

SUNSET PASS

Synopsis and Research Summaries

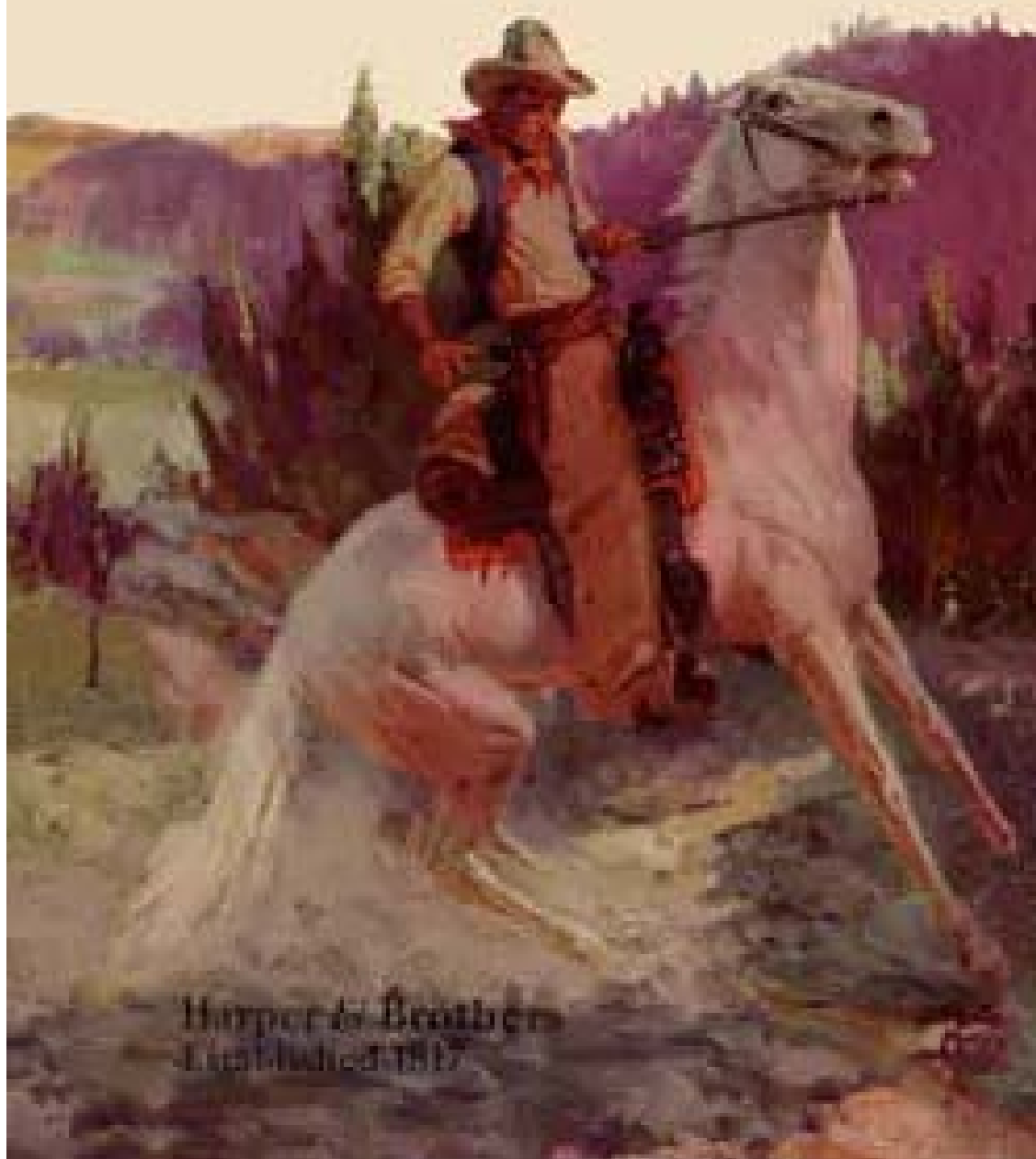
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Zane Grey's West Society

SUNSET PASS

By Zane Grey



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INTRODUCTION

Trueman ("True") Rock returns to Wagontongue, New Mexico, after spending five years running cattle in Texas. He finds all of his old girl friends are married, one of his best friends killed under suspicious circumstances, and a lovely lady with whom he becomes infatuated at first sight. He learns of a shady cattle rustling-butchering scheme being operated by the lovely lady's villainous brother, a brother who is overly protective of his sister. Trueman is conflicted between bringing a cattle rustling outfit to justice, finding the real story behind his friend's killing, and winning the young lady's love while defeating her loyalty to her ner-do-well brother.

LIST OF MAJOR CHARACTERS

(XX) Indicates the page where each character first appears in the Walter J. Black, Inc, edition of *Sunset Pass*.

- **Trueman Rock (aka. True) (1)**...a 33-year old man who returns to Wagontongue, New Mexico after six years working on a cattle job in Texas.
- **Bill Clark (4)**...owner of the Range House Hotel.
- **Cass Seward (5)**...a sheriff who had been Rock's friend, but who had died in his absence under circumstances that were unclear.
- **Sol Winter (8)**...a storekeeper who had always been kind to Rock, loaning him money.
- **Nick Winter (8)**...Sol's son and True's friend who had been shot near Sunset Pass, supposedly in an accident, but Sol Winter believes otherwise.
- **Thiry Preston (14)**...beautiful 22-year old daughter of Gage Preston.
- **Range Preston (25)**...Thiry's brother.
- **Ash Preston (25)**...brother of Thiry who is very protective of her.
- **Amy Wund Dabb (42)**...old girl friend of Rock before he left for Texas.
- **Jim Leslie (49)**...horse seller.
- **Hal Roberts (58)**...a rider for a rancher named Spangler.
- **Adam Pringle (60)**...a rancher friend who offers Rock a job.
- **Jess Slagle (67)**...a rancher ruined by John Dabb.
- **Gage Preston (76)**...a cattleman in the butchering business originally from Missouri.
- **Mrs. Gage Preston (82)**...wife of Gage, mother of Thiry.
- **Alice Preston (82)**...16-year old daughter of Gage, sister of Thiry.
- **Lucy and Burr Preston (82)**...younger Preston children.
- **Tom, Albert, and Harry Preston (87)**...Preston sons who work for Rock. Tom and Harry are twins, hard to tell apart.
- **Scoot and Boots (aka. Frank) Preston (93)**...additional Preston sons.
- **John Dabb (192)**...married Amy Wund, had been a partner in a cattle deal with Sol Winter.

- **Hesbitt (192)**...a cattleman from Wyoming new to the Sunset Pass area and president of the Cattlemen's Association.
- **Clink Peebles (211)**...a cowboy who wears red scarves, foreman for Hesbitt.
- **Spangler (58)**...a cattle rancher friend of Rock.
- **Tom Lincoln (301)**...a cattleman and member of the Cattlemen's Association.

SYNOPSIS

Chapter 1. Trueman Rock returns to Wagontongue, New Mexico, after being away in Texas for five years where he saved a respectable sum of money from working in the cattle business. He finds all of his old girlfriends married, and his good friend, Nick Winter, has been killed under questionable circumstances. Trueman visits with Nick's father, Sol Winter. Trueman learns his old girlfriend Amy Wund has married John Dabb, a drunk who neglects and mistreats her. Trueman learns that Sol had been involved in the cattle business with John Dabb, who cheated him. While left briefly in charge of Sol's store, Trueman meets and immediately becomes infatuated with a beautiful young lady named Thiry Preston, the daughter of an older cattleman named Gage Preston, who runs a cattle butchering business. While carrying Thiry's goods to her wagon, Trueman encounters her drunken brother Ash, who is overly protective of his sister, who resents Trueman helping his sister. Ash starts to draw his gun to shoot Trueman, but he is interrupted by his brother Range.

Chapter 2. Ash attempts to hit Rock, but Rock trips Ash. Rock is so overwhelmed by Thiry that he tells Sol he will never drink alcohol again. Sol tells Rock he believes Ash killed his son Nick. Sol tells Rock he believes the Prestons are rustling cattle, and that Gage Preston is in the butchering business with John Dabb. Sol tells Rock that Amy Wund, now Mrs. John Dabb, will tell Thiry lies about Rock. True asks Sol about a safe way to invest his money from the Texas cattle business. Rock sees Amy Wund on the street, and she flirts with him and tells him she knows he has fallen for Thiry. Rock learns of a beautiful white horse a man named Leslie has for sale, and he learns that Thiry had shown an interest in the horse.

Chapter 3. Rock buys the horse from Jim Leslie, and he learns that John Dabb had wanted the horse, but that Leslie didn't want to sell it to him. Sol tells Rock that Thiry is always sad. Rock meets a cowboy named Hal Roberts, who encourages him to get a job riding with a cattleman named Spangler. Rock rides out to a cabin once owned by a man named Adam Pringle. He meets Pringle, and he offers Rock a job. Rock says he wants to try to get a job with Gage Preston. Pringle warns him to stay away from Sunset Pass, Preston's ranch. Rock rides out to meet an old rancher friend named Jess Slagle, who tells him he has had a lot of cattle rustled, and that he and his wife are leaving. Rock rides on to the Preston ranch where Ash greets him.

Chapter 4. Rock goes to see Gage Preston and confronts Ash telling him he also wants to see Thiry. Gage hires him to boss the younger riders of his outfit, including his younger sons. Rock

meets Mrs. Preston, 16-year old daughter Alice, and younger children Lucy and Burr. Rock decides to call his white horse Egypt, because that is the name Thiry had given him. Rock discusses the wholesale butchering business with Gage. He learns Thiry has been the teacher for her younger siblings. Rock has dinner with the Preston family where he meets two more sons, Range and Boots, whose real name is Frank. Thiry asks Rock to escort her to her cabin.

Chapter 5. Rock tells Thiry he has told her father that in addition to coming to Sunset Pass looking for a job, he has also come to see her. She tells him her brother Ash is overly protective of her, and that she can't be friends with Rock, as Ash had tangled with other men who tried to get close to her. She encourages Rock to leave. He tells her his background, including the reason he had left Wagontongue years ago was because he had shot a man named Pickens. He tells her he believes he can save her more harm if he stays rather than leaves. Rock admits to himself that he loves Thiry. Thiry is afraid Ash will kill Rock or Rock will kill Ash. She knows Ash is crooked, and she suspected her father is also crooked, but she doesn't tell Rock that. Rock realizes that is the cause of Thiry's sad eyes, and he decides to stay at Sunset Pass.

Chapter 6. Rock decides to try to stop the rustling and butchering in order to save the Prestons from catastrophe. Ash rides off with Rock's horse Egypt in order to challenge Rock. Rock decides to ride Ash's horse. Rock finds a piece of quicklime where he and the boys are working. He believes it may have been used to destroy cattle hides with brands of other ranchers. He finds a deep well, which he believes may be where old hides are thrown to be treated with quicklime, and nearby he finds boot prints, which he measures. Rock and Thiry meet secretly following dinner, and he tells her someday he will put her up on Egypt. He tells her he will challenge Ash about taking his horse, but that he will avoid serious confrontation. He tells her he can help her and her family by staying on at Sunset Pass and that he loves her. She tries again to get him to leave.

Chapter 7. Rock earns a reputation as a hard worker as he helps the young Preston brothers. The brothers look forward to the Fourth of July dance. Rock challenges Ash for violating the Code of the West when he took the horse Egypt without asking, but he diplomatically avoids a major confrontation. Rock is upset and jealous as he sees Ash hug Thiry. Rock tells Thiry's father that he is in love with Thiry, and he asks her father's permission to marry her. The father is pleased that Rock did that, saying it would also please her mother, and he gives Rock permission to do so. He tells Thiry he has given Rock permission to marry her, and he tells her she doesn't answer to Ash in the matter. The father warns Rock about Ash's temper. He encourages Rock to go to Mrs. Dabb's masquerade party, and to flirt with Mrs. Dabb to make Thiry jealous. Rock believes the father has some deep motive besides seeing Thiry married, perhaps something to do with the crooked rustling and butchering. Rock rides to the isolated Slagle's ranch to see if he can find evidence of the illegal butchering.

Chapter 8. Rock discovers several riders, one with a red scarf, at a cabin where a number of hides are drying on coral fences. He finds several cowhides hidden in a culvert along with more quicklime, some of them with a half-moon brand, and he suspects the Prestons are involved, although he personally hopes he is wrong. He visits Sol Winter and learns that Gage Preston

had recently rode by with two wagons full of freshly butchered beef and a wagon full of hides. Rock learns a man named Hesbitt runs the Half Moon brand. He also learns about a man named Clint Peeples who wears a red scarf and is Hesbitt's foreman. Rock purchases a masquerade outfit depicting a gambler, as he plans to attend the July Fourth dance. He runs into his old friend Jem Slagle, who tells him Gage Preston would never put Rock to butchering, as he probably had something bigger in mind for Rock. Rock runs into Amy Wund, Mrs. Dabb.

Chapter 9. Amy flirts with Rock out in the open in front of the hotel. She makes sure to invite him to her dance, asking him to protect her from Clink Peeples whom she had kissed, but with whom she wants no relationship. Rock tells her he wants to meet her husband John. Amy tells Rock she may be jealous of Thiry Preston. She tells Rock that Gage Preston hopes to benefit from having Rock on his crew, capitalizing on Rock's reputation for honesty. She hints that the Prestons are corrupt. The next morning Rock goes to see John Dabb, for whom he had once worked. Dabb introduces Rock to Hesbitt. Rock asks Hesbitt if his foreman Clink Peeples was in town looking for him. Rock makes sure Dabb knows Amy had never been serious about Rock, and he warns Dabb that he should pay closer attention to his wife. Dabb warns Rock to not do any gun throwing in defense of Preston, as it would ruin him. Dabb tells Rock he broke off his business deal with Preston. Rock learns the Prestons, including Thiry, had arrived in town a day early for the dance. He runs into Thiry in town. She tells him that any care she had for him had been killed by Amy Dabb, but she promises to dance every dance with him except for a few she had promised to her brothers.

Chapter 10. Rock finds Peeples and rebukes him for trying to stop Amy, and Peeples promises to apologize to her. Peeples warns Rock about "queer range shadows creepin' over the Prestons". He advises Rock to grab up Thiry and run off with her, away from the Prestons. Rock is coldly snubbed by the new president of the Cattleman's Association. It is learned that Ash has ridden in under cover of night, likely planning to cause trouble at the dance. Amy Dabb recognizes Rock in his gambler disguise at the dance. Disguised as a Spanish girl in gold and black, Amy approaches Rock and leads him to the dance floor. She asks him what he told her husband, because he has been treating her more kindly since Rock talked with him. She also tells him Peeples has apologized to her. Rock sees Thiry in a white Colonial wedding dress. She secretly slips a note to him telling him Ash is in town, and she fears Ash will try to rip her gown. She says she wants to dance with Rock, but she asks him to first dance with Allie.

Chapter 11. Allie also warns him that Ash will try to ruin Thiry's dress. Rock asks Allie to be his friend and to trust him, and that he is serious about marrying Thiry. Rock and Thiry dance. Ash appears as he tears the masks off of several girls, looking for Thiry. He tears Thiry's mask off, and she introduces him to the still masked Rock, calling him her Senor del Toro masquerade partner. Ash tries to tear Thiry's dress, but Rock knocks him to the floor. He tells Thiry he loves her, and escorts her away. They kiss before she enters the house where she is staying. A week later Ash apologizes to Thiry saying he was drunk at the dance. Preston tells Ash it had been Rock who hit him at the dance. He tells Ash that members of the Cattlemen's Association have been snooping around, that they are suspicious about the butchering business, and that he should back off the butchering business until things blow over. He warns Ash to clean up the

Half Moon hides. Ash refuses to stop the butchering. He also tells Ash that Thiry really likes Rock. Ash threatens to kill Rock. His father tells him that if he tries to kill Rock, Rock will likely kill him.

Chapter 12. Rock feels doom approaching the Prestons. He feels the old man is deliberately trying to force a confrontation between himself and Ash. Orders are given for Rock and a short crew of young, inexperienced men to drive five hundred head of two-year-old steers to the flat by Slagle's ranch, a very challenging job. Rock learns the idea to send him with the herd was Thiry's, an idea most likely designed to avoid a confrontation between himself and Ash. Rock observes Ash and Boots Preston riding off with saddle bags, ropes, and blankets, clearly intending to disobey their father and remove the hides from the culvert to a better hiding-place. Rock writes Thiry a note telling her to prepare herself for the inevitable, namely that something bad was surely to happen to Ash sooner or later, but that she would endure through it all. When Rock and the boys round up the cattle, they see lots of Half Moon brands. Jim Dunne, foreman for the cattleman Hesbitt, along with four other riders ride up on Rock's group. Rock had made sure to separate out any Half Moon cattle before he had begun his drive, so Dunne's riders find no Hesbitt cattle in the herd. Rock challenges Dunne to tell Hesbitt what he found and to not believe rumors he has heard about Prestons being rustlers. The young Preston sons thus become aware of the rumors against their family. When Rock returns to the Preston ranch after depositing the cattle to the Slagle's ranch flat, Gage Preston and Ash visit him to discuss the Hesbitt outfit's inspection of their cattle. Rock tells Gage the other cattlemen have him figured out and he has to quit the butchering business. Ash leaves in anger. Rock tells Gage his bull-headed son will be the ruin of the Prestons. Thiry comes to meet Rock after she has met with her father and Ash.

Chapter 13. Thiry admits she has learned the truth about her family's butchering business. She tells Rock she loves him. She learns Rock has known all along that her family were cattle thieves. She threatens to shoot Rock. He says he won't betray her family, and that he will find a way to save her family. Two days later Rock rides into Wagontongue to visit Sol Winter. Sol advises him to go to the heads of the Cattlemen's Association and tell them he'll see to it that Gage Preston makes good to the other cattlemen for the stolen cattle. Rock goes to visit John Dabb and promises he'll stop Gage Preston's rustling. Dabb has Rock to dinner with Tom Lincoln, and they discuss the deal Sol suggested along with the need to make sure Ash Preston leaves the country. Rock agrees to try to work out the deal with Gage Preston.

Chapter 14. Rock uses his own money to buy Slagle's silence and to allow Slagle to leave the range, as Slagle has seen through the Preston butchering scheme. Rock tells the Gage Preston that the cattlemen are wise to his rustling and butchering, and that he himself has determined it was Ash's boot prints at the culvert where the Half Moon hides were hidden. He offers Gage the opportunity to go to the Cattlemen's Association, to offer to pay for the cattle he has stolen, and to quit the butchering business rather than to face going to jail or worse. He tells Gage he has bought off Slagle for his silence. Gage asks Rock to take the young boys camping to get them away for a while so he can try to deal with Ash. Thiry visits Rock on the camping trip and asks him to join with her and her father to fight the cattlemen. Rock refuses to do so,

which ultimately pleases Thiry. Rock tells her to be patient, and that he will solve her father's problem. He goes to Clay Hill, a famous old roundup ground, and discovers Jimmy Dunne has been shot, but not mortally wounded, in a confrontation with Ash. Clink Peeples is attending to Dunne, and he tells Rock that Dunne had accused Ash of rustling. Rock visits with Gage Preston to once more convince him to settle his debts to the cattlemen and quit butchering. Ash confronts Rock, and a gunfight occurs during which Ash wounds Rock and Rock kills Ash.

Chapter 15. When Rock comes to his senses, he is taken to the doctor and later to the Winters' home. Gage goes to see Dabb and representatives of the Cattlemen's Association, and agrees to the reimbursement plan Rock had suggested, after which he and his three sons leave for Colorado. Amy Dabb visits Rock and tells him the Association representatives want him to run Sunset Pass Ranch on shares for them. Thiry visits Rock and tells him her father confessed to her that Ash was not her real brother, that Ash was her father's illegitimate son with a girl he had loved who had died and gave him her child. Once she realized Ash was not her brother, she was able to forgive Rock for killing him. She asks Rock to stay on at the ranch with her, as she does not want to leave. Sol Winter comes in and sees the two of them holding each other. He says he has seen the love the two of them have for each other, and he says "Westerners are a hard pioneerin' outfit". He says he sees the two of them and Allie and her new husband "leanin' more to finer, better things".

HELPFUL RESEARCH AND STUDY SUMMARIES

Dr. Joseph L. Wheeler, *Zane Grey's Impact on American Life and Letters: A Study In the Popular Novel* (George Peabody College for Teachers [Vanderbilt] – 1975)

References (75, 197,198)

(75) Grey felt that mistreatment of a fine horse would be resented by most Westerners. In Sunset Pass, Grey explored the ramifications of a man breaking the unwritten horse law...Most Westerners were fond of animals and were usually kind to them.

Researcher's Note: In Chapter Seven, pages 143 through 147 Rock admonishes Ash for riding off on Rock's white horse, Egypt, without first getting Rock's permission, a violation of what Grey calls "The Code of the West".

(197-198) Whereas many of Grey's books end with sunset, interestingly enough Sunset Pass ends in the morning. It is probable that the razzing he received about his sunset obsession finally got to him and he started leaving them out about the same time his descriptive passages began to be cut or deleted.

(198) Ash Preston in Sunset Pass is another totally evil villain. Trueman Rock is one of Grey's deadliest gunmen. Thiry Preston is a very appealing heroine. Gage Preston reaps what he sows and is forced to leave the country. Sol Winter serves as a catalyst.

Dr. Carlton Jackson, ZANE GREY: Revised Edition, Published by Twayne's United States Authors Series Edited by Kenneth Eble, University of Oklahoma, 1989
(ISBN 0-8057-7543-9)

Reference (46)

(46) *Sunset Pass* (1931), set in New Mexico...presents additional discussions of the loner. In *Sunset Pass* Trueman Rock seeks to bring a rustling family to justice. Rock's chief dilemma is that he falls in love with the culprit's daughter. As in so many other of Grey's novels, the hero not only wins the hand of the maiden but reforms through love and example the erring parents.