

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. 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. Back on Gunlock ranch after two years in Chicago, because of her father's illness, Jane gets lost riding in the hills and meets Denison, now a neighbor, who guides her home. Not knowing her identity, he speaks bitterly of Van Tassel. She tells McCrossen who brought her home and he denounces Denison as a cattle thief. Later she asks Dr. Carpy why her father is unpopular and he tells her it is because of Van Tassel's ruthless and unscrupulous character.

CHAPTER III—Continued

"Who is that man?" asked Bull as Panama left the shop.
"Why, you ought to know that man, Bull. He's an old-time Sleepy Cat gambler and confidence man—up to every game they ever played from here to Frisco."
"What's his name?"
"They used to call him Big Bill Hayes."
"I heard that name."
"Guess you did—guess everybody's heard it."
"But he made a trip to Panama when the French outfit was runnin' things there. He cleaned up on the Frenchmen, and they run him out of town. He says he got the dysentery down there. Anyway, he got away before they strung him up for a cardsharp. Now everybody calls him Panama."
"What's he doin' here now?"
"Why, the damned critter got religion somehow, and he's the kindest, best preacher that ever talked in Sleepy Cat. He's doin' a world of good."
Oscar spoke up. "Panama's breaking Jake of swearing, Bull."
"Got a job, ain't he?" snickered Bull.
"Just the same, he's cooled me down a lot—you know that, Oscar," declared Spotts. "Otto!" he yelled to the porter in the back room. "What the hell's a-matter with the hot water this mornin'?"

CHAPTER IV

Jane made it a practice to visit her father at the Medicine Bend hospital at least every two weeks.
She spent the day at the hospital with her father, ate an early supper with him, and took Number One back to Sleepy Cat. Her father asked a good many questions about McCrossen.
"A good man," Van Tassel said wheezily of him again and again. "His only trouble is gambling—he will gamble."
"I'm sorry, Father," returned Jane with asperity—it was not the first time he had made the same remark—"but I don't quite see how I can watch him, do you?"
"Well, keep track of the shipments this month. The steers will be going out right along now—good deal of money coming in. See that he don't get too much away from you, under one pretext or another. When he wants money to gamble, he won't stop at nothing. And it won't do a bit of hurt to be kind of nice to him yourself."
Hints such as these failed to move Jane. Indeed, they aroused an antagonism.
When the train pulled into Sleepy Cat late that night it was cold; a north wind was spitting rain. McCrossen was on hand with the two-seated buckboard. He met Jane at the Pullman step and hurried her through the sprinkle across the platform to the rig.
"I piled the house supplies in the back," explained McCrossen, "so you'd better ride with me."
"Brought you an extra-heavy coat over," he added. "Thought you might need it. Will you put it on now?"
His voice, never harsh, sounded solicitous. Jane thought she would put the coat on. Her foreman, sitting beside her, helped her get into it. His manner was tender. His hands, as he straightened the coat collar, lingered a moment on her shoulders. Jane shook her shoulders slightly to draw them away.
"Your father's a great man, Jane," he said. "No use talkin'."
"I'm glad to hear someone say a good word for him," returned Jane dryly.
"Oh, he's got his enemies, I know. But from the first minute I ever saw you, girl, when you got off the train that mornin' in Sleepy Cat"—McCrossen inclined in friendly fashion toward his tight-sitting little companion to emphasize his words—"from the very first minute I saw you, I said to myself, 'There's a girl with all the grit and sand of her father.'"

"Hadn't you better drive a little faster?" suggested Miss Tight Sitter, casually.

"I'm afraid to push the old buckboard over this part of the road. So I said to myself," he continued, "There's a girl with her father's grit and her mother's beauty." Jane—he lowered his voice, becomingly—"are you warm?"
"Quite."
"And comfortable?"
"Perfectly. But I should like to get on faster."

McCrossen brought the horses to a stop. "What's the matter?" asked his companion rather tartly.
"This is Gunlock Ford. The creek was runnin' kind of high when I drove through after supper, and it's been rainin' all evenin'. We don't want to get caught in the water. I'll get out and see how things look. Take the lines a minute."

"It's safe, I reckon," he reported, returning soon to the rig. "But you'd better put your feet in my lap till we get across. The water might come up through the floorboards."

Her response was chilly. "My feet will be all right where they are."

"O. K., Jane! But you're about the sweetest girl I ever saw in the world."

Suiting action to these words, McCrossen put his arm swiftly around the girl and pulled her toward him for a kiss.

He failed to get one. Instead, he got a smart slap from Jane's gloved hand; and she pushed him back with a force he had not thought possible in so delicate a feminine make-up.

"Please mind your business, Dave, and attend to your driving," said Jane collectedly.

The night was an unquiet one for Jane's pillow. The more she thought about her surprise admirer and his crude advances, the angrier she grew. In the morning she breakfasted and ordered her saddle pony. She meant to take a long ride all by herself and rid herself of her annoyance in the morning air of the high hills.

The day was sympathetic to her purpose. She rode under a cloudless sky into the far reaches of Gunlock Ranch. Insensibly, the clouds in her mind cleared and left her free to enjoy the glory of the scene.

On and on, Jane rode. The pony was spirited and seemed, like his mistress, to enjoy the jaunt. The farther she rode, the wilder the country grew, with



The Farther She Rode, the Wilder the Country Grew.

only small bunches of cattle here and there to remind her of her domain. At length the hills grew too rough for pleasure riding. With her spirits quieted and feeling invigorated, Jane reined about for the ranch house.

Covering considerably more distance, Jane, having grown weary, was rejoiced at last to see the dusty, serpentine foothills road well below her. Having reached it, she reined into it and jogged along, confident of reaching home soon. Presently she encountered an Indian family traveling toward her in a wagon. She reined up.

"Am I heading right for Gunlock Ranch?" she asked of the man driving.

He nodded affirmatively. But a bright-eyed boy in the wagon box made a protest. He jabbered in low tones to his father and, turning to Jane, exclaimed, "Wrong way," and pointed north. The father shook his head, and the dispute grew. Jane, confused by the uncertainty, thanked the party and rode on south.

A few miles farther she met a horseman heading north. As he drew near, Jane thought she recognized him as the man who had directed her back to the ranch a couple of weeks before, at the close of a long day of riding through the Gunlock hills. Jane reined up inquiringly. The horseman responded to the unspoken invitation by doing likewise. Jane saw a slender face, deeply tanned, black hair, mild brown eyes, a large nose, and a small mouth, framed by a not unfriendly chin.

"Good morning," ventured Jane. "Can you tell me whether I am on the right road to Gunlock Ranch?"

The man listened but made no effort to speak. Instead he looked at the girl silently. His gaze was embarrassing.

He ignored her question and instead asked one himself:

"Aren't you the girl who got lost around here a couple of weeks ago?"
"Y-yes," answered Jane. "And aren't

you the man who directed me back to Gunlock Ranch?"

"Guess I was," the man replied, in an absent-minded way.

"I realize that it's stupid of me to lose my way again," she said, "but can you tell me whether I am heading right for the ranch?"

He found his tongue and spoke quietly: "Well . . . you'd reach the ranch the way you are going, though probably not today."

"Not today?" she asked in amazement.

"You want to reach the ranch house, I suppose?"

"I do."

"Then you're heading the wrong way."

"Will you please set me right?"

"You'd better take the back trail. You're going away from the ranch house now."

Jane exclaimed in surprise. "Why, how is that? Are you sure?"

"Dead sure." A suspicion of humor crept into the words.

Confused at being caught wrong, Jane flushed. The man, silent, just looked at her. She did not like it; he might be laughing at her. Facing him more sternly, she asked with helpless annoyance in her words, "What am I to do?"

"Back trail."

"What does that mean?" she asked tartly.

"Turn around."

"Where am I?"

"Pretty well out on the Gunlock Indian Reservation."

"I've never felt so stupid in my life," declared Jane, trying to act at ease as she reined about. "I thought I knew this country well enough by this time not to get lost. I'm certainly not a tenderfoot."

The man smiled, but to himself.

"There's been men here several years who get lost riding in the hills. It's no disgrace for a two-monther."

Jane did not relish being termed a "two-monther." "Oh, I've been here before," she said airily.

He offered no comment. Tired, waiting for him to say something, Jane was nettled by his continued silence.

"I see you're wearing your bracelet," he remarked of a sudden. The words came, so to speak, out of a clear sky. She looked at him just as suddenly as he had spoken; and in alarm.

He was looking straight ahead—just as if she were not within miles—and with the impassive expression of a man riding quite alone. Could he be, she asked herself in a flash of fear, a bad man? Could he mean to rob her of her bracelet and watch?

For a moment she was too upset to speak. But her silence seemed not to move her companion.

Looking placidly ahead, and after waiting for her to comment, he spoke again:

"I might be wrong. But I thought I saw that bracelet about two years ago, Fourth of July—"

"Oh," exclaimed Jane for want of something better to say.

"Anyway," continued her even-speaking guide, "I know I couldn't be mistaken about the young lady that wore it. Weren't you visiting here around that time?"

"Yes," ventured Jane, stealing a glance at the questioner. His gaze was fixed steadfastly ahead.

"Were you at the Frontier Day celebration in Sleepy Cat that Fourth of July?" he continued.

"Y-yes," repeated Jane. "W-were you?"

"If I hadn't been," he answered dryly. "I shouldn't have seen the bracelet."

They were jogging along pleasantly enough, and as the man didn't actually demand her bracelet or watch, her panic subsided.

"Stopping over at the ranch for a while, are you?"

"For a while, yes."

"Some of the boys over at your ranch were telling in town they had a young lady over at Gunlock that used to ride in a circus. I suppose it was you."

"I'm the only woman, young or old, over there."

"What circus did you work with?"

"Oh, several circuses," said Jane recklessly.

"What were some of them?"

Jane, growing flighty, named one of the big ones whose shows she had attended in Chicago.

"What year were you with that show?"

She was growing desperate. With affected embarrassment she turned full on him. "You mustn't ask me that. Women are sensitive about their age. Don't you know?"

For the first time he turned his eyes directly toward hers; there was a slight mutual shock at the encounter. To hide a momentary confusion, she laughed nervously; but a bridge—a little bit of a bridge over a little bit of a brook—had been crossed. And the little bit of a brook was of the kind that sometimes leads to a big river.

His eyes were brown—Jane could see them now—together with some of the lightning that flashed in response to her words. She was even a little scared.

"I've heard some women are that way," he went on, "but I shouldn't call you a woman."
"Oh, my! Why not?"
"Well, I'd call you a girl. The reason I asked was, because I was with that show one season myself."

This was growing terrifying. Jane made an effort to change the line of talk; but her stranger was interested. "Did you ever happen to ride in Madison Square Garden?"
"N-no! Did you?"
"I rode there one winter when we showed there."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

For the Little Princess



1828-B

The simplicity but irresistible charm of princess frocks accounts for their undiminished popularity and appeal for those who sew, and this one will make an instant hit with the mothers of growing daughters as well as with the daughters themselves. Slightly fitted at the waist to accent the mild flare of the skirt, this pretty and petite princess model goes together like a charm, the result of a minimum of effort and expense. Puff sleeves, a contrasting Peter Pan collar, and a row of small bright buttons down the front complete the picture.

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Household Questions

To keep the coffee pot sweet, boil a strong solution of borax in it occasionally.

Never wear rings, except plain bands, when washing fine laces, silks, etc. Rings may catch in fabrics and tear them.

To remove print from flour sacks, rub print with lard and let stand over night. In the morning boil in water with soap in it, then rub until print has all disappeared.

Fill crevices in floors with putty and smooth off with a knife. Do this three or four days before putting finish on floors.

Flowers for the house should be cut in the late afternoon.

Beets are fattening and therefore excellent food for those desiring to put on flesh.

If patent leather shoes and belts are rubbed occasionally with a glycerin-dipped cloth the leather will not dry and crack.

Custard filling will not soak into crust if the white of an egg is brushed over crust before pouring in custard.

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Uncle Phil Says:

That Is Something
If a man knows he is mediocre he can console himself by supporting noble and high-minded causes.

It is a Hindoo epigram that "money will buy a dog, but only love will make him wag his tail."

Each day, praise the deserving and somewhat less often scatter rebukes among the undeserving.

Very little of education is mistaken. If it does nothing else it confers polish.

Would It Unburden Us?

Not enough pains are taken to put the great issues of the day in understandable form for the millions.

Failure after long perseverance is much grander than never to have a striving good enough to be called a failure.

We all think our "hearts are in the right place," no matter how feckish our affections.

Canine Gave the Game Away

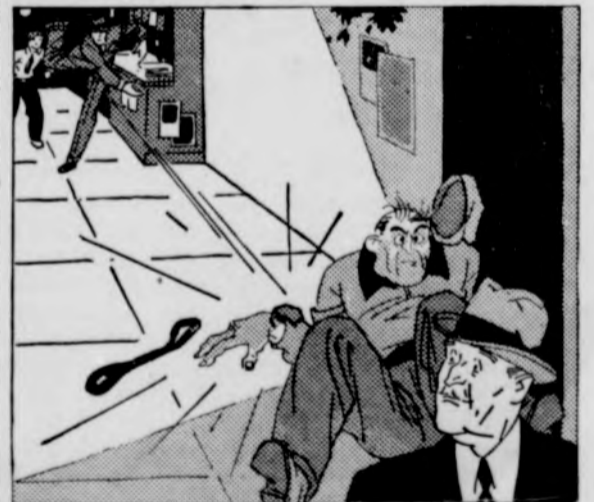
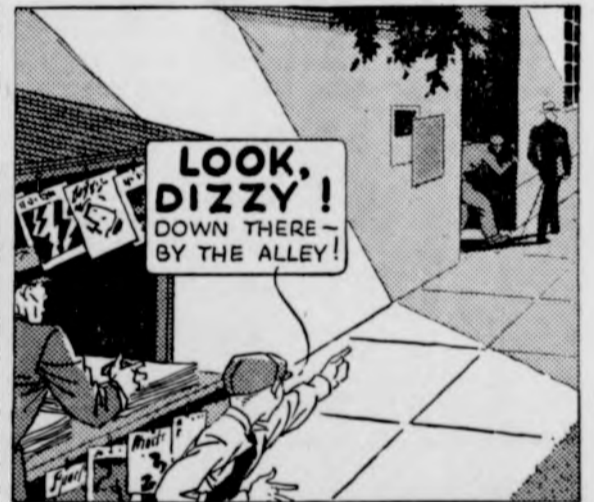
The talk in the club was on sensible dogs. Brown said, "I have the best in the world. Soon after I got it the wife and I went out. On coming home several hours later, I found the dog lying on the sofa, so I gave him a sound hiding. Next time I came in he was on the floor, but on finding the sofa was warm I gave him another hiding, even more severe than the first."

"I suppose that cured him," said Jones.

"Not exactly," said Brown, "you see, the next time he was standing by the sofa blowing on it to cool it."

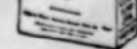


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Lucky Rabbit's Foot. Just like Dizzy carries—has nickel-plated cap and ring. Free for 2 Grape-Nuts package tops.

DIZZY DEAN, c/o GRAPE-NUTS, Battle Creek, Mich. I enclose _____ Grape-Nuts package tops for which send me the item(s) checked below. (Put correct postage on your letter.)

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