

RANCH MYSTERY

A Story For Children

By Paula Norton

It begins to look as though Beth, who is visiting her Uncle and Aunt and their two boys, on a Western ranch, has at last hit upon the identity of the man who is leading the raids on the ranch. Mort Russell lost a rosel from one of his spurs and Beth found it in the pasture where Uncle Walter now has drillers trying to find water. Mort came out to the ranch, which he claimed he had not seen for several months, and offered to buy the place for spot cash. Uncle Walter was tempted to sell, but Beth told about the spur and the obvious fact that Mort had paid a secret visit to the place. He must have some very good reason for wishing to buy the land. Uncle Walter postponed the sale until he'd had time to think it over.

Chapter 11.

THE DAY after Mort Russell made his offer to buy the ranch, Claude, the rural postman, hitched his horse to the post of the mail box and ambled out to the pasture.

Since he had a letter to deliver, he had an excellent excuse to see



how the drilling was progressing. The family, even Aunt Mary, was gathered in a little group around the drillers. Uncle Walter looked more downhearted than ever. Beth clearly read in his face the conviction that he should have taken up Mort's offer.

Tim and Ron had been unable to find an explanation, in the school dictionary, for the initials on the stranger's suitcase. Yet Beth still thought about them and wished with all her heart that she had been able to solve that little part of her suspicions.

"Hello, Claude," she called as she saw the awkward figure ambulating toward them.

"How does the well-drilling go, Walter?" the postman asked. "Any signs of water, yet?"

Uncle Walter looked around. "No signs yet, Claude, and we're down pretty far."

There was an air of dejection about the whole family as they stood staring at the drill and the dry earth around it.

"Well, I wouldn't give up. Oh, gosh, I near forgot. Here's a note for you," and Claude handed an envelope to the rancher. "Mort Russell asked me to bring it out."

EVERYONE looked up with a new interest. Uncle Walter tore open the envelope and read the note carefully. He looked up at the curious eyes upon him.

"It's another offer from Mort. He says this is my last chance to sell."

Before anyone else could speak, Claude burst forth. "Say, you ain't aimin' to sell to Mort Russell, are you?"

"Maybe. Why?"

"Well, doggone, Claude was wide-eyed and earnest. 'It ain't any of my business, but I'd sure look into a deal with Mort before I did sell. Mort Russell don't buy nothin' unless it's goin' to bring in plenty of easy money to him.'"

"That's about the way Beth and Mama and the boys feel, Claude. But me . . . well, I don't know. He made me a good offer."

"Has he looked your land over?" Claude asked. He was in his element now, having a part in someone else's life and affairs.

"Well, no, not exactly."

"Do you mean to say he's buyin' it sight unseen?" asked Claude.

Beth felt an urge to tell Claude what they all, at least she and the boys, suspected.

"Claude, I think he's been on this land when none of us knew about it. Remember the rowel I showed you the day we went to town? Well, that's Mort Russell's rowel, Claude. I found it here in the pasture."

"Well, I'll be a howling coyote." And the lanky mail-carrier slapped his thigh in amazement. "I don't know just why, but I always

had a sneakin' feelin' that Mort had somethin' to do with the raids you've had out here, and now I know it."

"Sleuthing Claude, eh?" grinned Ron. "Well, he's always asking questions about this place lately, and twice I saw him outside Dobbie's Saloon talkin' to Juan, that Mex you run off. And Mort ain't got no business with Juan except crooked business."

SILENTLY the family turned back to the drill once more. They all felt the hopelessness in each other. Monotonously the drill went on . . . and on.

The sun crept up the sky. It beat hot upon their heads. Aunt Mary knew it was lunch time, and she looked at her husband. His worried face moved her to put her work-worn hand on his arm.

"I'll go get lunch, Pa," she said. He nodded.

The drilling held everyone's attention. It seemed all-important to all of them. Then suddenly one of the drillers leaned down to the earth as if he were listening. Everyone strained toward him.



The tense expression on his face was mirrored in their own. The man's hands felt of the gravel that suddenly bubbled from the drill.

"Sir, I think you've got water," the man said as casually as that. Ron jumped into the air and shouted. Aunt Mary turned back and hurried to the group.

"What is it, Pa? Have they reached water?" she shouted. Beth grabbed Tim by the arm and held her breath.

THEN like the hissing of a valve, the strangest of noises steamed up from around the drill. Everyone stood looking puzzled and frozen in their tracks.

"Listen, what is that noise?" shouted Uncle Walter. "Water don't come up like that! It sounds like gas!"

The men at the drill stepped back. The children stumbled aside. Everyone shouted, "What is it? What is it?" No one could answer, and the drillers only looked as amazed as the rancher himself.

The gas-like hissing grew louder and louder . . . and instinctively the group moved back as from the hissing wick of a cannon. All eyes were on the bubbling hole. All ears noted the noise growing louder and louder until with a roar and a rush a great black stream of muddy liquid sprang into the air . . . a geyser . . . a black geyser of sand and . . .

"Oh! Good heaven, man, it's OIL!" shouted both drillers. And oil it was. It shot higher and higher into the heat-laden air. It covered the fence, and the people who were too dazed to move away. It splattered their up-turned faces and deluged their clothes. It fell in sandy splotches into Ron's wide open eyes and open mouth. He coughed and sputtered and choked. Then, and only then, did the little family grab and clutch at each other and exclaim and shout. No one listened to anyone else. Aunt Mary ran to her husband and throwing her arms around him shouted, above the noise, "What does it mean, Pa? What DOES it mean?"

"Honey, it means we ain't sellin' this ranch . . . not by a jugful!"

The boys and Beth yelled like young Indians. Claude had stayed long enough to witness the miracle.

"Walter," he shouted above the roar. "Here's a dang good reason why Mort Russell wanted your land. But how did he know about this stuff bein' here?"

Beth came to her senses with a start at the mention of Mort Russell. Without a word she grabbed Tim by the arm and dragged him toward the ranch house.

"What's the big idea," yelled Tim. "I wanna stay and watch."

"The idea is . . . have you an almanac at the house? I have an idea the initials on that stranger's handbag may be in the almanac. Besides . . . you'd better ride to town as fast as you can and get somebody that knows about oil wells to come out here . . . quick!"

(Concluded next week)

Yesterdays * * * * * By Frank King



THE CONTACT CLUB

By DON ROBERTS

WELL, fellows, let's talk about long-distance flying and flights today, just by way of bringing up some interesting facts.

European airlines, you know, have some long stretches to cover to reach their far-flung possessions. There's a British service to Cape Town in Africa, from London; to India, also, Holland has a service to Java and Borneo, and so on. The story of the first attempts to establish an airway through Africa is a pretty interesting one, and it gives a good idea of the sort of going the early birds had to face.

Just a short while after the armistice was signed in November, 1918, surveying parties went into Africa to lay out a chain of landing fields. A year later, 23 airports and 19 emergency landing fields were completed, covering 5206 miles, from Cairo, Egypt, to Cape Town. If you'll get out the map of Africa, you'll see that there was SOME job cutting through that wild jungle.

An experimental flight was organized in England at once and a Vickers-Vimy two-motored biplane was obtained. This was the same type ship, you see, which first flew the Atlantic non-stop—a converted bomber powered by a pair of 350-horsepower Rolls-Royce motors.

FIVE men—a scientist, two pilots, a mechanic and a rigger—left Brooklands (England) January 24, 1920, but the real start of the trip was made February 6 from Heliopolis, for there was nothing ahead at that point but pioneering and jungle.

Well, trouble popped up right off. Heat started it all. Because the motors were water cooled, they began to spring leaks in the cooling system. The ship was following the Nile and reached Luxor, still in Egypt, when the first leak showed up.

Two more leaks in the next two days made forced landings necessary, and still the party wasn't even well into Africa. And a day later, passing over a region of craters of volcanic origin, a motor "froze" tight from overheating due to a leak, but the pilot set it down safely along the Nile.

February 9 the ship was serviced again, and on the 10th took off for Mongalla, on the upper reaches of the White Nile. In two hours the party reached Jebelain, where fuel was obtained and ANOTHER leak was stopped. Off at 11 a. m., they landed in a dry swamp with a bum magneto, in two hours. Next day they returned to Jebelain for three days of repairing.

SO IT went. With the water jackets springing leaks all over the place and the heat so intense it nearly blistered the face of anyone foolish enough to poke

LEAP YEAR EVERY YEAR

AMERICA'S Leap Year is 1936, but an ancient medieval custom of French Provencal girls allows them to "pop the question" whenever they like. The young lady bakes a Provencal cake called a "fougasse." She places it—with a jar of wine—outside her home. When her sweetheart arrives, he eats the cake, drinks the wine, and leaves a silken scarf beside the wine jug . . . which means, "Will you marry me?" The following Sunday she answers simply by wearing the scarf to church . . . and soon the wedding bells ring out. Old customs are often best!

SINKING VALLEY

SINCE 1915 the fertile Santa Clara valley south of the lower end of San Francisco Bay, has sunk more than five feet. Geological studies show that it sinks about one foot every four years. Dr. C. F. Tolman, of Stanford university, is trying to discover whether or not it is a "floating valley" riding on a large body of underground water. If so, a water conservation program will be undertaken to "refloat" this rich district.

AFRICAN TOLL BRIDGES

Swollen rivers along Congo caravan routes can hold up an entire party for days. At these points shrewd natives have constructed great vine bridges, strung across a river torrent with rattans, creepers and vines. Over these fairly safe bridges pass the caravans, careful not to tumble into the stream below. At the end of the vine bridge are camped the bridge makers, to exact nominal toll. The longer the bridge, the higher the tax.

his head out of the cabin, the party started on a 538-mile hop. They had rigged up a pumping arrangement to replenish water in the leaking jackets, but even that ran out and presently they were down in another hunk of jungle.

They had to fly the ship over to a spot where there was some water, and that night, while a native was hiking for gasoline, the men slept (or tried to) on the wings of the ship—dodging crocodiles! Next day they flew the few miles to Mongalla and spent five days fixing up the damage.

BY FEBRUARY 27, the expedition had reached (with three or so forced landings) Tabora, in Tanganyika territory—more than half way through their long trip. But here the toughest luck of all hit them. A motor quit shortly after the takeoff and the Vickers sat down in brush among great ant-hills, busting things up so badly that the ship couldn't be flown any more.

The fuselage of that ship, so they say, is still at Tabora, serving as a pavilion for a club.

Later, a ship with a radial motor spanned the whole African continent and returned without engine trouble—proof that water-cooled motors just didn't belong in darkest Africa.

INCA RUINS

VISITORS to Peru are taking deep interest in the still magnificent remains of huge Inca buildings, which are continually being excavated. Sharp zig-zag fortress walls surround each ruin—made of great boulders weighing as much as 150 tons each. How these were raised into place is unknown. Each rock is perfectly fitted, and no mortar is used. Spanish conquerors called these palaces the "ninth wonder of the world."

The Incas had no written language, and the story of the past must be learned from the study of ruins and legends left by the Spanish invaders.



AMERICA GROWS

NOW that we have the Quakers settling into the picture of the new America, let's take a peep-shew squint at the other colonies.

Spain, France and England were pretty conscious by now of the possible importance of hanging on to the lands in America that were theirs by right of discovery. But, they must populate these lands in order to claim them for themselves alone.

Then the real squabbling began. Spain stood up and shouted that she owned all of North America and part of South America. No one was particularly impressed with Spain's declarations, and she had to give in to the claims of the English and the French.

(Now you get out your map of North America and play "See the Lands Claimed by Europe.") The English said, "All the land from Kennebec to the Savannah belongs to us."

Spain said, "In the south, everything as far north as the Savannah is mine."

France claimed the great stretches of land north of the English line.

This was the beginning of the colonies. It is easy to see how disputes, quarrels and border trouble brewed.

The lands claimed by France were often claimed by England, too, and as a result of this difference of opinion these two nations were constantly at each other's throat.

New England grew and prospered and reached out for more territory; so the French and their Indian pals ground their teeth in rage and envy.

Disputes then arose in the colonies themselves. The people argued heatedly with their new governors, and the governors were ordered around by their royal bosses in Europe.

The people in the colonies said to their governors, "You give us more privileges or we won't pay

Over the Captain's Coffee Cup

Travel Tales from Everywhere

By Whit Wellman

ROMANCE of the sea is as endless as the pounding surf on the blue and red rocks of Point Lobos, near Carmel . . . or the small creeping waves of Monterey Bay. Stories of ships go back beyond recorded history . . . legends of sailors who explored the unknown, frightening seas before the voyages of Marco Polo, and came home with tales of marvels and strange countries.

THE FIRST SHIPS

probably went to sea among the islands of the western Pacific, rather than in the Mediterranean, as was lately supposed. (Some say they were Celestial junkies of the south China coast, but we hold with the Pacific theory.)

There's a good reason. Look at a map of the Pacific, see how a great part of what was a continent ages ago must have been flooded. Only a few isolated high spots remained. Sumatra, New Guinea, Australia, Java . . . Borneo.

No one is sure where the inhabitants came from, but they didn't swim. How they came is perhaps the story of the earliest "ocean-going" boat. Some genius among these seamen had an inventive turn of mind, and created one of the simplest and most practical improvements the world ever knew. It made travel of hundreds and thousands of miles possible. He attached a strip of wood running parallel to his canoe—and sailed to sea in the first "outrigger" canoe. It was almost unsinkable.

POLYNESIANS

still go out to sea in these picturesque boats, and in the even steadier double canoe—two large canoes fastened together by a raft-like structure in the center. But these are passing from the Pacific. White men have come with steam, canned salmon . . . a thousand pleasant and lazy modernisms which make primitive effort unnecessary. One day museums will display "outriggers" as a special attraction, and the first ships known to man will be relics of the past. Whalers, missionaries, adventurous pearl-divers went south, and within a few short years the culture of the Polynesian world began to die.

WHALES ARE ANCIENT

creatures, and tales about them almost as old. There's the yarn of the Florida Indians, who leaped upon a whale's back and plugged up one nostril with a wooden peg. They went to the bottom with him, and when he rose again, they calmly (if somewhat out of breath) plugged the other nostril—which stopped

the show, and was the finish of Mr. Whale.

A clever method is still used by the Eskimos, who are a lazy race of whalers, and make the job easy. A fleet of kayaks surrounds a whale, and the natives proceed to toss harpoons into the monster. The trick of it is that huge bladders of sealskin are attached to the harpoons, and these balloons prevent the animal from sounding—being slaughtered at leisure.

A REAL OLD-TIMER

is Thomas Tansley, master of sailing ships, who drops us a line occasionally. "I've had some wonderful experiences in following the old wind-jammers to their extinction," he writes. "When I first went to sea there were one hundred sailing vessels to one steamer. When I quit there were just a few left, mostly in the Alaska fishing—and I've stored in my memory some happenings which shiver me when I look back, others laughable. But my love of the old sea songs feels more enjoyable to me than some of this crazy jazz they dish out today."

CAPT. LAWRENCE ABER

is one of the Northwest's interesting men. Writer, lecturer (author of "The Islander") he sailed among the islands for 15 years as mate and master of trading schooners. During the war he served in the Navy, and was torpedoed three times. He commanded one of the Navy mystery ships, and was aboard the *Hampshire* when she went down with Lord Kitchener in the North Sea. After the war he went back again to the islands of the west Pacific, where he found "more beach-combers in the islands since the war than ever before. Every trading schooner is having trouble with them. For more than five years I kept picking them up in Borneo and Sulu, and carried them to Manila where they could get transportation home through officials. Among them . . . a large number of American girls. Possibly 90 per cent of these tropical tramps are American citizens."

COLD CAN KILL

not only tropical fish . . . but shoals of mullet as well, according to the log of Captain L. W. Long, commander of the *Haiti* which sails between Caribbean ports. A white mass 20 miles long was sighted off the coast of South America. It turned out to be a vast shoal of dead mullet. For mile after mile the ship sailed through tightly massed corpses as thick as the sea weed of the Sargasso Sea. A few were brought up in buckets and examined by the ship's surgeon. They had died, apparently, from the change in temperature when they left the Gulf stream. But no record of a similar occurrence in that part of the ocean is known.

THE NORTH POLE

was discovered by Admiral Peary . . . or by Dr. Cook, but who will decide? A white-haired man of 70, Dr. Cook is again asking for recognition . . . for a "full and impartial investigation" of his story by the American Geographical Society. The Royal Geographical Society of Denmark gave Dr. Cook medals and honors . . . the American Society examined Peary's evidence that he had reached the pole . . . but did not go into Dr. Cook's reports.

Dr. Cook is tired of being the "forgotten man" of Arctic exploration, and wants something done about it. But . . . time and public interest wait for no man. His claims (whether true or false) were news a generation ago, but no one cares much today which of the fur-clad adventurers first stood on top of the world.

DO YOU KNOW

adventure yarns, old sea songs . . . something you'd like to see in this column? Send them to The Captain, Five Star Weekly, 450 Mills Tower, San Francisco, California.

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