one hand, humming softly the while. "John," asked de Spain after a pause, "who is that girl that shot against me this afternoon?"

"That," answered Lefever, thinking, shocked, of Jeffries's words, "was Nan Morgan."

"Who is she?"

"Just one of the Morgans; lives in the Gap with old Duke Morgan, her uncle; lived there as long as I can remember. Some shot, Henry."

"How can she live in the Gap," mused de Spain, "with an outfit like that?"

"Got nowhere else to live, I guess. I believe you'd better change your mind, Henry, and stay with us."

"No," returned de Spain meditatively, "I'm not going to stay. I've had glory enough out of this town for a while." He picked up his hat and put it on. Lefever thought it well to make no response. He was charged with the maintenance and operation of the stage-line arsenal at Sleepy Cat, and spent many of his idle moments toying with the firearms. He busied himself now with the mechanism of a huge revolver—one that the stage-driver, Frank Elpaso, had wrecked on the head of a troublesome negro coming in from the mines. De Spain in turn took off his hat, poked the crown discontentedly, and, rising with a loss of amiability in his features and manner, walked out of the room.

The late sun was streaming down the full length of Main Street. The street was still filled with loiterers who had spent the day at the fair, and lingered now in town in the vague hope of seeing a brawl or a fight before sundown—cattlemen and cowboys from the northern ranges, sheepmen from the Spider River country, small ranchers and irrigators from the Bear basin, who picked their steps carefully, and spoke with prudence in the presence of roisterers from the Spanish Sinks, and gunmen and gamblers from Calabasas and Morgan's Gap. The Morgans themselves and their following were out to the last retainer.

CHAPTER II

THE THIEF RIVER STAGE LINE

Sleepy Cat has little to distinguish it in its casual appearance from the ordinary mountain railroad town of the western Rockies. The long, handsome railroad station, the eating-house, and the various division-headquarters buildings characteristic of such towns are in Sleepy Cat built of local granite. The yard facilities, shops, and roundhouses are the last word in modern railroad construction, and the division has not infrequently held the medal for safety records.

But more than these things go toward making up the real Sleepy Cat. It is a community with earlier-than-railroad traditions. Sleepy Cat has been more or less of a settlement almost since the day of Jim Bridger, and its isolated position in the midst of a country of vast deserts, far mountain ranges, and widely separated watercourses has made it from the earliest Western days a rendezvous for hunters, trappers, emigrants, prospectors, and adventurers—and these have all, in some measure, left their impress on the town.

Sleepy Cat lies prettily on a high plateau north and east of the railroad, which makes a détour here to the north to round the Superstition Range; it is a county-seat, and this, where counties are as large as ordinary Eastern States, gives it some political distinction.

The principal street lies just north of the railroad, and parallels it. A modern and substantial hotel has for some years filled the corner above the station. The hotel was built by Harry Tenison soon after the opening of the Thief River gold-fields. Along Main Street to the west are strung the usual mountain-town stores and saloons, but to the north a pretty residence district has been built up about the court-house square. And a good water-supply, pumped from Rat River, a brawling mountain stream that flows just south of the town, has encouraged the care of lawns and trees.

Before de Spain had walked far he heard music from the open-air dancing-pavilion in Grant Street. Stirred by an idle curiosity, he turned the corner and stopped to watch the crowded couples whirling up and down the raised platform under paper lanterns and red streamers to the music of an automatic piano. He took his place in a fringe of onlookers that filled the sidewalk. But he was thinking as he stood, not of the boisterous dancing or the clumsy dancers, but of the broken lever and the defeat at the fair-grounds. It still rankled in his mind. While he stood thinking the music ceased.

A man, who appeared to be in authority, walked to the centre of the dancing-floor and made an announcement that de Spain failed to catch. The manager apparently repeated it to those of his patrons that crowded around him, and more than once to individual inquirers who had not caught the purport of what had been said. These late comers he pushed back, and when the floor had been well cleared he nodded to the boy operating the piano, and looked toward a young couple standing in an attitude of waiting at the head of the hall.

All eyes being turned their way, de Spain's attention as well was drawn toward them. The man was powerful in stature, and rather too heavy, but straight as an Indian. His small, reddish face was tanned by the sun and wind, and his manner as he stood with arms akimbo, his hands resting on his belt, facing his partner and talking to her, had the confidence of a man at ease with women. From the handsome hat which, as he turned to his partner for the dance, he sent spinning toward a table beside the piano, the soft brown shirt and flowing tie, down to the small, high-heeled and spurred boots, he wore the distinctive cowboy rig of the mountains, even to the heavy hip-holster, in which his revolver was slung. He was, in fact, rather too smartly dressed, too confident in manner to please de Spain, who was in no mood to be pleased anyway, and who could conceive a dislike for a man the instant he set eyes on him—and a liking as quickly. He seemed to recall, too, that this particular fellow had crowed the loudest when he himself forfeited the shooting-match earlier in the day.

But de Spain, unamiable as he now was, looked with unconcealed interest at the man's dancing partner. She, too, was browned by the mountain sun and air—a slight, erect girl, her head well set, and a delicate waist-line above a belted brown skirt, which just reached the tops of her small, high, tan riding-boots. She wore a soft, French-gray Stetson hat. Her dark-brown hair was deftly hidden under it, but troublesome ringlets strayed about her ears as if she had not seen a glass for hours, and these, standing first with one hand and then the other laid against her leather belt, she put up into place, and as if not wholly at ease with her surroundings. Instead of looking at her partner, who talked to her while waiting, her eyes, noticeably pretty, wandered about the platform, resting at moments on the closely drawn lines of spectators. They reflected in their unrest the dissatisfied expression of her face. A talkative woman standing just in front of de Spain, told a companion that the man was Gale Morgan, a nephew of Satterlee, laziest of the Morgans. De Spain, who never had to look twice at any woman, at once recognized in the dancing partner the little Music Mountain girl who had been his undoing at the target; the woman added that Nan was, in some hazy degree, Gale's cousin.

The energetic piano thumped the strains of a two-step. Gale Morgan extended his arm toward Nan; she looked very slight at his side. But instead of taking her position, she drew back, looking up and frowning as she seemed to speak objectingly to Gale. De Spain saw her hesitation without catching its import. The talkative woman near at hand was more divining. "Lord, that Nan Morgan makes me tired," she exclaimed to her gum-chewing companion, "ever see anything like her? First she wouldn't dance unless the floor was cleared—Sleepy Cat folks ain't good enough for them Music Mountain cattle thieves! And now the music doesn't suit her. Listen to that boob of a boy trying one piece after another to get one to suit my outlaw lady. Nerve!"

But while the impatient woman chafed the right tune was found, and Nan Morgan's face, as she watched the manipulator of the piano, brightened. "Faster!" she cried under her breath, taking her position on her cousin's arm. Then, responding with a sort of fiery impatience to her partner's guiding, she caught the rapid step of the music, and together the two swept down the floor.

Whatever the impatience of the crowd over the finicky start, the spectators soon showed their admiration of the dancing with unrestrained hand-clapping, and followed with approving outcries. De Spain, standing apart, watched Nan's flying feet, wondering how she and her people could possibly be what they were painted, and whether they really were so or not. Every swaying step, every agile turn proved how sure she was of herself, and how perfectly her body answered to every exaction of the quick movement of the dance. Gale Morgan seemed the merest attendant for his partner, who, with quickened pulses, gave herself up more and more to the lively call of the music.

Once the two swung away out, near to de Spain's corner. As Nan whirled by, de Spain, either with the infection of the music or from her nearness to him, caught his breath. His eyes riveted themselves on her flushed face as she passed—oblivious of his presence—and he recalled how in the morning she had handled her rifle in the same quick, sure way. De Spain could not dance at all; but no one could successfully accuse him of not knowing how to handle any sort of a gun. It was only now, as she came so very close to him for the first time since the mortification of the morning, and he saw the smoothness of her pink-brown cheeks, that he could ungrudgingly give her full credit for shooting him down. He forgave her, unasked, the humiliation she had put on him. He felt an impulse to go up to her—now that she had stopped dancing—and congratulate her honestly, instead of boorishly as he had done at the match, and to say, unreservedly, that she was the better shot—indeed, one of the best he had ever seen.

But while he thought all of this he did not stir a step. The two dancers at once disappeared, and a new and rougher party crowded out on the floor.

"Now, isn't that a pretty bunch!" exclaimed the critical woman again. "That's the Calabasas gang. Look at those four men with the red neckerchiefs. Sandusky, that big fellow, with the crooked jaw—Butch, they call him—and his jaw's not half as crooked as Sandusky himself, either. He couldn't lie in bed straight. And Harvey Logan, with his black hair plastered over his eyes. Why, for one drink

those two fellows would turn loose on this crowd and kill half a dozen. And there's two of Duke Morgan's cowboys with them, boozing old Bull Page, and that squint-eyed Sassoon—he's worse than the others, that fellow—a fine bunch to allow in this town."

De Spain had excellent ears. He had heard of these Calabasas men—of Sandusky and of the little fellow, Logan. They had much more than a local reputation as outlaws; they were known from one end of the Superstition Range to the other as evil-doers of more than ordinary ruthlessness. De Spain, from force of habit, studied every detail of their make-up. Both showed more than traces of drink, and both securing partners joined rudely in the dancing. It had become second nature to de Spain to note even insignificant details concerning men, and he took an interest in and remarked how very low Logan carried his gun in front of his hip. Sandusky's holster was slung higher and farther back on the side. Logan wore a tan shirt and khaki. Sandusky, coatless, was dressed in a white shirt, with a red tie, and wore a soiled, figured waistcoat fastened at the bottom by a cut-glass button.

The Sleepy Cat gossip commented on how much money these men had been spending all day. She wondered aloud, reckless apparently of consequences, who had been robbed, lately, to provide it. Her companion scolded her for stirring up talk that might make trouble; averred she didn't believe half the stories she heard; asserted that these men lived quietly at Calabasas, minding their own affairs. "And they're kind to poor folks, too." "Sure," grimaced the obdurate one, "with other people's money." De Spain had no difficulty in placing the two women. One was undoubtedly the wife of a railroad man, who hated the mountain outlaws, and the other was, with equal certainty, a town sympathizer with slandered men, and the two represented the two community elements in Sleepy Cat.

De Spain, discontented, turning again into Main Street, continued on toward the Thief River stage barn. He knew an old Scotch Medicine Bend barnman that worked there, a boyhood friend; but the man, McAlpin, was out. After looking the horses over and inspecting the wagons with a new but mild curiosity, awakened by Jeffries's proposal, de Spain walked back toward the station. He had virtually decided not to take the job that Jeffries painted as so attractive, and resolved now to take the night train back to Medicine Bend. Medicine Bend was his home. He knew every man, woman, and child in the town. Before the tragic death of his father, his mother had lived there, and de Spain had grown up in the town and gone to school there. He was a railroad man, anyway—a modest trainmaster—and not eager for stage-line management.

The prospect of reducing the Sinks to a law-and-order basis at his own proper risk could not be alluring to the most aggressive of law-and-order men—and de Spain was not aggressive. Yet within a moment of his sensible decision he was to be hurried by a mere accident to an exactly contrary fate.

As he passed Grant Street again he encountered a party on horseback heading for the river bridge. Trotting their horses leisurely, they turned the corner directly in front of de Spain. There were five in the company. Three of the men were riding abreast and a little ahead. Of these, the middle horseman was a spare man of forty years, with a black military hat, and a frankly disreputable air. His face was drawn up into a one-sided smile, marked by a deep, vertical wrinkle running up, close to his nose, from the corner of his mouth almost to the inner corner of his eye. Satt Morgan's smile was habitual and lessened his stern aspect. At his right rode his cousin, Duke Morgan, older, shorter, and stouter. His square, heavy-jawed, smooth-shaven face was lighted by hard, keen eyes, and finished by an uncompromising chin. Duke was the real head of the clan, of which there were numerous branches in the Superstition Mountains, all looking with friendliness or enmity to the Morgans of Morgan's Gap.

The yellow-haired man riding on the left, with a red face and red-lidded, squinting eyes, was in stature something between the two Morgans, and about the age of the elder cousin. His shoulders slouched, and he showed none of the blood of his companions. But this man, David Sassoon, the Calabasas gambler, quondam cowboy, and chronic brawler, stood in some way close to the different Morgans, and was reputed to have got each of them, at different times, out of more than one troublesome affair, either by sheer force of arms, or through his resourceful cunning.

These men were followed by a younger man riding with a very young woman. De Spain knew none of the front-rank men, but he knew well Nan Morgan and her dancing partner.

They were talking together, and Nan seemed from her manner at odds with her companion. He appeared to be trying to laugh the situation off when he caught sight of de Spain pausing for them to pass. Gale's face lighted as he set eyes on him, and he spoke quickly to Nan. De Spain could not at first hear his words, but he needed no ears to interpret his laugh and the expression on his face. Nan, persistently importuned, looked around. She saw de Spain, much closer, it would seem, than she had expected to see a man looking directly at her, and her eyes rested on him only a moment. The substance of her cousin's words she apparently had not caught, and he repeated them in a louder voice: "There's your handsome Medicine Bend gunman!"

Nan, glancing again toward de Spain, seemed aware that he heard. She looked away. De Spain tightened up with a rage. The blood rushed to his face, the sarcasm struck in. If the birthmark could have deepened with humiliation it would have done so at the instant of the cold inspection of the girl's pretty eyes. But he cared less for Nan's inspection, cold as it was, than for the jibe of her satisfied cousin. Not content, Gale, calling ahead to the others, invited their attention to the man on the street corner. De Spain felt minded to hurl an insult at them in a body. It would have been four to one—rather awkward odds even if they were mounted—and there was a woman. But he only stood still, returning their inspection as insolently as silence could. Each face was faithfully photographed and filed in his memory, and his steady gaze followed them until they rode down the hill and clattered jauntily out on the swaying suspension bridge that still crosses the Rat River at Grant Street, and connects the whole south country—the Spanish Sinks, the Thief River gold-fields, the saw-toothed Superstition Range, Morgan's Gap, and Music Mountain with Sleepy Cat and the railroad.

De Spain, walking down Grant Street, watched the party disappear among the hills across the river. The encounter had stirred him. He already hated the Morgans, at least all except the blue-eyed girl, and she, it was not difficult to divine from her expression, was, at least, disdainful of her morning rival.

Reaching the station platform while still busy with his thoughts, de Spain encountered Jeffries and Lefever.

"When are you coming up to take my job, Henry?" demanded the superintendent without any parley.

"I am not coming up," announced de Spain bluntly.

"Not coming up, eh? All right, we'll find somebody that will come up," retorted Jeffries. "John," he added, "wire Medicine Bend to send Farrell Kennedy here in the morning to see me."

"What's the reason that fellow sticks so close to Medicine Bend?" demanded Jeffries, when Lefever joined him later in his office.

"Don't ask me," frowned Lefever perplexed. "Don't ask me. Henry is odd in some ways. You can't tell what's going on inside that fellow's head by looking at the outside of it." Jeffries grunted coldly at this bit of wisdom. "I'll tell you what I should think—if I had to think: Henry de Spain has never found out rightly who was responsible for the death of his father. He expects to do it, sometime; and he thinks sometime he's going to find out right there in Medicine Bend."

While they were talking the train was pulling out for Medicine Bend with de Spain on board.

It was a tedious ride, and de Spain was much too engaged with his thoughts to sleep. The Morgans were in his head, and he could not be rid of them. He recalled having been told that long ago some of these same Morgans lived on the Peace River above his father's ranch. Every story he had ever heard of their wild lives, for they were men sudden in quarrel and reckless of sequel, came back to his mind. He wondered what sort of a young girl this could be who lived among them—who *could* live among them—and be what she seemed at a glance to be—a fawn among mountain-wolves.

It was late when he reached Medicine Bend, and raining—a dismal kind of a night. Instead of going to his room, just across the street from the station, he went up-stairs and sat down with the

train-despatchers. After an hour of indecision, marked by alternative fits of making up and unmaking his mind, he went, instead of going to bed, into the telegraph-room, where black-haired Dick Grady sat at a key.

“How about the fight to-night at Sleepy Cat?” Grady asked at once.

“What fight?” demanded de Spain perfunctorily.

“The Calabosas gang got to going again up there to-night. They say one of the Morgans was in it. Some town, that Sleepy Cat, eh, Henry?”

“What Morgan was in it?”

“Gale Morgan. A lot of stuff came in on it an hour ago. Was there anything started when you left?”

“I didn’t hear of anything,” responded de Spain. But his indifference to the subject was marked.

“What’s the matter?” demanded the operator. “Aren’t you well to-night?”

“Perfectly.”

“Sleepy?”

De Spain roused himself. “Dick, have you got a Sleepy Cat wire open?”

“What do you want?”

“Tell Jeffries I’ll take that Thief River stage job.”

CHAPTER III

THE SPANISH SINKS

From a car window at Sleepy Cat may be seen, stretching far down into the southwest a chain of towering peaks, usually snow-clad, that dominate the desert in every direction for almost a hundred miles. In two extended groups, separated by a narrow but well-defined break, they constitute a magnificent rampart, named by Spaniards the Superstition Mountains, and they stretch beyond the horizon to the south, along the vast depression known locally as the Spanish Sinks. The break on the eastern side of the chain comes about twenty miles southwest of Sleepy Cat, and is marked on the north by the most striking, and in some respects most majestic peak in the range—Music Mountain; the break itself has taken the name of its earliest white settlers, and is called Morgan's Gap. No railroad has ever yet penetrated this southern country, despite the fact that rich mines have been opened along these mountains, and are still being opened; but it lies to-day in much of the condition of primitive savagery, and lawlessness, as the word is conventionally accepted, that obtained when the first rush was made for the Thief River gold-fields.

It is not to be understood that law is an unknown equation between Calabasas and Thief River, or even between Calabasas and Sleepy Cat. But as statute law it suffers so many infractions as to be hardly recognizable in the ordinary sense. Business is done in this country; but business must halt everywhere with its means of communication, and in the Music Mountain country it still rests on the facilities of a stage line. The stage line is a big and vigorous affair, a perfectly organized railroad adjunct with the best horses, the best wagons, the best freighting outfits that money can supply.

But this is by no means, in its civilizing effect, a railroad. A railroad drives lawlessness before it—the Music Mountain country still leans on stage-line law. The bullion wagons still travel the difficult roads. They look for safety to their armed horsemen; the four and six horse stages look to the armed guard, the wayfarer must look to his horse—and it should be a good one; the mountain rancher to his rifle, the cattle thief to the moonless night, the bandit to his wits, the gunman to his holster: these include practically all of the people that travel the Spanish Sinks, except the Morgans and the Mormons. The Mormons looked to the Morgans for safety; the Morgans to themselves.

For many a year the Morgans have been almost overlords of the Music Mountain country. They own, or have laid claim to, an extended territory in the mountains, a Spanish grant. One of the first mountain Morgans married a Spanish girl, and during the early days, when the Morgans were not fighting some one out of court, they were fighting some one in court on their endless and involved titles.

But whether they won domain in lawsuit or lost it, one pearl of their holdings they never submitted to the jurisdiction of any tribunal other than their own arms. Morgan's Gap opens south of Music Mountain, less than ten miles west of Calabasas. It is a narrow valley where valleys are more precious than water—for the mountain valley means water—and this in a country where water is much more precious than life. And some of the best of this land at the foot of Music Mountain was the maternal inheritance of Nan Morgan.

At Calabasas the Thief River stage line maintains completely equipped relay barns. They are over twenty miles from Sleepy Cat, but nearly fifty the other way from Thief River. The unequal division is not due to what was desirable when the route was laid out, but to the limit of what man could do in the never-conquered desert. This supplies at Calabasas a spring, to tempt the unwary traveller still farther within its clutches. A large number of horses are kept at Calabasas, and the barn crews are quartered there in a company barrack. Along the low ridges and in the shallow depressions about Calabasas Spring there are a very few widely separated shacks, once built by freighters and occupied by squatter outlaws to be within reach of water. This gives the vicinity something of the appearance

of a poorly sustained prairie-dog town. And except these shacks, there is nothing between Calabasas, Thief River, and the mountains except sunshine and alkali. I say nothing, meaning especially nothing, in the way of a human habitation.

But there is a queer inn at Calabasas. A pioneer Thief River prospector, mad with thirst, fought his way across the Sinks to the Calabasas Spring, and wandered thence one day into Sleepy Cat. In a delirium of gratitude he ordered built at Calabasas what he termed a hotel, to provide at that forbidden oasis for the luxurious comfort of future thirst-mad wanderers. It was built of lumber hauled a thousand miles, and equipped with luxuries brought three thousand—a fearsome, rambling structure, big enough for all the prospectors in the Rocky Mountains.

Having built this monument, creditable to his good-will rather than his good sense, the unfortunate man went really mad, and had the sorry distinction of being the first person to be put in the insane asylum at Bear Dance. It had never occurred to him that any one had any title to, or that any madder man would lay any claim to, so accursed a spot as Calabasas. But old Duke Morgan announced in due time that the hotel was built on Morgan land, and belonged to the Morgans. Nobody outside a madhouse could be found to dispute with Duke Morgan a title to land within ten miles of Morgan's Gap, and none but a lunatic would attempt to run a hotel at Calabasas, anyway. However, a solution of the difficulty was found: Duke's colorable title gave the cue to his retainers in the Gap, and in time they carted away piecemeal most of the main building, leaving for years the kitchen and the servants' quarters adjoining it to owls, lizards, scorpions, and spiders.

Meantime, to tap the fast-developing gold-fields, the freight route and stages had been put in, and the barns built at Calabasas. A need naturally developed for at least one feature of a hotel—a barroom. A newer lunatic answered the call of civilization—a man only mildly insane stocked the kitchen range with liquors, and fitted up in a crude way the ice-boxes—where there never was ice-serving pantries, and other odd nooks for sleeping quarters. Here the thirsty stage passenger, little suspecting the origin of the facilities offered him for a drink, may choose strong drink instead of water—or rather, he is restricted to strong drink where water might once have been had—the spring being piped now half a mile to the barns for the horses. And this shack, as it is locally called, run by a Mexican, is still the inn at Calabasas. And it continues to contribute, through its stirring annals, to the tragic history of the continental divide.

It need hardly be said that Duke Morgan laid claim also to the Calabasas Spring. But on this the company, being a corporation, fought him. And after somewhat less of argument and somewhat more of siege and shooting, a compromise was reached whereby the company bought annually at an exorbitant price all of Duke, Satterlee, and Vance Morgan's hay, and as the Morgans had small rivers of water in the mountains, and never, except when crowded, drank water, a *modus vivendi* was arranged between the claimants. The only sufferer through this was the Mexican publican, who found every Morgan his landlord, and demanding from him tithes over the bar. But force is usually met with cunning, and such Morgans as would not pay in advance at Calabasas, when thirsty, often found the half-mad publican out of goods.

The Calabasas Inn stood in one of the loneliest canyons of the whole seventy miles between Sleepy Cat and Thief River; it looked in its depletion to be what it was, a sombre, mysterious, sun, wind, and alkali beaten pile, around which no one by any chance ever saw a sign of life. It was a ruin like those pretentious deserted structures sometimes seen in frontier towns—relics of the wide-open days, which stand afterward, stark and sombre, to serve as bats' nests or blind-pigs. The inn at Calabasas looked its part—a haunt of rustlers, a haven of nameless men, a refuge of road-agents.

The very first time de Spain made an inspection trip over the stage line with Lefever, he was conscious of the sinister air of this lonely building. He and Lefever had ridden down from the barn, while their horses were being changed, to look at the place. De Spain wanted to look over everything connected in any way, however remotely, with the operation of his wagons, and this joint, Lefever had told him, was where the freighters and drivers were not infrequently robbed of their money. It

was here that one of their own men, Bill McCarty, once “scratched a man’s neck” with a knife—which, Bill explained, he just “happened” to have in his hand—for cheating at cards. Lefever pointed out the unlucky gambler’s grave as he and de Spain rode into the canyon toward the inn.

Not a sign of any sort was displayed about the habitation. No man was invited to enter, no man warned to keep out, none was anywhere in sight. The stage men dismounted, threw their lines, pushed open the front door of the house and entered a room of perhaps sixteen by twenty feet. It had been the original barroom. A long, high, elaborately carved mahogany bar, as much out of keeping as it possibly could be with its surroundings, stretched across the farther side of the room. The left end, as they faced the bar, was brought around to escape a small window opening on a court or patio to the rear of the room. Back of the bar itself, about midway, a low door in the bare wall gave entrance to a rear room. Aside from this big, queer-looking piece of mahogany, the low window at the left end of it, and the low door at the back, the room presented nothing but walls. Two windows flanking the front door helped to light it, but not a mirror, picture, chair, table, bottle, or glass was to be seen. De Spain covered every feature of the interior at a glance. “Quiet around here, John,” he remarked casually.

“This is the quietest place in the Rocky Mountains most of the time. But when it is noisy, believe me, it is noisy. Look at the bullet-holes in the walls.”

“The old story,” remarked de Spain, inspecting with mild-mannered interest the punctured plastering, “they always shoot high.”

He walked over to the left end of the bar, noting the hard usage shown by the ornate mahogany, and spreading his hands wide open, palms down, on the face of it, glanced at the low window on his left, opening on the gravelled patio. He peered, in the semidarkness, at the battered door behind the bar.

“Henry,” observed Lefever, “if you are looking for a drink, it would only be fair, as well as politic, to call the Mexican.”

“Thank you, John, I’m not looking for one. And I know you don’t drink.”

“You want to know, then, where the Mexican keeps his gun?” hazarded Lefever.

“Not especially. I just want to know—”

“Everything.”

“What’s behind the bar. That’s natural, isn’t it?”

Very complete fittings and compartments told of the labor spent in preparing this inner side for the convenience of the bartender and the requirements of exacting patrons, but nothing in the way of equipment, not so much as a pewter spoon, lay anywhere visible.

De Spain, turning, looked all around the room again. “You wouldn’t think,” he said slowly, “from looking at the place there was a road-agent within a thousand miles.”

“You wouldn’t think, from riding through the Superstition Mountains there was a lion within a thousand miles. I’ve hunted them for eleven years, and I never saw one except when the dogs drove ’em out; but for eleven years they saw me. If we haven’t been seen coming in here by some of this Calabasas bunch, I miss my guess,” declared Lefever cheerfully.

The batten door behind the bar now began to open slowly and noiselessly. Lefever peered through it. “Come in, Pedro,” he cried reassuringly, “come in, man. This is no officer, no revenue agent looking for your license. Meet a friend, Pedro,” he continued encouragingly, as the swarthy publican, low-browed and sullen, emerged very deliberately from the inner darkness into the obscurity of the barroom, and bent his one good eye searchingly on de Spain. “This,” Lefever’s left hand lay familiarly on the back of de Spain’s shoulder, “is our new manager, Mr. Henry de Spain. Henry, shake hands with Mexico.”

This invitation to shake hands seemed an empty formality. De Spain never shook hands with anybody; at least if he did so, he extended, through habit long inured, his left hand, with an excuse for the soreness of his right. Pedro did not even bat his remaining eye at the invitation. The situation, as Lefever facetiously remarked, remained about where it was before he spoke, and nothing daunted,

he asked de Spain what he would drink. De Spain sidestepped again by asking for a cigar. Lefever, professing he would not drink alone, called for cigarettes. While Pedro produced them, from nowhere apparently, as a conjurer picks cards out of the air, the sound of galloping horses came through the open door. A moment later three men walked, single file, into the room. De Spain stood at the left end of the bar, and Lefever introduced him to Gale Morgan, to David Sassoon, and to Sassoon's crony, Deaf Sandusky, as the new stage-line manager. The later arrivals lined up before the bar, Sandusky next to Lefever and de Spain, so he could hear what was said. Pedro from his den produced two queer-looking bottles and a supply of glasses.

"De Spain," Gale Morgan began bluntly, "one of our men was put off a stage of yours last week by Frank Elpaso." He spoke without any preliminary compliments, and his heavy voice was bellicose.

De Spain, regarding him undisturbed, answered after a little pause: "Elpaso told me he put a man off his stage last week for fighting."

"No," contradicted Morgan loudly, "not for fighting. Elpaso was drunk."

"What's the name of the man Elpaso put off, John?" asked de Spain, looking at Lefever.

Morgan hooked his thumb toward the man standing at his side. "Here's the man right here, Dave Sassoon."

Sassoon never looked a man in the face when the man looked at him, except by implication; it was almost impossible, without surprising him, to catch his eyes with your eyes. He seemed now to regard de Spain keenly, as the latter, still attending to Morgan's statement, replied: "Elpaso tells a pretty straight story."

"Elpaso couldn't tell a straight story if he tried," interjected Sassoon.

"I have the statement of three other passengers; they confirm Elpaso. According to them, Sassoon—" de Spain looked straight at the accused, "was drunk and abusive, and kept trying to put some of the other passengers off. Finally he put his feet in the lap of Pumperwasser, our tank and windmill man, and Pumperwasser hit him."

Morgan, stepping back from the bar, waved his hand with an air of finality toward his inoffensive companion: "Here is Sassoon, right here—he can tell the whole story."

"Those fellows were miners," muttered Sassoon. His utterance was broken, but he spoke fast. "They'll side with the guards every time against a cattleman."

"There's only one fair thing to do, de Spain," declared Morgan. He looked severely at de Spain: "Discharge Elpaso."

De Spain, his hands resting on the bar, drew one foot slowly back. "Not on the showing I have now," he said. "One of the passengers who joined in the statement is Jeffries, the railroad superintendent at Sleepy Cat."

"Expect a railroad superintendent to tell the truth about a Calabastas man?" demanded Sassoon.

"I should expect him at least to be sober," retorted de Spain.

"Sassoon," interposed Morgan belligerently, "is a man whose word can always be depended on."

"To convey his meaning," intervened Lefever cryptically. "Of course, I know," he asserted, earnest to the point of vehemence. "Every one in Calabastas has the highest respect for Sassoon. That is understood. And," he added with as much impressiveness as if he were talking sense, "everybody in Calabastas would be sorry to see Sassoon put off a stage. But Sassoon is off: that is the situation. We are sorry. If it occurs again—"

"What do you mean?" thundered Morgan, resenting the interference. "De Spain is the manager, isn't he? What we want to know is, what you are going to do about it?" he demanded, addressing de Spain again.

"There is nothing more to be done," returned de Spain composedly. "I've already told Elpaso if Sassoon starts another fight on a stage to put him off again."

Morgan's fist came down on the bar. "Look here, de Spain! You come from Medicine Bend, don't you? Well, you can't bully Music Mountain men—understand that."

“Any time you have a real grievance, Morgan, I’ll be glad to consider it,” said de Spain. “When one of your men is drunk and quarrelsome he will be put off like any other disturber. That we can’t avoid. Public stages can’t be run any other way.”

“All right,” retorted Morgan. “If you take that tack for your new management, we’ll see how you get along running stages down in this country.”

“We will run them peaceably, just as long as we can,” smiled de Spain. “We will get on with everybody that gives us a chance.”

Morgan pointed a finger at him. “I give you a chance, de Spain, right now. Will you discharge Elpaso?”

“No.”

Morgan almost caught his breath at the refusal. But de Spain could be extremely blunt, and in the parting shots between the two he gave no ground.

“Jeffries put me here to stop this kind of rowdyism on the stages,” he said to Lefever on their way back to the barn. “This is a good time to begin. And Sassoon and Gale Morgan are good men to begin with,” he added.

As the horses of the two men emerged from the canyon they saw a slender horsewoman riding in toward the barn from the Music Mountain trail. She stopped in front of McAlpin, the barn boss, who stood outside the office door. McAlpin, the old Medicine Bend barnman, had been promoted from Sleepy Cat by the new manager. De Spain recognized the roan pony, but, aside from that, a glance at the figure of the rider, as she sat with her back to him, was enough to assure him of Nan Morgan. He spurred ahead fast enough to overhear a request she was making of McAlpin to mail a letter for her. She also asked McAlpin, just as de Spain drew up, whether the down stage had passed. McAlpin told her it had. De Spain, touching his hat, spoke: “I am going right up to Sleepy Cat. I’ll mail your letter if you wish.”

She looked at him in some surprise, and then glanced toward Lefever, who now rode up. De Spain was holding out his hand for the letter. His eyes met Nan’s, and each felt the moment was a sort of challenge. De Spain, a little self-conscious under her inspection, was aware only of her rather fearless eyes and the dark hair under her fawn cowboy hat.

“Thank you,” she responded evenly. “If the stage is gone I will hold it to add something.” So saying, she tucked the letter inside her blouse and spoke to her pony, which turned leisurely down the road.

“I’m trying to get acquainted with your country to-day,” returned de Spain, managing with his knee to keep his own horse moving alongside Nan as she edged away.

She seemed disinclined to answer, but the silence and the awkwardness of his presence drew at length a dry disclaimer: “This is not my country.”

“I understood,” exclaimed de Spain, following his doubtful advantage, “you lived out this way.”

“I live near Music Mountain,” returned Nan somewhat ungraciously, using her own skill at the same time to walk her horse away from her unwelcome companion.

“I’ve heard of Music Mountain,” continued de Spain, urging his lagging steed. “I’ve often wanted to get over there to hunt.”

Nan, without speaking, ruthlessly widened the distance between the two. De Spain unobtrusively spurred his steed to greater activity. “You must have a great deal of game around you. Do you hunt?” he asked.

He knew she was famed as a huntress, but he could make no headway whatever against her studied reserve. He watched her hands, graceful even in heavy gloves; he noticed the neck-piece of her tan blouse, and liked the brown throat and the chin set so resolutely against him. He surmised that she perhaps felt some contempt for him because she had outshot him, and he continued to ask about game, hoping for a chance in some far-off time to redeem his marksmanship before her and giving her every possible chance to invite him to try the hunting around Music Mountain.

She was deaf to the broadest hints; and when at length she excused herself and turned her pony from the Sleepy Cat road into the Morgan Gap trail, de Spain had been defeated in every attempt to arouse the slightest interest in anything he had said. But, watching with regret, at the parting, the trim lines of her figure as she dashed away on the desert trail, seated as if a part of her spirited horse, he felt only a fast-rising resolution to attempt again to break through her stubborn reticence and know her better.

CHAPTER IV

FIRST BLOOD AT CALABASAS

Nothing more than de Spain's announcement that he would sustain his stage-guards was necessary to arouse a violent resentment at Calabasas and among the Morgan following. Some of the numerous disaffected were baiting the stages most of the time. They bullied the guards, fought the passengers, and fomented discontent among the drivers. In all Thief River disturbances, whether a raid on cattlemen, a stage hold-up, a gun fight, or a tedious war of words, the Calabasas men, sometimes apparently for the mere maintaining of prestige, appeared to take leading rôles. After de Spain's declaration the grievance against Elpaso was made a general one along the line. His stage was singled out and ridden at times both by Sandusky and Logan—the really dangerous men of the Spanish Sinks—and by Gale Morgan and Sassoon to stir up trouble.

But old Frank Elpaso was far from being a fool. A fight with any one of these men meant that somebody would be killed, and no one could tell just who, Elpaso shrewdly reckoned, until the roll-call at the end of it. He therefore met truculence with diplomacy, threatening looks with flattery, and hard words with a long story. Moreover, all Calabasas knew that Elpaso, if he had to, would fight, and that the eccentric guard was not actually to be cornered with impunity. Even Logan, who, like Sandusky, was known to be without fear and without mercy, felt at least a respect for Elpaso's shortened shotgun, and stopped this side actual hostilities with him. When the June clean-up of the No. 2 Thief River mine came through—one hundred and six thousand dollars in gold bullion under double guard—and a Calabasas contingent of night-riders tried to stop the treasure, rumor along the Sinks had it that Elpaso's slugs, delivered at the right moment, were responsible for Deaf Sandusky's long illness at Bear Dance, and the failure of the subsequent masked attack on the up stage.

Sassoon, however, owing to the indignity now put upon him, also nourished a particular grievance against the meditative guard, and his was one not tempered either by prudence or calculation. His chance came one night when Elpaso had unwisely allowed himself to be drawn into a card game at Calabasas Inn. Elpaso was notoriously a stickler for a square deal at cards. He was apparently the only man at Calabasas that hoped for such a thing, and certainly the only one so rash as to fight for it—yet he always did. A dispute on this occasion found him without a friend in the room. Sassoon reached for him with a knife.

McAlpin was the first to get the news at the barn. He gave first aid to the helpless guard, and, without dreaming he could be got to a surgeon alive, rushed him in a light wagon to the hospital at Sleepy Cat, where it was said that he must have more lives than a wildcat. Sassoon, not caring to brave de Spain's anger in town, went temporarily into hiding. A second surgeon was brought from Medicine Bend, and heroic efforts were put forth to nurse again into life the feeble spark the assassin had left in the unlucky guard.

Word of this cutting reached de Spain at Thief River. He started for Calabasas, learned there during a brief stop what he could—which was, of course, next to nothing—of the affray, and posted on to Sleepy Cat.

A conference was held in Jeffries's office. De Spain, Lefever, and some of the division staff discussed the situation raised by the affair. De Spain was instructed to see that Sassoon was brought in and made an example of for the benefit of his Calabasas friends. Accordingly, while the guard's life hung in the balance, the sheriff, Jim Druel, was despatched after Sassoon. A great deal of inquiry, much riding, and a lot of talk on Druel's part accomplished nothing.

Lefever spoiled with impatience to get after Sassoon. "The only way we'll ever get one of that gang is to go for him ourselves," said he. The sheriff's campaign did collapse. Sassoon could not be found although rumor was notorious that he continued to haunt Calabasas. Lefever's irritation

grew. “Never mind, John,” counselled de Spain, “forget about wanting him. Sometime one of us will stumble on him, and when we do we’ll shackle him.” The precaution was taken, meantime, to secure a warrant for the missing man, together with authority for either of the two to serve it. Elpaso, in the end, justified his old reputation by making a recovery—haltingly, it is true, and with perilous intervals of sinking, but a recovery.

It was while he still lay in the hospital and hope was very low that de Spain and Lefever rode, one hot morning, into Calabasas and were told by McAlpin that Sassoon had been seen within five minutes at the inn. To Lefever the news was like a bubbling spring to a thirsty man. His face beamed, he tightened his belt, shook out his gun, and looked with benevolent interest on de Spain, who stood pondering. “If you will stay right here, Henry,” he averred convincingly, “I will go over and get Sassoon.”

The chief stage-guard, Bob Scott, the Indian, was in the barn. He smiled at Lefever’s enthusiasm. “Sassoon,” said he, “is slippery.”

“You’d better let us go along and see you do it,” suggested de Spain, who with the business in hand grew thoughtful.

“Gentlemen, I thank you,” protested Lefever, raising one hand in deprecation, the other resting lightly on his holster. “We still have some *little* reputation to maintain along the Sinks. Don’t let us make it a *posse* for *Sassoon*.” No one opposed him further, and he rode away alone.

“It won’t be any trouble for John to bring Sassoon in,” murmured Scott, who spoke with a smile and in the low tone and deliberate manner of the Indian, “if he can find him.”

With de Spain, Scott remained in front of the barn, saddled horses in hand. They could see nothing of the scene of action, and de Spain was forced in idleness to curb his impatience. Lefever rode down to the inn without seeing a living thing anywhere about it. When he dismounted in front he thought he heard sounds within the barroom, but, pushing open the door and looking circumspectly into the room before entering, he was surprised to find it empty.

There was something, under the circumstances and in the stimulus of danger, almost uncanny in the silence, the absence of any life whatever about the place. Lefever walked cautiously inside; there seemed no need of caution. No one was there to confront or oppose him. Surveying the interior with a rapid glance, he walked to the left end of the bar and, gun in readiness, looked apprehensively behind it. Not so much as a strainer was to be seen underneath. He noticed, however, that the sash of the low window on his left, which looked into the patio, was open, and two heel-marks in the hard clay suggested that a man might have jumped through. Whether these were Sassoon’s heels or another’s, Lefever decided they constituted his clew, and, running out of the front door, he sprang into his saddle and rode to where he could signal de Spain and Scott to come up.

He told his story as they joined him, and the three returned to the inn. Scott rode directly to the rear. Lefever took de Spain in to the bar, showed him the open sash, and pointed to the heel-prints. De Spain stepped through the window, Lefever following. An examination showed the slide of a spur-rowel behind one heel-mark and indications of a hasty jump.

While they bent over the signs that seemed to connect their quarry with the place, a door opened across the courtyard, and Pedro appeared. He was curiously dense to all inquiries, and Lefever, convinced that Sassoon was somewhere at hand, revenged himself by searching the place.

In the dark kitchen a very old woman and a slovenly girl were at work. No one else was to be found anywhere.

De Spain, who was the more experienced tracker, thought he could follow the footprints to the arched opening across the patio. This was closed only by a swinging gate, and afforded easy escape from a pursuer. At some distance outside this gate, as de Spain threw it open, sat Bob Scott on his horse. De Spain made inquiry of Scott. No one had been seen. Returning to Lefever, who, greatly chagrined, had convinced himself that Sassoon had got away, de Spain called Scott into the patio.

A better tracker than either of his companions, Scott after a minute confirmed their belief that Sassoon must have escaped by the window. He then took the two men out to where some one, within a few minutes, had mounted a horse and galloped off.

“But where has he gone?” demanded Lefever, pointing with his hand. “There is the road both ways for three miles.” Scott nodded toward the snow-capped peak of Music Mountain. “Over to Morgan’s, most likely. He knows no one would follow him into the Gap. Just for fun, now, let’s see.”

Dismounting, the Indian scrutinized the hoof-prints where the horse had stood. Getting into the saddle again, he led the way, bending over his horse’s neck and stopping frequently to read the trail, half a mile out along the Gap road, until he could once more readily point out the hoof-prints to his companions. “That is Sassoon,” he announced. “I know the heels. And I know he rides this horse; it belongs to Gale Morgan. Sassoon,” Scott smiled sympathetically on Lefever, “is half-way to Morgan’s Gap.”

“After him!” cried Lefever hotly. De Spain looked inquiringly at the guard. Scott shook his head. “That would be all right, but there’s two other Calabasas men in the Gap this afternoon it wouldn’t be nice to mix with—Deaf Sandusky and Harvey Logan.”

“We won’t mix with them,” suggested de Spain.

“If we tackle Sassoon, they’ll mix with us,” explained Scott. He reflected a moment. “They always stay at Gale Morgan’s or Duke’s. We might sneak Sassoon out without their getting on. Sassoon knows he is safe in the Gap; but he’ll hide even after he gets there. He takes two precautions for every other man’s one. Sassoon is a wonder at hiding out. I’ve got the Thief River run this afternoon—”

De Spain looked at him. “Well?”

Scott’s face softened into the characteristic smile—akin to a quiet grin—that it often wore. “If I didn’t have to go through to-day, and the three of us could get to the Gap before daylight to-morrow morning, I would give Sassoon a run for his money in spite of the other fellows.”

“Don’t take your run this afternoon,” directed de Spain. “Telephone Sleepy Cat for a substitute. Suppose we go back, get something to eat, and you two ride singly over toward the Gap this afternoon; lie outside under cover to see whether Sassoon or his friends leave before night—there’s only one way out of the place, they tell me. Then I will join you, and we’ll ride in before daylight, and perhaps catch him while everybody is asleep.”

“If you do,” predicted Scott, in his deliberate way of expressing a conclusion, “I think you’ll get him.”

It was so arranged.

CHAPTER V

ROUNDING UP SASSOON

De Spain joined his associates at dark outside the Gap. Neither Sassoon nor his friends had been seen. The night was still, the sky cloudless, and as the three men with a led horse rode at midnight into the mountains, the great red heart of the Scorpion shone afire in the southern sky. Spreading out when they rode between the mountain walls, they made their way without interruption silently toward their rendezvous, an aspen grove near which Purgatoire Creek makes its way out of the Gap and, cutting a deep gash along the edge of the range for a hundred miles, empties into the Thief.

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 was wakeful, and his eyes rested with curiosity on the huge bulk of Music Mountain, rising overwhelmingly above him. Through the Gap that divided the great, sentinel-like front of El Capitan, marking the northern face of the mountain rift, from Round Top, the south wall of the opening, stars shone vividly, as if lighting the way into the silent range beyond.

The breathing of his companions soon assured de Spain that both were asleep. The horses were quiet, and the night gave no sound save that vaguely through the darkness came the faint brawl of tiny cataracts tumbling down far mountain heights. De Spain, lying on his side, his head resting on his elbow, and his hands clasped at the back of his neck, 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. She stayed with him, it seemed, for hours—appearing and disappearing, in one aspect more alluring than another. Then her form outlined in the 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. It was strictly a *coup de main*, depending for its success on chance and nerve. The one that tried it might manage to bring out his man—or might be brought out himself. Between these alternatives there was not much middle ground, except that failing to find Sassoon, or in case he should be intercepted with his prisoner, the intruder, escaping single-handed from a shower of bullets, might still get away. But Morgan's Gap men were esteemed fairly good marksmen.

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. The western sky was still dark when de Spain, mounting, discussed the last arrangements with his scouts and, taking the bridle of the led horse, turned toward Round Top. At its narrowest point the Gap opening is barely two miles wide, and the one road, in and out, lies among the rocks through this neck; toward it all trails inside the Gap converge. De Spain gave his horse his head—it was still too dark to distinguish the path—and depended on his towering landmarks for his general direction. He 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 enclosed and perfectly hidden valley before him. The eastern and southern sides still lay in darkness, but the

stupendous cliffs frowning on the north and west were lighted somewhat from the east. The southern wall, though shrouded, seemed to rise in an unending series of beetling arêtes.

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 of the gigantic mountain fissure, it could hardly be, de Spain thought, more than a few thousand yards—so completely was his sense of proportion stunned by the frowning cliffs which rose, at points, half a mile into the sky. But it was actually several miles from wall to wall, 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 he strained his eyes for signs, first of life, and then of habitation. The little creek, now beside his way, flowed quietly albeit swiftly along, and his utmost vigilance could detect no living thing stirring; but a turn in the trail, marked by a large pine-tree and conforming to a bend of the stream, 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, wondering whether a bullet, if fired from any of the low, open windows—which he could almost throw his hat into as he trotted past—would knock him off his horse or leave him a chance to spur away. But 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.

He quickened his pace. The place he wanted to reach was more than a mile distant. Other cabins back toward the north wall could be seen dimly to his right, but all were well removed from his way. He found, in due time, the ford in the creek, as Scott had advised, made it without mishap, scrambled up a steep and rocky path, and saw confronting him, not far ahead, a small, ruinous-looking cabin shack. Dismounting before this, he threw his lines, shook himself a little, and walked up to the cabin door. It was open.

The mild-minded conspirators who had planned the details of the abduction were agreed that if the effort could be made a success at all, there was but one way to effect it, and that was to act, in every step, openly. Any attempt to steal on Sassoon unawares would be a desperate one; while to walk boldly into his cabin at daybreak would be to do only what his companions were likely at any time to do, and was the course least calculated to lead to serious trouble. None of the three were unaware of the psychological action of that peculiar instinct of danger possessed by men habitually exposed to surprise—they knew how easily it may be aroused in a sleeper by the unusual happening about him, and how cunningly it is allayed by counterfeiting within his hearing the usual course of normal events.

De Spain, following the chosen policy, called gruffly to the cabin inmate. There was no answer. All had sounded extremely plausible to de Spain at the time he listened to Bob Scott's ingenious anticipation of the probabilities, and he had felt while listening to the subtle Indian that the job was not a complicated one.

But now, as 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 with an effort to feel at home, stepped unevenly across the threshold, and tried to peer into the interior darkness, Scott's strategy did not, for some reason, commend itself quite so convincingly to him. There seemed, suddenly, a great many chances for a slip in the programme. De Spain coughed slightly, 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. But his noise-making was attended with the utmost caution. He had dropped, like a shot, flat on the floor and crawled, feeling his way, to the opposite side of the room, only to find, after much trouble, that the bed in the darkness was there, but it was empty. De Spain rose. For a moment he was nonplussed. An inside room remained, but Scott had said there was no bed within it. 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 was destined, a moment later, to a ruder awakening than even his companion outlaws ever gave him. Lying unsuspectingly on his back, he 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. Like lightning, he threw up his knees, drew himself into a heap, and shot himself out, hands, arms, legs, back, everything into one terrific spring. But the sinewy vise above only gave for the shock, then it closed again relentlessly in. 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, eagle-like claws gripped at his throat and shut off his breath.

Again and again, with the fury of desperation, Sassoon drew in his powerful frame, shot it out, twisted and struggled. Great veins swelled on his forehead, his breath burst in explosive gasps, he writhed from side to side—it was all one. After every effort the cruel fingers at his throat tightened. The heavy knee on his chest crushed more relentlessly. 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. Scott had predicted he would go without much fuss, and de Spain, now somewhat surprised, found Bob right in his forecast. With less trouble than he expected, the captor got his man sullenly on horseback, and gave him severely plain directions as to what not 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. To get him out in this manner was, de Spain realized, the really ticklish part of the undertaking.

Fortune, however, seemed to favor his assurance in invading the lions' den. 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 again felt qualms. But he rode close to his prisoner, told him in restrained monologue what would happen if he made a noise, and even held him back in his pace as they trotted together past the Gap stronghold. Nevertheless, he breathed more freely 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 at the house. He looked quickly, but though his eyes were off his path and his prisoner for only a fraction of a second, when he looked ahead again he saw confronting him, not a hundred yards away, a motionless horseman.

CHAPTER VI

HEELS FOR IT

With a sudden, low command to Sassoon to check his horse, and without a movement that could be detected in the dawn ten yards away, de Spain with the thumb and finger of his right hand lifted his revolver from its scabbard, shifted his lines from his left hand to his right, rode closer to Sassoon and pressed the muzzle of the 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 'Frenchy'; 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—"

While he spoke to Sassoon his eyes were fixed on the rider halted in their path. 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. The whole fabric of his slender plot seemed to go to pieces at the sight of her. At the mere appearance of his frail and motionless foe a feeling of awkward helplessness dissolved his easy confidence. He now reversed every move he had so carefully made with his hands and, resentfully eying Nan, rode in somewhat behind Sassoon, doing nothing further than to pull his kerchief up about his neck, and wondering what would be likely to happen before the next three minutes were up. Beyond that flash the future held no interest for him—his wits had temporarily failed.

Of one thing he felt assured, that it was in no wise up to him to speak or do first. 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. She waited so long before accosting the two men that de Spain, who was ready to hope any improbable thing, began to hope she might let them pass unchallenged. He had resolved, if she did not speak to push past without even looking at her. They were now almost abreast. His fine resolution went smash overboard. The very instinctive knowledge that her eyes were bent on him 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. He even continued to dream she did not recognize him. Her eyes, in fact, were directed toward Sassoon, and 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 come 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 sceptical, 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 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 them 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, yelled loud in answer to Lefever, and before the startled girl could collect herself, de Spain, crouching in his saddle, as a fusillade cracked from Lefever’s and Scott’s revolvers, urged Sassoon’s horse around Nan’s, kicked it violently, 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 and behind, de Spain, Scott, and Lefever awaited the moment when their pursuers should show their hand. Scott was on the west of the line, and nearest the enemy.

“Who are they, Bob?” yelled Lefever.

Scott scrutinized the pursuers carefully. “One,” he called back, “that big fellow on the right, is Deaf Sandusky, sure. Harvey Logan, likely, the middle man. The other I can’t make out. Look!” he exclaimed, pointing to the foot-hills on their distant left. Two men, riding out almost abreast of them, were running their horses for a small canyon through which the trail led two miles ahead. “Some riding,” cried Scott, watching the newcomers. “That farther man must be Gale Morgan. They are trying for the greasewood canyon, to cut us off.”

“We can’t stand for that,” decided de Spain, surveying the ground around them. “There’s not so much as a sage-brush here for cover.”

Lefever pointed to his right; at some distance a dark, weather-beaten cone rose above the yellow desert. “Let’s make a stand in the lava beds,” he cried.

De Spain hesitated. “It takes us the wrong way.” He pointed ahead. “Give them a run for that canyon, boys.”

Urging their horses, the Sleepy Cat men rode at utmost speed to beat the flanking party to the trail gateway. For a few minutes it looked an even break between pursuers and pursued. The two men in the foot-hills now had a long angle to overcome, but they were doing a better pace than those of the Gap party behind, and half-way to the canyon it looked like a neck-and-neck heat for the narrow entrance. Lefever complained of the effort of keeping up, and at length reined in his horse. “Drop me here on the alkali, boys,” he cried to the others. “I’ll hold this end while you get through the canyon.”

“No,” declared de Spain, checking his pace. “If one stays, all stay. This is as good a time as any to find out what these fellows mean.”

“But not a very good place,” commented Scott, as they slowed, looking for a depression.

“It’s as good for us as it is for them,” returned de Spain abruptly. “We’ll try it right here.”

He swung out of his saddle, Lefever and Scott after an instant’s reconnoissance following. Sassoon they dismounted. Scott lashed his wrists together, while de Spain and Lefever unslung their carbines, got their horses down, and, facing the west and south, spread themselves on the ground.

The men behind lost nothing of the defensive movement of the pursued party, and slowed up in turn. For the moment the flankers were out of sight, but they must soon appear on the crest of a rise between them and the canyon. Lefever was first down and first ready with his rifle to cover the men behind. These now spread out and came on, as if for a rush.

Lefever, picking Logan, the foremost, sent a warning shot in front of him. De Spain fired almost at the same moment toward the big man making a *détour* to the right of the leader. The two bullets puffed in the distant alkali, and the two horsemen, sharply admonished, swerved backward precipitately. After a momentary circling indecision, the three rode closer together for a conference, dismounted, and opened a return fire on the little party lying to.

The strategy of their halt and their firing was not hard to penetrate. The men from the foot-hills were still riding for the canyon. No views were exchanged among Sassoon’s captors, but all understood that this move must be stopped. Lefever and Scott, without words, merely left the problem to de Spain as the leader. He lay on the right of the line as they faced south, and this brought him nearest to the riders out of the foot-hills. Taking advantage of a lull in the firing, he pulled his horse around between himself and the attacking party, and in such a position that he could command with his rifle the fast-moving riders to the west.

Something of a predicament confronted him. He was loath to take a human life in the effort to get a cutthroat jailed, and hated even to cripple a beast for it, but the two men must be stopped. Nor was it easy to pick up the range offhand, but meaning that the Morgans, if they were Morgans, should understand how a rush would be met, he sent one shot after another, short, beyond, and ahead of the horsemen, to check them, and to feel the way for closer shooting if it should be necessary. The two dashed on undaunted. De Spain perceived that warnings were wasted. He lowered his sights, and, waiting his chance as the leader of the foot-hill pursuers rode into a favorable range, he fired for his horse’s head. The beast jumped convulsively and pitched forward, head down in a half somersault, throwing his rider violently to the ground. Scott and Lefever yelled loudly.

Out of the cloud of dust the man scrambled to his feet, looked coolly around, and brushed the alkali disgustedly from his eyes just as a second bullet from de Spain tore up the earth a few feet to one side of him. He jumped like a rabbit at this summons, and did not even make a further pretense at composure. Grabbing his hat from the ground, he ran like mad toward the hills. Meantime his mounted companion had turned about. De Spain sprang to his feet, jerked up his horse and cried: “Now for the canyon!” Pushing Sassoon into the saddle and profiting by the confusion, the railroad men rode hard for their refuge, and reached it without more molestation than an occasional shot from their distant pursuers on the main trail. De Spain and his scouts now felt assured of their escape. The foot-hills contingent was left far behind, and, though their remaining 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 in this way to breathe their horses, or to hold off the rear pursuit, 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 VII

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. No such defiance of the traditions of the Morgan rule along the reaches of the Spanish Sinks had been attempted in years—and it was recalled more than once, when de Spain's feat was discussed at the ranches, on the trails, and in the haunts of gunmen in Calabasas, that no one of those who had ever braved the wrath of the Sink rulers had lived indefinitely to boast of it.

Experienced men, therefore, 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. No question of the right or wrong of the arrest was discussed—justification was not considered. It was an overwhelmingly 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. Gale Morgan strode and rode the streets of Sleepy Cat looking for de Spain, and storming.

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 stage men, kept close to the drift of public sentiment, decided after de Spain's 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's office, "but we didn't think."

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

"Meaning, that in this country you can't begin on a play like pulling Sassoon out from under his friends' noses without keeping up the pace—without a second and third act. You dragged Sassoon by his hair out of the Gap; good. You surprised everybody; good. But you can't very well stop at that, Henry. You have raised hopes, you have led people to invest you with the faint glimmerings of a reputation. I say, the glimmerings, because such a feat by itself doesn't insure a permanent reputation, Henry. It is, so to say, merely a 'demand' reputation—one that men reserve the right to recall at any moment. And the worst of it is, if they ever do recall it, you are worse off than when before they extended the brittle bauble to you."

"Jingo, John! For a stage blacksmith you are some spieler." De Spain added an impatient, not to say contumelious exclamation concerning the substance of Lefever's talk. "I didn't ask them for a reputation. This man interfered with my guard—in fact, tried to cut his throat, didn't he?"

"Would have done it if Frank had been an honest man."

“That is all there is to it, isn’t it? If Sassoon or anybody else gets in the way of the stages, I’ll go after them again—that’s all there is to it, isn’t it?”

Lefever tapped the second finger of one fat hand gently on the table. “Practically; practically all, Henry, yes. You don’t quite understand, but you have the right idea. What I am trying to hammer into your dense cocconut is, that when a man has, gets, or is given a reputation out in this country, he has got to live up to it.”

“What do you want me to do—back a horse and shoot two guns at once up and down Main Street, cowboy style?”

Lefever kept his patience without difficulty. “No, no. You’ll understand.”

“Scott advised me to run down to Medicine Bend for a few days to let the Morgans cool off.”

“Right. That was the first step. The few days are a thing of the past. I suppose you know,” continued Lefever, in as well-modulated a tone as he could assume to convey information that could not be regarded as wholly cheerful, “that they expect to get you for this Sassoon job.”

De Spain flushed. But the red anger lasted only a moment. “Who are ‘they’?” he asked after a pause.

“Deaf Sandusky, Logan, of course, the Calabastas bunch, and the Morgans.”

De Spain regarded his companion unamiably. “What do they expect I’ll be doing while they are getting me?”

Lefever raised a hand deprecatingly. “Don’t be overconfident, Henry; that’s your danger. I know you can take care of yourself. All I want to do is to get the folks here acquainted with your ability, without taking unnecessary chances. You see, people are not now asking questions of one another; they are asking them of themselves. Who and what is this newcomer—an accident or a genuine arrival? A common squib or a real explosion? Don’t get excited,” he added, in an effort to soothe de Spain’s obvious irritation. “You have the idea, Henry. It’s time to show yourself.”

“I can’t very well do business here without showing myself,” retorted de Spain.

“But it is a thing to be managed,” persisted Lefever. “Now, suppose—since the topic is up—we ‘show’ in Main Street for a while.”

“Suppose we do,” echoed de Spain ungraciously.

“That will crack the *début* ice. We will call at Harry Tenison’s hotel, and then go to his new rooms—go right to society headquarters first—that’s my theory of doing it. If anybody has any shooting in mind, Tenison’s is a quiet and orderly place. And if a man declines to eat anybody up at Tenison’s, we put him down, Henry, as not ravenously hungry.”

“One man I would like to see is that sheriff, Druel, who let Sassoon get out.”

“Ready to interview him now?”

“I’ve got some telegrams to answer.”

“Those will keep. The Morgans are in town. We’ll start out and find somebody.”

It was wet and sloppy outside, but Lefever was indifferent to the rain, and de Spain thought it would be undignified to complain of it.

When, followed by Lefever, he walked into the lobby of Tenison’s hotel a few moments later the office was empty. Nevertheless, the news of the appearance of Sassoon’s captor spread. The two sauntered into the billiard-hall, which occupied a deep room adjoining the office and opened with large plate-glass windows on Main Street. Every table was in use. A fringe of spectators in the chairs, ostensibly watching the pool games, turned their eyes toward de Spain—those that recognized him distinguishing him by nods and whispers to others.

Among several groups of men standing before the long bar, one party of four near the front end likewise engaged the interest of those keener loafers who were capable of foreseeing situations. These men, Satterlee Morgan, the cattleman; Bull Page, one of his cowboys; Sheriff Druel, and Judge Druel, his brother, had been drinking together. They did not see Lefever and his companion as the two came in through the rear lobby door. But Lefever, on catching sight of them, welcomed his

opportunity. Walking directly forward, he laid his hand on Satt Morgan's shoulder. As the cattleman turned, Lefever, genially grasping his hand, introduced de Spain to each of the party in turn. What followed in the brief interval between the meeting of the six men and the sudden breaking up of the group a few moments later was never clearly known, but a fairly conclusive theory of it was afterward accepted by Sleepy Cat.

Morgan threw the brim of his weather-beaten hat back from his tanned face. He wore a mustache and a chin whisker of that variety designated in the mountains by the most opprobrious of epithets. But his smile, which drew his cheeks into wrinkles all about his long, round nose, was not unfriendly. He looked with open interest from his frank but not overtrustworthy eyes at de Spain. "I heard," he said in a good-natured, slightly nasal tone, "you made a sunrise call on us one day last week."

"And I want to say," returned de Spain, equally amiable, "that if I had had any idea you folks would take it so hard—I mean, as an affront intended to any of you—I never would have gone into the Gap after Sassoon. I just assumed—making a mistake as I now realize—that my scrap would be with Sassoon, not with the Morgans."

Satt's face wrinkled into a humorous grin. "You sure kicked up some alkali."

De Spain nodded candidly. "More than I intended to. And I say—without any intention of impertinence to anybody else—Sassoon is a cur. I supposed when I brought him in here after so much riding, that we had sheriff enough to keep him." He looked at Druel with such composure that the latter for a moment was nonplussed. Then he discharged a volley of oaths, and demanded what de Spain meant. De Spain did not move. He refused to see the angry sheriff. "That is where I made my second mistake," he continued, speaking to Morgan and forcing his tone just enough to be heard. Druel, with more hard words, began to abuse the railroad for not paying taxes enough to build a decent jail. De Spain took another tack. He eyed the sheriff calmly as the latter continued to draw away and left de Spain standing somewhat apart from the rest of the group. "Then it may be I am making another mistake, Druel, in blaming you. It may not be your fault."

"The fault is, you're fresh," cried Druel, warming up as de Spain appeared to cool. The line of tipplers backed away from the bar. De Spain, stepping toward the sheriff, raised his hand in a friendly way. "Druel, you're hurting yourself by your talk. Make me your deputy again sometime," he concluded, "and I'll see that Sassoon stays where he is put."

"I'll just do that," cried Druel, with a very strong word, and he raised his hand in turn. "Next time you want him locked up, you can take care of him yourself."

The sharp crack of a rifle cut off the words; a bullet tore like a lightning-bolt across de Spain's neck, crashed through a mahogany pilaster back of the bar, and embedded itself in the wall. The shot had been aimed from the street for his head. The noisy room instantly hushed. Spectators sat glued to their chairs. White-faced players leaned motionless against the tables. De Spain alone had acted; all that the bartenders could ever remember after the single rifle-shot was seeing his hand go back as he whirled and shot instantly toward the heavy report. He had whipped out his gun and fired sidewise through the window at the sound.

That was all. The bartenders breathed and looked again. Men were crowding like mad through the back doors. De Spain, at the cigar case, looked intently into the rainy street, lighted from the corner by a dingy lamp. The four men near him had not stirred, but, startled and alert, the right hand of each covered the butt of a revolver. De Spain moved first. While the pool players jammed the back doors to escape, he spoke to, without looking at, the bartender. "What's the matter with your curtains?" he demanded, sheathing his revolver and pointing with an expletive to the big sheet of plate glass. "Is this the way you build up business for the house?"

Those close enough to the window saw that the bare pane had been cut, just above the middle, by two bullet-holes. Curious men examined both fractures when de Spain and Lefever had left the saloon. The first hole was the larger. It had been made by a high-powered rifle; the second was from

a bullet of a Colt's revolver; it was remarked as a miracle of gun-play that the two were hardly an inch apart.

In the street a few minutes later, de Spain and Lefever encountered Scott, who, with his back hunched up, his cheap black hat pulled well down over his ears, his hands in his trousers pockets and his thin coat collar modestly turned against the drizzling rain, was walking across the parkway from the station.

"Sassoon is in town," exclaimed Lefever with certainty after he had told the story. He waited for the Indian's opinion. Scott, looking through the water dripping from the brim of his seasoned derby, gave it in one word. "Was," he amended with a quiet smile.

"Let's make sure," insisted Lefever. "Supposing he might be in town yet, Bob, where is he?"

Scott gazed up the street through the rain lighted by yellow lamps on the obscure corners, and looked down the street toward the black reaches of the river. "If he's here, you'll find him in one of two places. Tenison's—"

"But we've just come from Tenison's," objected Lefever.

"I mean, across the street, up-stairs; or at Jim Kitchen's barn. If he was hurried to get away," added Scott reflectively, "he would slip up-stairs over there as the nearest place to hide; if he had time he would make for the barn, where it would be easy to cache his rifle."

Lefever took the lapel of the scout's coat in his hand. "Then you, Bob, go out and see if you can get the whole story. I'll take the barn. Let Henry go over to Tenison's and wait at the head of the stairs till we can get back there. It is just around the corner—second floor—a dark hall running back, opposite the double doors that open into an anteroom. Stay there, Henry, till we come. It won't be long, and if we don't get track of him you may spot your man yourself."

De Spain found no difficulty in locating the flight of marble stairs that led to the gambling-rooms. It was the only lighted entrance in the side street. No light shone at the head of the stairs, but a doorway on the left opened into a dimly lighted anteroom and this, in turn, through a large arch, opened on a large room brilliantly lighted by chandeliers—one in the centre and one near each corner. Around three sides of this room were placed the keno layouts, roulette-wheels, faro-tables, and minor gambling devices. Off the casino itself small card-rooms opened.

The big room was well filled for a wet night. The faro-tables were busy, and at the central table at the farther end of the room—the table designated as Tenison's, because, at the rare intervals in which the proprietor dealt, he presided at this table—a group watched silently a game in progress. De Spain took a place in shadow near one side of the archway facing the street-door and at times looked within for the loosely jointed frame, crooked neck, tousled forehead, and malevolent face of the cattle thief. He could find in the many figures scattered about the room none resembling the one he sought.

A man entering the place spoke to another coming out. De Spain overheard the exchange. "Duke got rid of his steers yet?" asked the first.

"Not yet."

"Slow game."

"The old man sold quite a bunch this time. The way he's playing now he'll last twenty-four hours."

De Spain, following the newcomer, strolled into the room and, beginning at one side, proceeded in leisurely fashion from wheel to wheel and table to table inspecting the players. Few looked at him and none paid any attention to his presence. At Tenison's table he saw in the dealer's chair the large, white, smooth face, dark eyes, and clerical expression of the proprietor, whose presence meant a real game and explained the interest of the idlers crowded about one player whom de Spain, without getting closer in among the onlookers than he wanted to, could not see.

Tenison, as de Spain approached, happened to look wearily up; his face showed the set lines of a protracted session. He neither spoke nor nodded to the newcomer, but recognized him with a mere

glance. Then, though his eyes had rested for only an instant on the new face, he spoke in an impassive tone across the intervening heads: "What happened to your red tie, Henry?"

De Spain put up his hand to his neck, and looked down at a loose end hanging from his soft cravat. It had been torn by the bullet meant for his head. He tucked the end inside his collar. "A Calabasas man tried to untie it a few minutes ago. He missed the knot."

Tenison did not hear the answer. He had reverted to his case. De Spain moved on and, after making the round of the scattered tables, walked again through the archway into the anteroom, only to meet, as she stood hesitating and apparently about to enter the room, Nan Morgan.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GAMBLING-ROOM

They confronted each other blankly. To Nan's confusion was added her embarrassment at her personal appearance. Her hat was wet, and the limp shoulders of her khaki jacket and the front of her silk blouse showed the wilting effect of the rain. In one hand she clutched wet riding-gloves. Her cheeks, either from the cold rain or mental stress, fairly burned, and her eyes, which had seemed when he encountered her, fired with some resolve, changed to an expression almost of dismay.

This was hardly for more than an instant. Then her lips tightened, her eyes dropped, and she took a step to one side to avoid de Spain and enter the gambling-room. He stepped in front of her. She looked up, furious. "What do you mean?" she exclaimed with indignation. "Let me pass."

The sound of her voice restored his self-possession. He made no move to get out of her way, indeed he rather pointedly continued to obstruct her. "You've made a mistake, I think," he said evenly.

"I have not," she replied with resentment. "Let me pass."

"I think you have. You don't know where you are going," he persisted, his eyes bent uncompromisingly on hers.

She showed increasing irritation at his attempt to exculpate her. "I know perfectly well where I am going," she retorted with heat.

"Then you know," he returned steadily, "that you've no business to enter such a place."

His opposition seemed only to anger her. "I know where I have business. I need no admonitions from you as to what places I enter. You are impertinent, insulting. Let me pass!"

His stubborn opposition showed no signs of weakening before her resolve. "One question," he said, ignoring her angry words. "Have you ever been in these rooms before?"

He thought she quailed the least bit before his searching look. She even hesitated as to what to say. But if her eyes fell momentarily it was only to collect herself. "Yes," she answered, looking up unflinchingly.

Her resolute eyes supported her defiant word and openly challenged his interference, but he met her once more quietly. "I am sorry to hear it," he rejoined. "But that won't make any difference. You can't go in to-night."

"I will go in," she cried.

"No," he returned slowly, "you are not going in—not, at least, while I am here."

They stood immovable. He tried to reason her out of her determination. She resented every word he offered. "You are most insolent," she exclaimed. "You are interfering in something that is no concern of yours. You have no right to act in this outrageous way. If you don't stand aside I'll call for help."

"Nan!" De Spain spoke her name suddenly and threateningly. His words fell fast, and he checked her for an instant with his vehemence. "We met in the Gap a week ago. I said I was telling you the exact truth. Did I do it?"

"I don't care what you said or what you did—"

"Answer me," he said sharply, "did I tell you the truth?"

"I don't know or care—"

"Yes, you do know—"

"What you say or do—"

"I told you the truth then, I am telling it now. I will never see you enter a gambling-room as long as I can prevent it. Call for help if you like."

She looked at him with amazement. She seemed about to speak—to make another protest. Instead, she turned suddenly away, hesitated again, put both her hands to her face, burst into tears, and hurried toward the stairs. De Spain followed her. “Let me take you to where you are going?”

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