

LOVE ON THE RANGE

BY NELSON C. HITE

The Story So Far

Trouble is brewing on the Rafter T. Quick-fire "Blar" Ankrum, under the name of Abe Streeter, takes a job on the ranch to help locate Lee Trone. He has a run-in with the range boss, Mose Hackett, and meets Ratchford, the sheriff, and Claydell, a neighboring rancher. Colonel Struthers and his daughter Betty arrive for a visit, and Ankrum recognizes Struthers as Kelton Drea, cousin of the man he killed to avenge his father's death.

Chapter 11 Licking Flame

ANKROM threw away his cigarette and yawned. "You boys goin' to the dance in Paso Pinto?" "Might—if they hev good likker."

His pardner grunted. "I don't like that town. Too crowdy an' fight ever' time I get within gunshot of the place!"

Ratchford's lips moved faintly, sardonically, in the gloom. One of the punchers said, "Either of you two gentis wants sit on a game of stud?"

Ankrum shook his head. Ratchford said, "Not me, fella. I've played cards with you before."

The two men got up and tramped inside. A moment later Ankrum heard the scraping of a match. A flicker of light came through the window; grew steady, and brightened. He heard the men dragging chairs and, a little later, the flap of cards.

"Funny Trone never wired any of these buildings but the ranch-house an' stable."

"Yeah. Where does he get his juice?" Ankrum asked.

"He sent to El Paso for a generator an' some other doo-hickies couple years back. Said he might's well keep up to date. I reckon it was Lee put the idea in his head."

He'd just about cut his neck off for that girl an' she for him," Ratchford sighed. "They're pretty close them two."

"Seen Trone yet?"

"No," the sheriff answered. "Reckon it's about time I sauntered over to the house an' had my talk. I been hearin' them friends of his would drift off to ped. I'd prefer to see the Ol' Man alone."

"You'll have a long wait if you're waitin' for them to go to bed. City folks sit up all night. They go to bed with the owls," Ankrum said. "Do you think there's anythin' in this rustlin' talk?"

Ratchford fingered his chin. "Don't seem to be any other outfit losin' critters. They might be keepin' it to themselves, of course. Again, there might really be some stealin' goin' on. The only gent that's gettin' hit. With a grunt he rose to his feet, peered down at Ankrum. "You heard what that puncher said."

The sound of voices came to Ankrum from the card players. Now that Ratchford was radiating from the lamp illumined his face. Weariness was written there; in the creases of the jowls. In the maze of criss-crossed lines about the eyes, there was melancholy, brooding. "You see, it all ties up with that damn gal that's going round 'bout me bein' out to break the Rafter T."

"Well, there would seem to be some substance for the rumor," Ankrum murmured gently.

The sheriff stiffened. "Yeah—that's why I'd like to get my hands around the neck of the gent that's buckin' it. Because my ol' man an' Trone burnt gunpowder years ago folks are willin' to swallow any kind of hog-wash that tends to picture me lookin' for revenge. Damn 'em! I believe in lettin' sleepin' dogs sleep!"

Sense Of Evil

ANKROM watched the sheriff strike out across the yard to where lights revealed the uncurtained windows of the ranch-house. As he watched Ratchford's broad back, sharp and black against those lights, conflicting thoughts struggled to adjust themselves upon his mind.

There was much about this sheriff he did not understand, he told himself. A vital, magnetic figure, there was yet something about him, some latent force, some indefinable sense of evil, that made a man hesitate to trust him far or to put faith in his words.

Just why this was, Ankrum could not say. But the feeling lingered. He could not shake it. Some way, big and magnetic as he was, Tom Ratchford measured short in Ankrum's estimation.

He wondered if Ratchford had been trying to talk him into something; if Ratchford had been hoping Bandera's name had hoped to take him by surprise. How much did this sheriff suspect? How much did he know? Did he really connect Abe Streeter with the Arizona smokeroo, Blar Ankrum? Or was he—

"Shucks," Ankrum muttered. "Looks like I'm tryin' to develop a case of nerves."

Then he chuckled softly as he recalled the sheriff's statement that Bandera was lined up against the Trones. That would mean that Bandera either was in the country

now or would shortly be coming in. It had been well over a year since his and Bandera's trails had crossed. In old Nogales it had happened. He remembered the circumstances well. He had taken malicious pleasure that night in upsetting a little deal the Mexican had been striving to bring off. An amusing case of "biter-bit" he'd made it, leaving Bandera seething with fury, swearing revenge by every saint in the calendar.

With another chuckle Ankrum rose to his feet, lunched against the shadowed wall while he fished the makings from his pocket and rolled a cigarette. He would have a final smoke, and then go hunt his bunk. His left hand rolled the quirely while his right sought the band about his hat, procured a match and struck it. The bursting flame illumined his face and brought out the sharp angles of it.

Even as the match burst into flame, another flame licked out from the shadows beneath an ancient pepper tree thirty yards away. The cigarette ripped from Ankrum's mouth, so close had been the miss. A report smashed loudly on the stillness, flattened out across the yard, beat up against the buildings. And on his heels another, even as Ankrum whirled, his hand streaking to the waistband of his trousers. A blur of motion stirred the shadows beneath the foliage; something dropped heavily in the dust.

With gun held ready in his hand Ankrum sprinted forward. He jerked to a stop before the tree as a vague white figure snapped up from the ground to confront him. It was the figure of a girl.

Tuck Out Of This!

"WHO—who are you?" "Abe Streeter, ma'am. Was that you doing that shootin'?" "No—yes! No! No, of course not!"

Despite the agitation in her voice Ankrum realized that this was not Lee Trone. Therefore, he reasoned it must be the golden-haired creature posing as Betty Struthers. What was she doing here? What was that thing in her hand? Ankrum leaned closer and saw that it was a pistol; he saw also that with her other hand the girl was pressing something to her breast—something that looked like folded papers.

"What are you doing here?" he whispered. "What have you got in your hands?" "She drew back. The hand with the papers disappeared inside the neckline of her dress and came out empty. Ankrum heard the sound of running footsteps. People would soon be upon them, hurling questions."

"Duck out of this," he said. "I'll see you later."

She peered at him strangely. Then suddenly she turned and ran.

A man came pounding up, grabbed Ankrum by the arm. "What's goin' on?" he growled. "What was all that shootin'?" Before Ankrum could answer, the man turned his head, belloved across his shoulder a lantern, somebody! We got to have a light here!"

Ankrum saw one of the running figures whirl and retrace its steps. The others came on and grouped themselves about Ankrum and the burly man who held him. A hand felt down his wrist and closed upon the barrel of his gun. "I'll take this," the heavy voice said. Ankrum, recognizing now the sheriff in the man who held him, relinquished his weapon.

"Speak up, you. Let's hear your name."

Ankrum said, "Abe Streeter."

He felt the sheriff's grip relax. "Oh—well, who in hell was you shootin' at?"

"I wasn't. Somebody else was doing that shootin', Ratchford."

Ratchford showed impatience. "Is the fellow's name a secret?"

"Reckon so—leastways, he didn't leave me any card."

"Where was you standin'?"

"By the bunkhouse," Ankrum said. "I was lightin' a cigarette. That shoe came along an' nicked it right out of my mouth."

"Kinda close, eh?"

"Well, I don't know. The fellow might have been aimin' to have some fun with me. I mean he might have done it on purpose."

"Ain't no one round here could shoot that good," Ratchford grunted. "Excepting maybe—Claydell. An' Claydell, he ain't got here yet. Prob'ly changed his mind an' decide'd to postpone his visit till tomorrow," he cleared his throat. "This where you figured them shots come from?"

"One, anyway. First, I think, I ain't sure about the second. When that cigarette went skally-hootin' I whirled an' saw a blur among the shadows here under this tree an' came pelting over. Had a hand chance to make out anything when up comes you an' these others."

A bobbing light showed Ankrum a man running toward them with a lantern. Ratchford took the lantern from him and held it high above his head. In the sand a short three feet away a shape lay motionless.

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Ratchford swings into action, tomorrow.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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Rug Maker
Women of New England are noted for their thrift, and Mrs. Mary Corson 86, of Rochester, New Hampshire, is no exception from discarded clothing she has supplied her home with attractive and durable rugs since 1877.

Not once during the past 61 years has Mrs. Corson spent money for a store rug; yet her 11-room home is amply carpeted. Her floors are covered with 92 rugs of various shapes and sizes. Some are hooked rugs of conventional design; others are braided, ranging from small mats to six feet across. During her lifetime she has made over 200 rugs.

Edvard Benes
Instrumental in securing the independence of Czechoslovakia after the World War was Edvard Benes, now president of that republic. Strange as it seems, President Benes, during the course of his political career, falsified his name seven different times to gain entry into foreign countries in the interests of Czechoslovakia.

His forged passports carried the names Spolny, Belsky, Berger, Novotny, Konog, Sicha, and Leblanc. In England he was arrested for forging his papers, but, strange as it seems, six months later one of his official duties in the new Czechoslovakian government was the signing of official passports for his country!

BONES OF MONSTER ARE BEING MOUNTED
WASHINGTON.—(AP)—Over at Smithsonian Institution, the scientists are working out their largest jig-saw puzzle.

They are piecing together the fossilized bones of a titanosaur discovered last summer in Utah by Dr. Charles W. Gilmore, curator of vertebrate paleontology.

This little fellow was more than one-half block long (170 feet), he probably weighed between 15 and 20 tons, and stood 15 feet above the ground. He ate only plants.

MOVIES GET MOST OF VILLAGE DIMES
WASHINGTON.—(AP)—Movies draw more family dimes in U. S. villages and small towns than any other form of amusement.

The U. S. bureau of home economics finds that non-relief families spend 30 cents out of every amusement dollar for moving picture shows in typical villages throughout the country. In the southeast it's even higher—36 cents out of the dollar.

Leaves Out Knots
CLEMSON COLLEGE, S. C.—(AP)—It takes no longer to grow a pine tree free of knots in its trunk than it does one filled with knotholes. Therefore, D. R. Brewster, extension forester, is advising timbermen to prune their pine trees and produce clear lumber which sells for about twice as much as the knotty kind.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—Col. Hall Acts Confused!



BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER

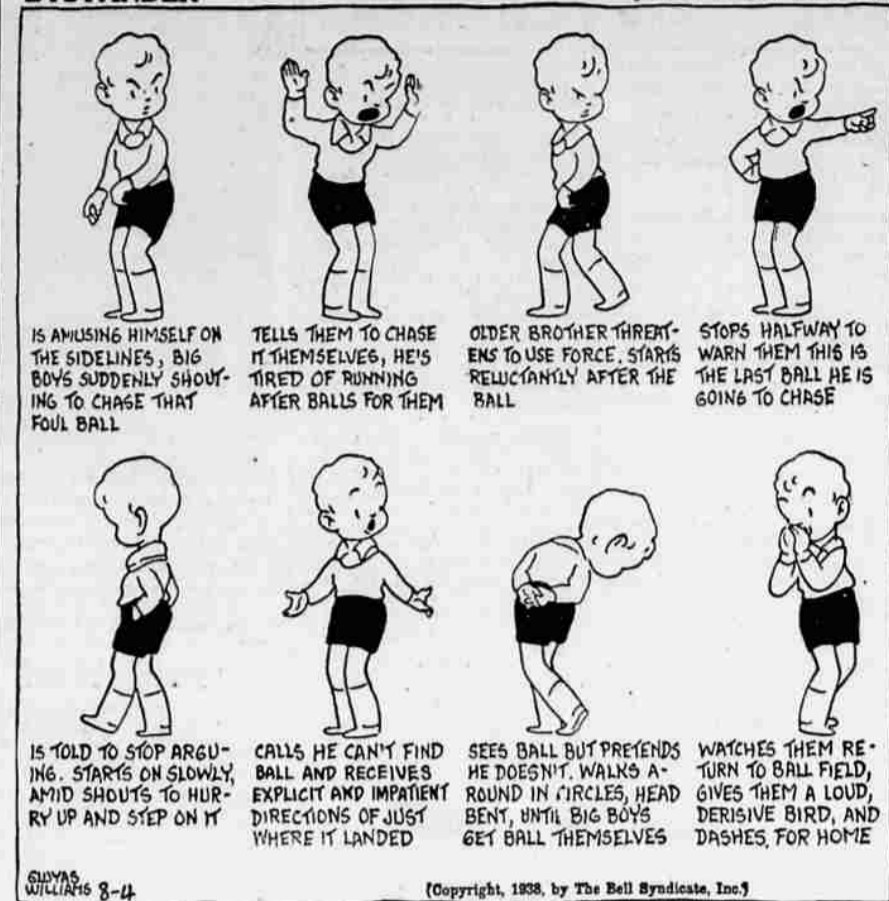


THE NEBBS—What Now?



BYSTANDER

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



3 MATTER POE By C. M. PAYNE



By HAL FORRESTER



By EDWIN ALGER



By SOL HESS



EXCUSE FOR LATENESS IS FINALLY REMOVED

BUTTE, Mont.—(AP)—A year ago, when a street clock disappeared mysteriously from in front of a business establishment where it had stood for years, Clock Watchers, Inc., organized and the members announced they were campaigning for a new clock to replace the missing one.

For a year they carried on their campaign. They threatened almost daily to the merchant that unless the clock was replaced "steps will be taken."

The Clock Watchers finally won their point.

"Which means the Clock Watchers will be minus a worn-out excuse for being late for work," said the merchant.

MORE CHILDREN URGED FOR FRENCH MOTHERS

WASHINGTON.—(AP)—France is doing something about her missing population.

The American commercial attaché in Paris reports that the French are using a system of family allotments to encourage larger families.

Under the system, a family's income is increased by specific amounts according to the number of children supported. A recent survey showing that births declined in France by 210,000 between 1930 and 1937 has led to an increase in allotments during last year by more than 8 percent.

Jews in Germany may not employ in domestic service Gentile females under the age of 45.