

GUNLOCK RANCH

by FRANK H. SPEARMAN

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SYNOPSIS

Sleepy Cat, desert town of the Southwest, is celebrating the Fourth of July. Jane Van Tassel, beautiful daughter of Gus Van Tassel, hated owner of Gunlock ranch, has arrived from the East for the first time. She watches the Frontier Day celebration in company with Dr. Carpy, crusty, tender-hearted friend of the community, Henry Sawdy of the Circle Dot ranch, tricked in a fake horse race the day before by Dave McCrossen, foreman at Gunlock, plans revenge. He enters Bill Denison, a handsome young Texas wrangler, in the rodeo which McCrossen is favored to win, and lays heavy bets on him. Unknown to the crowd, Denison is a champion horseman McCrossen and the young stranger tie in the various events. McCrossen picks up a handkerchief from the ground riding full speed, facing backward. Denison easily follows suit. Denison then drops a cigarette carelessly. Racing down the track full tilt, he picks up the cigarette. The verdict goes to Denison when McCrossen refuses to attempt the stunt. Entreated by the crowd, Denison agrees to perform another trick. Jane Van Tassel is asked for her bracelet and throws it on the track. Just as Denison rides to pick it up a yell from Barney Rebstock, a McCrossen henchman, scares the pony, nearly costing the rider his life. Gun play is prevented by the intervention of Dr. Carpy.

CHAPTER II—Continued

He had the crowd with him. While they cheered, the wrangler remounted, entered leisurely up the track and down, and brought the gelding to a halt in front of Dr. Carpy and Jane Van Tassel. Patting the pony affectionately on the neck with his left hand, and speaking softly, the wrangler tapped the little fellow with his double quirt on the right shoulder.

The pony pawed the dust in protest but gradually crooked his right foreleg, then his left, and knelt in apology to the grandstand. The crowd gave him loud applause.

Meantime, throwing his lines, the wrangler stepped off the pony, laid his hand on the guard rails of the grandstand track-fence, cleared it, and, picking his way among the spectators up to where Carpy sat, stopped before Jane.

He was covered with dust and sweat. Jane started. She saw a pair of keen brown eyes inspecting her from behind long dusty lashes. She saw a familiar object in his right hand, as he held it out to her and heard his low words:

"Lady, your bracelet!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Jane completely surprised. "Thank you!"

"It's the other way round, please," retorted the wrangler. "I want to thank you. Sorry," he stammered, "for the disturbance."

He tried to fade away among his boisterous following of uproarious Circle Dot men. But not everyone was disposed to let him escape easily. Harry Tension, who paid the stake money over to Sawdy at the Circle Dot quarters, insisted on meeting the Texan. He was dragged, reluctant, out of the sleeping tent and shook hands slowly with the Medicine Bend sport magnate.

"Where did you pick up that cigarette trick?" demanded Tension. "I never saw it done but once. That was at Madison Square Garden."

"How long ago?" asked the wrangler.

"Two years ago last winter."

"It was done there that winter, I understand," said the Texan evenly.

"Of course, it was under artificial light, so they had to use white paper."

"You been in New York, then?"

"Once or twice, sir."

"You've seen it done, then?"

"I have, sir. And I'm mighty glad I met you," drawled the Texan, cutting the interview short. He was not ungracious, but was somewhat fatigued.

"The boy can ride," said Tension, rejoining Sawdy. "I told him I saw that cigarette act done in Madison Square Garden, two years ago. He said he saw it at the same time. I guess that's where he picked it up."

"Picked what up, the cigarette?"

"The act. He said they used a white-paper cigarette there on account of the artificial light—so he must have seen it."

"Who's they?" asked Sawdy bluntly.

"I suppose he meant the rider."

"I wonder if he meant himself. Why, Harry, he's the man that introduced that act at the Garden, two years ago last winter."

CHAPTER III

Two years later, back on her old father's ranch after two years in Chicago, Jane was riding the possessions one day to be hers. Wandering on her pony far in the Gunlock hills, she had lost her way toward the close of the day and had stopped to ask directions from a man standing at the door of a poor-looking cabin.

"Why, isn't this Gunlock Ranch?"

"Not yet." The man answered the question firmly, Jane thought.

"When I left the house this morning," she said indignantly, "they told

me I could ride all day without getting off Gunlock Ranch. I must have ridden about a hundred miles. What did you mean by saying, 'not yet?' she asked suspiciously.

Bill Denison, before whose door she had halted, looked at Jane with curiosity. "Oh, nothing special," he said casually. "Only, that old man Van Tassel has stolen everything in the hills except this ranch. I hear he's pretty sick now—down at the Medicine Bend hospital—but who can tell that he won't show up some fine night and steal this place while I'm asleep?"

At this outburst Jane first stopped breathing—then she breathed furiously. Her features hardened. "Why, how outrageous!" she exclaimed. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

The young man held his ground. "Let me ask a question. Are you any kin of old man Van Tassel's?" he asked composedly.

"I don't care to discuss that question with you," was her defiant reply.

"I admit, if you are, I was kind of rough, speaking as I did," he went on. "I didn't know he had any relations. I worked for him a year once, and I never heard him tell of any. So I guess I have to apologize."

"I should think you would apologize," declared Jane, scandalized.

"But," he countered, and the "but" was emphatic, "to tell you the truth, lady, I can't take everything back. You living over at the ranch?" he asked.

"I live in Chicago." She bit off the words as if they were tenpenny nails.

"And you're lost?"

"If I were not, I shouldn't be here."

"Now no matter how you and I may differ on some subjects," he said, "I'll start you on your way home, providing you want me to. In fact, I'll do it anyway."

"Will you wait a minute while I saddle up?"

"I won't wait a second. I'll find my own way." So saying, Jane jerked her horse around.

"Well, I like your spunk, anyway," Denison called out to her, "and I'll catch you in a couple of minutes, whether you like it or not."

"You can stay right where you are," she shot back. "I don't want you near me, anyhow."

As she rode away, Jane heard in an incredibly short time the clatter of hoofs beside her. She bristled inside.

"What are you chasing me for?" she demanded as Denison rode up and halted, with a jerk, at her side.

"I was afraid you'd fall off your horse," he retorted dryly. "Now skip the hard words," he countered easily as Jane angrily objected to his taunt and to his company. "You know your



"You Must Have Been Trying Not to Find Me," Said Jane Coldly.

used up; you don't know how to ride. You've used up your horse, and you don't know the country, and I've got to get you home, so turn around and follow me—do you know where you're heading for?"

She was too exasperated to speak.

"You're headed for the desert, and that's a poor place for a stranger to sleep in, night or day."

The fell warning checked Jane. She had heard stories about that awful desert; she had been warned to keep away from it. A revulsion of feeling swept over her. She was tired, tired enough to drop off her horse. Oppressed by a sense of loneliness, helplessness, and resentment at being ridiculed by a disagreeable stranger, her eyes filled with angry tears. She began to cry as she turned her horse's head to follow him.

"Hold on," he said kindly, "hold on. Nothing to cry about, not a thing. You're as safe as if you were in your bed at the ranch. I guess I'm pretty rough-spoken; but my bark's worse'n my bite. So you're from Chicago?"

"Yes."

"That's quite a burg, I understand."

"How far have we got to go to get home?"

"Considerable ways. If we could go as the crow flies, it wouldn't be so far. How long have you been out here?"

"Six weeks."

He was too polite to comment, though he had hardly need to ask the question—Jane was so evidently a tenderfoot.

"What's your name?" she asked in turn.

"Bill Denison."

"How long have you lived here?"

"Here and in the Panhandle most of my life."

"And how many years is that?"

"Nigh onto thirty years, I figure it to be."

"What are you so sore for on everybody at Gunlock ranch?"

Could Jane have seen the expression of amazed despair on Denison's face, she would have felt she had reverted to an impossible subject.

"Lady," retorted her companion, "if I told you, you wouldn't believe it. But I don't say I'm sore at everybody. And I'm not sore at you. I'm glad there's one decent person now at Gunlock—"

Jane bridled again. "One decent person! I like that!"

"Hang it, I didn't mean to make another break. Please excuse, and I'll hog-tie my troublesome tongue."

"Is it very much farther?" asked Jane, alarmed now by approaching darkness.

"Not a whole lot. But maybe you'd better mount off and rest a little if you need to. It's rough going from here on, for I'm trying to take a short cut."

"You're not lost, are you?" she demanded suspiciously.

"Not yet."

"But you might get lost?"

"Not tonight. And if you'll stick to the saddle a little ways farther, you can have a drink at a spring to freshen you up."

"How can you find it?"

"If you'd drunk from it as many times as I have, you could find it in a sandstorm, blindfolded—so could these horses, either of 'em."

The two were silent for a while. Presently Denison checked his horse. "Here's your spring, lady. Are you thirsty?"

"Choked. If you hadn't been so mean, I'd have asked you for a drink at your house—if it is your house."

"It's mine so far, but there's a hang-over lawsuit of Van Tassel's on it. Can you get down, lady?"

"I don't know whether I can or not. I've been in this saddle so long."

Her companion eased her to the ground. Jane refused to drink without a cup till he told her to cup her hands. Then she would not drink until she could see there were no snakes in the water.

"Nothing gets into that water; it would freeze a snake to death. But I can strike a light so you can see the water in your hands."

He folded a piece of newspaper taken from one of his saddle pockets, lighted a match thinking his companion rather fussy, and when Jane had drunk, he drank and gave the horses a drink.

"I'd have offered you a drink at my house if I'd thought of it," he said, helping her to remount. "I didn't aim to be mean. You kind of took me by surprise. I'll admit I'm sore at Gunlock."

There were lights everywhere when Jane knocked, very late, at the ranch-house door. Kindly old Bull Page, one of the ranch hands, greeted her in the kitchen.

The girl was jaded to death. "Where's everybody, Bull?" she asked, dropping into a chair.

"Why, Miss Jane, they're all out lookin' for you."

"Looking for me?" exclaimed Jane scornfully. "Well, they must be loafing on the job. Where's Quong?"

"Quong's gone to bed, but I'll get some bacon and fried potatoes for you in no time," declared Bull. "Coffee?"

"Yes, and strong."

"Same as I take it. Well, well, how'd you manage to find your way home?"

"I didn't find it. I found a man and a cabin about a hundred miles from nowhere, and he brought me home. That coffee smells grand, Bull," sighed Jane. "Hurry up with the bacon!"

As she said the words, she stalked the ranch foreman, Dave McCrossen.

At the sight of the missing girl he struck an attitude of resentful astonishment. "Hell's bells, Jane!" he exclaimed. "Here you are home and we've been ridin' all over creation for you!"

"You must have been trying not to find me," said Jane coldly. Without much reason she resented the fact that she had got lost and not been promptly found.

"Where were you?" asked the foreman, sitting down.

"In the hills. You've always been telling me to ride where I pleased and that there was no danger because you'd pick me up. I guess your formula didn't work."

"I missed this time. There's never been any trouble locatin' you before. But it won't happen again. So you just wandered away and wandered home again?"

"I did not wander home. I was brought home."

"Who brought you?"

"Bill Denison."

If a cannon cracker had been exploded under McCrossen, it could not have been more sensational than her answer. He caught his breath with a gulp. "That fellow! Well, some things do beat the devil! Bull," he said, recollecting himself, "go out and tell the boys Jane is home. Bill Denison, was it?" he resumed, looking keenly at Jane.

"The name doesn't seem to sit very well with you," observed Jane crustily. McCrossen looked disgruntled.

"That bird's name doesn't sit very well with anyone at Gunlock."

Jane seemed willing to pursue the subject. "Why not?" she asked languidly as she sipped her coffee.

"Why not? There's more reasons than one. Denison is a rustler, if you know what that means." He paused.

"What else?" she asked in the same fatigued manner.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Sacrifice in Iron

On the old bridge, in Frankfort-am-Main, the Rhineland, stands a medieval iron cross with a figure of Christ. A cock tops the cross, explained by legend that the architect vowed to sacrifice to the devil the first living thing crossing the bridge.

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Pattern 1927-B

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Household Questions

Custard pies should first be started to bake in a hot oven to set the crust, then the heat of the oven should be quickly reduced so that the custard may cook slowly.

Raisin sauce served on steamed or baked cottage puddings makes a good winter dessert and one advised for children.

After washing white silk stockings or gloves and rinsing them thoroughly be sure to hang them in the shade to dry. This will keep them white.

If the chicken is well rubbed inside and out with a cut lemon before being cooked it will make the meat white, juicy and tender.

Left-over cauliflower can be dipped in cracker crumbs and egg and fried in deep fat and served for luncheon or supper.

When blankets are washed at home do not wring them dry. Instead hang them outdoors on the clothesline to dry.

Brass door knockers exposed to the weather will stay bright and shiny if they are rubbed with paraffin before being polished.

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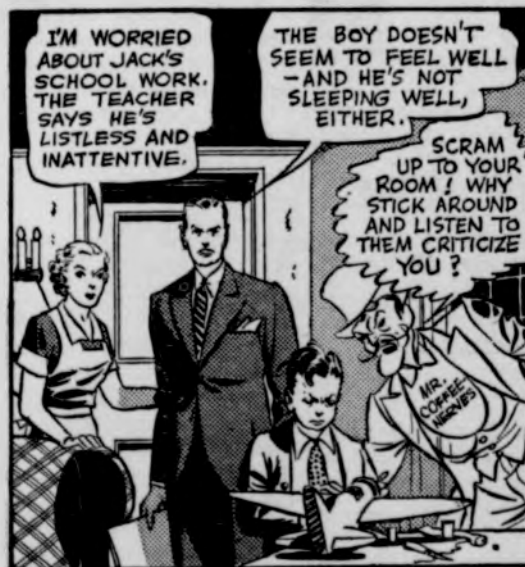
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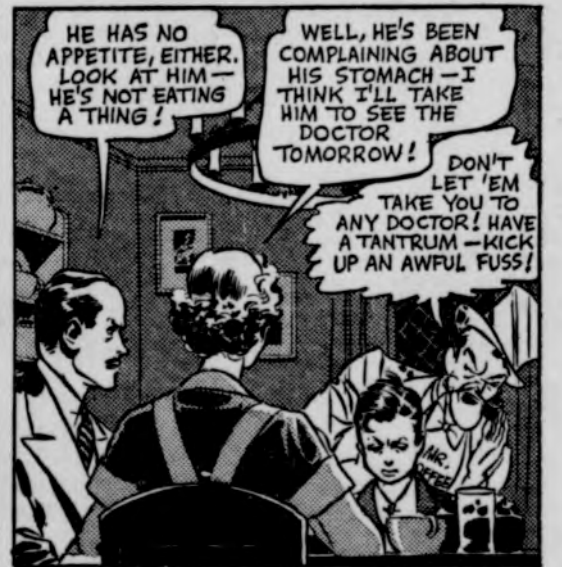
THE DOCTOR HELPS JACK



"I'M WORRIED ABOUT JACK'S SCHOOL WORK. THE TEACHER SAYS HE'S LISTLESS AND INATTENTIVE."

"THE BOY DOESN'T SEEM TO FEEL WELL — AND HE'S NOT SLEEPING WELL, EITHER."

"SCRAM UP TO YOUR ROOM! WHY STICK AROUND AND LISTEN TO THEM CRITICIZE YOU?"



"HE HAS NO APPETITE, EITHER. LOOK AT HIM — HE'S NOT EATING A THING!"

"WELL, HE'S BEEN COMPLAINING ABOUT HIS STOMACH — I THINK I'LL TAKE HIM TO SEE THE DOCTOR TOMORROW!"

"DON'T LET 'EM TAKE YOU TO ANY DOCTOR! HAVE A TANTRUM — KICK UP AN AWFUL FUSS!"



"WHY — THIS SOUNDS LIKE COFFEE — NERVES TO ME — BUT SURELY YOU'RE NOT LETTING THIS BOY DRINK COFFEE!"

"BUT, DOCTOR — I DIDN'T KNOW — I'VE ALWAYS FELT THAT HE NEEDED A HOT DRINK!"

"— OF COURSE YOU NEED A HOT DRINK! — AND TELL 'EM ANOTHER THING YOU NEED IS TO BE LET ALONE!"



"THE RIGHT KIND OF A HOT DRINK IS VERY BENEFICIAL — TRY GIVING HIM POSTUM — MADE WITH — HOT-MILK!"

"ALL RIGHT, DOCTOR — I'LL TRY IT — IF YOU THINK THE CHANGE WILL HELP HIM —"

"CURSES! I WAS AFRAID OF THIS! NOW I'LL HAVE TO BEAT IT!!"



"LATER" "JACK, YOUR WORK SHOWS REMARKABLE IMPROVEMENT LATELY! YOU'LL SOON BE OUR STAR PUPIL AT THIS RATE!"

"MOTHER SAYS IT'S BECAUSE I'VE BEEN FEELING SO MUCH BETTER SINCE I SWITCHED TO POSTUM — MADE WITH — HOT-MILK!"

OF COURSE, children should never drink coffee. And many grown-ups, too, find that the caffeine in coffee disagrees with them. If you are bothered by headaches or indigestion or can't sleep soundly... try Postum for 30 days. Postum contains no caffeine. It is simply whole wheat and bran, roasted and slightly sweetened. Try Postum. You may miss coffee at first, but after 30 days you'll love Postum for its own rich, satisfying flavor. It is easy to make, delicious, economical, and may prove a real help. A product of General Foods.

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