

LOVE ON THE RANGE

BY NELSON C. NEE

The Story So Far

Someone is out to bust the Rafter T ranch. Under the name of Abe Streeter, quick-fire "Blitz" Ankrom takes a job there to help lovely Lee Trone. Ankrom immediately dislikes Ratchford, the sheriff, and when Colonel Struthers and his daughter Betty arrive for a visit, he recognizes Struthers as an impaler, Kelton Dream, Claydell, a neighboring rancher, is expected for a conference at the Trones. A shot is fired at Ankrom in the dark. Another shot rings out, and a body falls.

Chapter 12

The Dude Is Dead

"GOOD LORD!" choked a voice—a girl's voice. "It's Colonel Struthers!"

It was Ankrom had known it instantly. "Hold this lantern, somebody," Ratchford growled, and thrust it into Ankrom's hands. The sheriff then dropped to his knees beside Kelton Dream's form. When Ratchford got to his feet, his eyes met Ankrom's squarely.

"Pretty quick," he said, "we're all going to saunter over to the house and go inside and stay there until daylight. Meantime, I don't want to catch anyone trampin' round over by that bunkhouse. This Struthers dude is dead."

A heavy sigh reached Ankrom's ears. It came from a man beside him. Looking up Ankrom saw that the man was Trone. The rancher's face looked haggard; his hands were clamped to his chest about his belt that their knuckles stood out like lumps of chalk.

Then Ankrom saw Lee Trone. Betty stood beside her. Lee's face he thought a trifle pale but her eyes were bright with interest—a little horror was in them, too. Betty's eyes were like burnt holes in a white counterpane; just now the rouge upon her cheeks gave her face a ghastly appearance.

"Daddy—Daddy, it's Daddy!" There were tears and laughter in her voice, and the laugh ran thin with hysteria. She waved and Ankrom sprang to catch her; he scooped her up in his arms and strode angrily toward the house. Behind him came Ratchford's voice: "Trone, you an' the others better go along, too. I'll be with you in a minute."

Lengthening his step to hold his lead, Ankrom grunted fiercely. "You little fool!"

They were close to the ranch-house now and light from the unshaded windows showed Betty's eyes come swiftly open. "Don't scold me—please. I had to see you. I've got to talk with you alone right away—"

"We'll get no chance now," Ankrom cut in gruffly. "That sheriff's nobody's damn clown. He'll make sure this wasn't no bluff by sending them others with us. What did you want to talk to me about?"

She got a hand inside her dress. When it came out it held a gun. As Ankrom carried her into the house and laid her on a sofa, she held the gun out to him anxiously. "Quick—take it! You'll have to get rid of it for me. I—"

"Did you shoot Dream?"

"I had to. He wouldn't have missed you the second time." Her eyes grew large again, filled with apprehension. "Quick—put it out of sight! The others are coming!"

They were Ankrom heard their steps upon the veranda. Hastily he thrust the weapon—a short-barreled .32—out of sight beneath his coat. And none too soon.

"In This Room"

LEE TRONE came into the room, her father and the others behind her. Ankrom lifted a hand to push back his hat and found his forehead moist. "Gosh," he said. "She keeled right over, didn't she?"

Lee looked oddly at the girl with the closed eyes who lay so limply on the sofa. "I'll get some water," she said.

"Poor kid," Old Man Trone heaved a sigh. "Pretty tough on her, havin' her father shot down like that." The two punchers stood behind him, looking on with interest, hats in hand, mouths open. Ankrom saw that Trone's glance, resting upon him, held a gleam of something he could not define. Clearing his throat, Trone said: "Did I understand you to tell the sheriff someone took a shot at you, Streeter?"

"Someone shot a cigarette out of my mouth, yeah."

"Pretty good shooting for night work, don't you think?"

"Depends. I was lightin' the cigarette. I'd say I made a pretty fair target."

"Do you think the same man fired both shots—the one at you and the one that dived the colonel?"

"Kind of hard to say," Ankrom evaded, and felt relieved when the sheriff came striding into the room. Lee came, too, bringing a towel and water. She passed Ankrom without a look and, bending above the sofa, began bathing Betty's forehead. "She looks awfully white," Lee said.

Ratchford flung the girl a disinterested glance, cleared his

throat and looked at Trone. "Sit down, boys," he growled, the words smacking more of a command than of an invitation. "We'll be here quite some spell 'n' I reckon we might as well be comfortable. Be at least four hours till daylight an' I make it nearer five." For a moment it seemed to Ankrom that Trone was about to explode. Veins swelled in his neck and forehead before he got himself in hand. Then he said vibrantly: "It's been a long time since a Rafter T gave an order on the Rafter T. 'Stead o' making your authority felt you'd be doing more good if you went after that killer!"

"My ol' man didn't bring me up to trail skunks in the dark," Ratchford's lazy drawl chuckled back. His eyes were on the old man. "Besides, I ain't at all sure it'll be wastin' time if we sit around here for a spell."

Lee Trone looked up from the sofa. "What do you mean?"

"To my notion the killer of that Struthers dude is in this room," he said, and his lips tightened up fearfully.

A startled light flashed into Trone's eyes that made Ankrom wonder. He saw the rancher's body brace itself as for a blow. Trone's voice was a bit unsteady, his cheeks looked a little gray. "In this room," he said mechanically. "In this room?"

"Yeah—," the sheriff's lips drooped; "right now!"

Antagonism

IN the silence following Ratchford's portentous words someone's breath came raspingly. To Ankrom the temperature seemed to have dropped visibly in the last half second. This cold silence cocked his muscles, set his teeth on edge. The air seemed to be tightening up, strangling these people who stood about like so many carved statues. Across the silliness stole the low, vibrant purring of an automobile motor. Louder and louder it grew, then suddenly ceased in the yard outside to the squeal of brakes. Grave crunching, boot-heels thudded across the veranda and a man stepped through the open door.

It was Claydell, and his smiling lips grew stiff as his eyes took in the scene before him. His glance darted to the sheriff.

"What's wrong, Ratchford?"

"There was antagonism in the sheriff's eyes," Claydell said. "He got in the way of a blue whistler," he said softly. "Claydell, let's see your gun."

A flush snapped into the bronze of Claydell's cheeks. "Ratchford," he said, "you have a nasty mind—one of the nastiest it has ever been my misfortune to encounter. Just what's the reason for that demand?"

"A man's been murdered here an' I'm in the process of checking up," Ratchford's words were measured. "Murder is a nasty thing, Claydell, an' it won't surprise me if it takes a nasty mind to solve it. Let's see that gun."

"Why, you damned fool—I wasn't!"

"Can you prove it?"

Ankrom saw that Claydell's lips were about to frame a sharp retort, then abruptly clamped down tight. "This man," Ankrom thought, "is more dangerous than Ratchford. He's a gent that knows when to talk an' when to keep his mouth shut." He looked at the rancher more carefully. He looked at Trone, too, and for the first time realized that Lee's father had been drinking. There was that bleary look about the eyes and the hand that Trone had propped against the wall was shaking.

Ankrom glanced toward the sofa and saw that Betty was sitting up; that Lee was eyeing the sheriff with hostility. He looked again at Ratchford; Ratchford's eyes were on Claydell.

"Can you prove you wasn't here?"

"I'm not so sure that I can," Claydell said. "I've been driving for several hours. I've been to El Paso since I saw you this afternoon—"

Ratchford cut in. "Can you prove that? Who did you talk with?"

"None of your damned business," Claydell tossed the words out coldly.

"I'll take that gun then, mister. You can have it back when I get the murderer."

Claydell reached inside his coat and took from some place a .38 Police Positive. He held it out toward Ratchford. Ratchford grinned with mockery. "You can put it on the floor, brother. I wasn't born yesterday."

If Claydell felt resentful he hid it well. Ankrom watched him bend forward and lay the gun before the sheriff's booted feet. Ratchford shoved the weapon under the table with the toe of his boot. "I'll look it over later," he said.

"So Struthers has been killed and you don't know who killed him, eh?" Claydell spoke.

"When you came in I had just finished saying that it was my notion that Struthers' killer was in this room. I still think so. Your comin' ain't changed my mind a bit."

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The net tightens around Ankrom, tomorrow.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

For further proof address the author, inclosing a stamped envelope for reply. Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.



Escaped Snakes
Second largest rattlesnake in North America and most deadly in point of number of fatalities resulting from its bite is the Western Diamond-back, known to scientists as *Crotalus atrox*.

The deadly reptile, which grows to a length of six or seven feet, will weigh more than 15 pounds, is common to Texas and northern Mexico, being essentially a "southern" rattler.

Yet, strange as it seems, a colony of Western Diamond-backs was discovered to have made its home far north in the state of Wisconsin, a location widely separated from its natural habitat.

By checking over past records, it was found that in 1920 several snakes of this species had escaped from a traveling circus near Pittsville in Wood County, Wis. These, according to T. E. Pope, curator of reptiles of the Milwaukee public museum, made their home in a ridge of limestone hills in the western part of that state.

The Sugar War
Strange as it seems, the conflict raging between France and England in the early nineteenth century gave France an industry she might not otherwise have had.

At the suggestion of Napoleon, a boycott was placed on cane sugar, then raised primarily in the British-owned India. Scientists were sent to Silesia to learn how to make sugar from beets instead.

Although Napoleon's military fortunes ended hopelessly, he had established a new industry—production of beet sugar—in which France was destined to lead the world.

Glad Show Lures Unexpected Crowd
GRANTS PASSES, Aug. 6.—(AP)—Police help was called for here today to clear the streets surrounding the third annual Grants Pass glassblow show as an unexpectedly large crowd jammed in front of the exhibit building. One girl fainted.

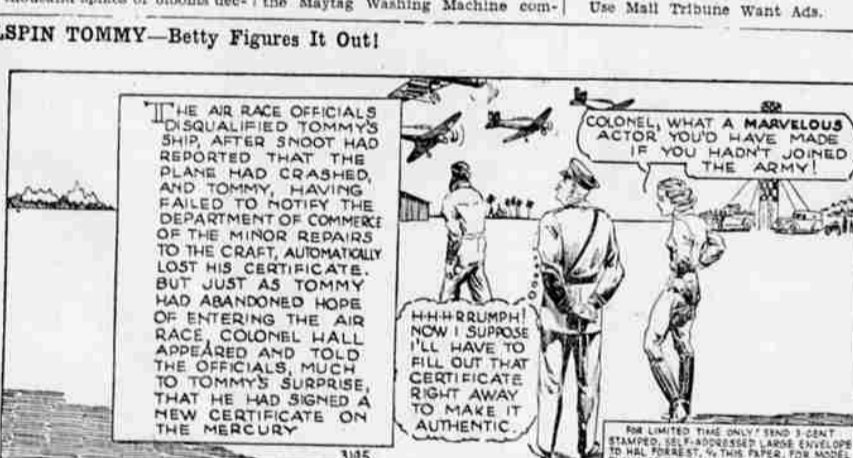
Ten thousand spikes of blooms decorated building, houses and offices while the best of the flowers of southern Oregon were being judged by Ralph J. Fommert, Pacific Wash., Leonard C. Larson, Portland, and L. E. Weeks, Salem.

The exhibit closes tomorrow night.

Maytag Workers Return in Force
NEWTON, Ia., Aug. 6.—(AP)—George Umbreit, vice-president of the Maytag Washing Machine company, said 1400 men, almost a full force, reported for work at the factory today for the first full day of operations under martial law.

Umbreit said the 1400 men included more than 100 foremen. The men entered the plant under the watchful eyes of 60 national guardsmen. Among those returning to work, Umbreit said, was Wilbert Allison, president of the CIO union which yesterday advised its striking members to return to work.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—Betty Figures It Out!



BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Farewell



THE NEBBS—Out of the Mouths of Babies



THE WORLD AT ITS WORST

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



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By HAL FORREST



BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Farewell



THE NEBBS—Out of the Mouths of Babies



Lady Gets Knockout Shock On Opening Stolen Package

TACOMA, Aug. 6.—(AP)—This is the one-syllable story of a very special cat named Alice.

Alice lived a long and happy life with a Tacoma mistress, and when she died she was mourned because of neighborhood objections, the lady had no place near her home to bury Alice. So she put Alice in a shoe box and tied a blue ribbon around it, and Alice was a special cat. Then the lady put the box in her automobile and started across town to a place suitable for the burial of a very nice kitty.

On the way, she stopped her automobile near a department store and did some shopping.

The box with Alice in it was in the back seat of the automobile when the lady started shopping. When she returned, Alice and her box were missing.

The bereaved lady grieved to several bystanders in turn, she inquired: "Has anybody seen my shoe box with a blue ribbon on it?"

Nobody had. The box was stolen.

Just then, out of the department store a clerk rushed.

"Call the ambulance," she called, "somebody just fainted in the ladies' rest room."

The bereaved lady went in. A police officer went in. There on the floor was a shoe box with a blue ribbon near it. There on the floor was Alice. There on the floor, fainting dead away, a young woman who cer-