

# LOVE ON THE RANGE

BY NELSON C. WY

## The Story So Far

Under the name of Abe Streeter, quick-fire Ankrum takes a job on the troubled Rafters ranch to help lonely Lee Trone. Colonel Struthers and his daughter Betty come to visit, and Ankrum recognizes Struthers as an impostor. Kelton Dreen, Dreen shot and Betty slips Ankrum her gun, saying she did it. Ratchford, the burly sheriff, holds them all for questioning, including Claydell, a neighboring rancher. Accidently, Ankrum drops Betty's gun on the floor.

## Chapter 14

### Questions

IN PLAIN sight, blue and cold and grim it lay. The surprise had frozen them all to a rigid tense-ness. Ankrum thought the pounding of his heart must surely shake him.

"Well!" the sheriff drawled at last. "What parlor trick is this, Streeter?"

Ankrum grinned with a mirth-lessness that showed the whiteness of his teeth. "Shucks," he said, "I feel downright ashamed to call that weakin' mine."

"I shouldn't wonder." With heavy irony Ratchford stooped to pick the weapon up. Yet even as his fingers spread to grip it, Ankrum covered the pistol with his foot.

Grimly Ratchford straightened. The head on his thick neck came forward until his heavy features were within ten inches of Ankrum's. Unblinking, the smoking eyes stared balefully.

His words were low, spaced wide apart: "Where did you get that gun?"

Across Ankrum's mind came the vision of the girl from Paso Pinto rising from the crumpled form of Kelton Dreen with one hand holding papers, a pistol in the other. This pistol!

He eyed it warily. Had the spurious Struthers' life been snuffed with this?

He let his glance rest upon the sheriff's. "By your tone," he told him, "a man would figure it was a crime to own more'n one gun in Texas?"

"Never mind airin' your opinions. I want to know where you got this gun."

"I don't know that it's any of your business, Ratchford."

"I'm making it my business." "Boot Hill is filled with fellas that had that habit—"

"Damn you!" Ratchford swore. "You answer my question an' answer it quick or I'll slap the bracelets on you an' take you in for this killin'!"

"What evidence you got that I downed Struthers? Law says you got to have evidence before you can arrest a man for a thing like this."

"Yeah? Well, that law don't cover you. The laws ain't made for driftin' saddle tramps that go round stirrin' up trouble. Talk fella—talk or I'll take your eyes like tempered steel, the lean cheeks drawn taut. Trouble, he told himself, was like his shadow. He could not escape it—wherever he turned his eyes, there lay trouble waiting. To move he had scenes of torture seemed to be his portion. There was no escape—save death.

"Very well, then; he was through trying. He would serve these trouble-bringers what they asked for. He would give them all they wanted from here on out; he would hurl it in their teeth.

As the sheriff's voice stopped Ankrum's right hand shrank into a hard fist. He took a forward stride as the sheriff stepped back a pace and stood. His eyes held Ratchford like a grip; they were pale blue like ice, they were baffling, mocking, hateful. "What was it you wanted, Ratchford?"

"Who hired you?"

CAUTION clouded the sheriff's glance. "I want to know where that gun came from."

"From the waistband of my trousers."

"Where'd you get it?"

As Ankrum was about to make answer, from the tail of his eye he caught a warning gesture. Just a tiny movement of a hand it was; a girl's hand—Lee's! Then she was not completely indifferent to him; the thought crossed his mind like light. Evidently she realized as did he himself, that Ratchford was out to find a goat and meant to find one before he left this room.

But Lee's cautioning gesture no longer held the force it might have held this morning. Stooping swiftly he came up with the gun his foot had covered; came up so suddenly the sheriff had no time to guess his purpose before the pistol's muzzle held him in grim focus as Ankrum backed to the wall beside the outer door.

"It didn't come from no dead man's hand, if that's what you're insinuat'ing," Ankrum drawled. "If you're aimin' to find a goat for this

night's work, Ratchford, you better pick on someone else."

"Any man can talk behind a gun," the sheriff sneered.

With a blur the pistol left Ankrum's hand and no one saw where he had sheathed it. White teeth gleamed coldly behind his parted lips. His attitude was a challenge to big Tom Ratchford, yet Ratchford did not move.

Ankrum said, "What caliber gun did the colonel use, Miss Struthers?"

"Why... a thirty-two, I believe."

"The pistol I just picked up was a thirty-two. It came off the ground near Struthers' body. One shell has been exploded. Do you know, Ratchford, what caliber slug it was that killed the colonel?"

"A forty-five," the sheriff's voice came back. "It cut out a moment's pause, and then: 'Like the gun I took out of your hand a while ago.'"

"Did you?" Ankrum said.

The sheriff shrugged. His lids concealed the expression in his eyes. "All right, then," he said, "like the forty-five you gave up at my request a while ago—if it makes you feel any better to have put it that way."

"It does. No man ever took a gun away from me yet, Ratchford—"

"Hard hombre, eh? I've seen your type of drifter before—the kind that hires out its guns to the highest bidder. Who hired you to gun the colonel?"

"I didn't gun him. I told you that before. Now let me ask you one: How'd you know the slug that downed him was a forty-five? Mightn't it have been a forty-four?"

"Where Were You?"

"I LISTEN," Ratchford said testily. "I've fooled around guns long enough to recognize whether a chunk of lead was thrown from a forty-four or forty-five, no matter how badly it happens to be battered. There's a difference in the weight. Besides, this slug was pretty smooth. It was like the ones your gun—the one you give me—shoots."

"That doesn't mean anything," Ankrum said. "You've got a forty-five yourself. It's slung in that shoulder holster under your coat. Mr. Trone may be packin' one too, for all I know. Claydell, here, produced a thirty-eight. If you're in a fix, you can buy a forty-five for a forty-five cased about him some place. I don't see any guns on these two cowboys, but if I was to judge them by the rest of you I'd say they was each packin' a forty-five, at least. For a country that's slunked its iron—"

"Never mind the sarcasm," Ratchford broke in roughly. He turned toward the two girls: "Miss Struthers, where were you when your man was shot?"

The unexpectedness of the question brought a startled breath from Lee Trone. Her eyes flicked wide and darkened. Instinctively they sought Ankrum's. He gave her a reassuring quirk of the lips and turned his glance on Betty.

The sheriff's procedure elicited no sign of dismay from her. She had her wit about her every minute of the time. Ankrum reflected sardonically, "A girl that has all the answers," he summed her up. When she spoke her voice held that amount of huskiness genuine grief for her father's death might have caused.

"I—let me see," a white hand went to her forehead, rumpling the golden curls; a tiny pucker grew between her thoughtful eyes. "I had just stepped out the door there. Father had asked me to meet him out beneath that pepper tree; he said he had something private which he wished to talk to me about." She bit her lip; her thoughts seemed far away. "I'm trying to recollect—it seems to me I had just stepped out the door and crossed the veranda. I was leaning against one of those funny posts—"

"Come, come Miss Struthers," the sheriff exclaimed impatiently. "I asked you where you were when you heard the shot. I'm not interested in the history of your movements from the time you finished supper."

"Upon the big sheriff the girl from Paso Pinto turned wide blue eyes in which there shone the hurt expression of a child who has been unjustly reproved. "But Mr. Ratchford, that is what I am trying to tell you. I had stepped out on the veranda when I heard two sharp reports—"

"Then you did not see the gun-flashes?" the sheriff growled. "You couldn't say from which direction the reports came?"

The girl shook her head. "I'm afraid not. I was looking—"

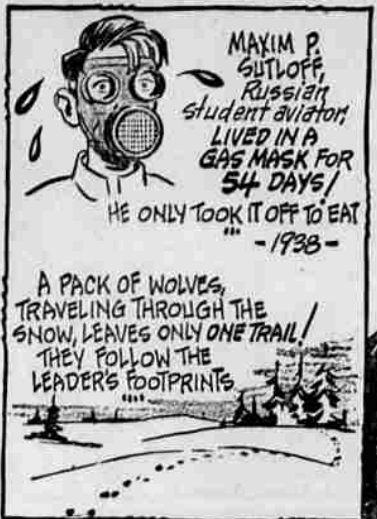
"Yeah," Ratchford cut her off. He swung round upon Lee Trone; "Lee," his eyes were on hers probing, "what were you doing under the pepper tree when Colonel Struthers got shot?"

(Copyright, 1938, Nelson C. Wy)

More bad news for the Rafters Monday.

# STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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



"COME ALL YOU ROLLERS IF YOU WANT TO HEAR THE STORY OF A BRAVE ENGINEER! CASEY JONES WAS THE ROLLER'S NAME, ON A SIX-EIGHT WHEELER, BOYS, HE WON HIS FAME!"

CASEY JONES' REALLY LIVED! AN ENGINEER ON THE ILLINOIS CENTRAL'S "CANNONBALL EXPRESS," HIS FAMOUS "FAREWELL TRIP TO THE PROMISED LAND" ENDED SOUTH OF MEMPHIS, TENN., WHEN HIS LOCOMOTIVE CRASHED A FREIGHT TRAIN...

-April 29, 1900-

Casey Jones, a negro engine wiper in a Vaughan, Mississippi, roundhouse one spring day in 1900 crowned this little ditty as he worked:

"O Casey Jones, he was all right. He stuck to his duty both day and night. They loved to hear his whistle and the ring of Number Three. As he came into Memphis on the old 'L. C.'"

A few days before, the wiper, Wallace Saunders, had been shocked by news of the death of his idol, John Luther "Casey" Jones, engineer on the crack "Cannonball Express" of the Illinois Central Chicago-New Orleans run.

Jones' method of "whippoorwilling" his engine's whistle had captivated Saunders, and the song young Saunders created was a fitting memorial to his friend. The same song, news item and set to music by songwriter Ed Newton, became a national hit.

Nicknamed "Casey" because he hailed from the town of Cayce, Ky., Jones worked for the B. & O. and for the Mobile and Ohio roads before joining the Illinois Central.

Casey's "farewell" trip into the promised land took place on the night of April 29, 1900. With his fire-

man, C. M. Webb, he pulled into Memphis on the 638, hauling the "Cannonball." Learning that the southbound engineer was sick, Jones and Webb volunteered to double back and take over the run.

The train rounded a long curve just above Vaughan and roared downhill about fifty-five miles an hour. It was 30 minutes behind schedule. Suddenly a freight train loomed ahead, pulling onto a siding.

With a crash, the train plowed through the bokars. The engineer had jumped clear, but Casey stuck to his post and was killed.

Tomorrow, what famous gate has been unopened for nearly 500 years?

## MORE SUMMER PUPILS IN OREGON SCHOOLS

EUGENE, Aug. 9.—(AP)—Summer study has increased at Oregon institutions markedly over last year according to percentages submitted by Chancellor Frederick M. Hunter for the Oregon board of higher education.

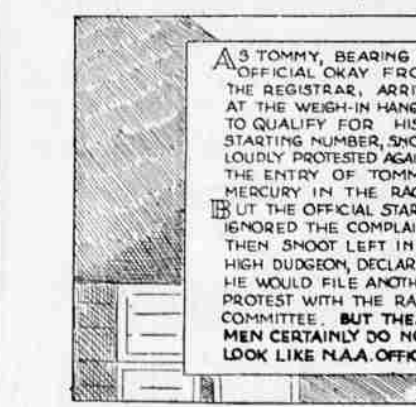
The percentage increase over last year for summer school post session:

Eastern Oregon normal, 72.3; Southern Oregon normal, 39.2; Oregon normal, 25.7; University of Oregon, 14.3; Oregon State, 12.0.

## OREGON JOB INSURED GET HIGHEST BENEFITS

SALEM, Aug. 9.—(AP)—Oregon's jobless insured are receiving larger weekly benefit checks than those of any other state, according to a comparative report received from the social

## TAILSPIN TOMMY—More Dirty Work!



## BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—The Warning!

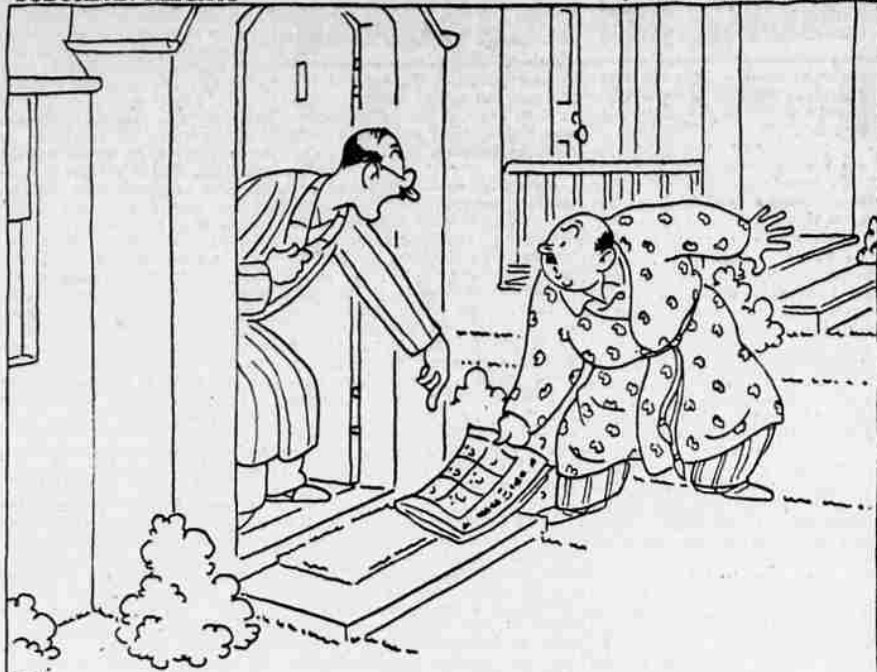


## THE NEBBS—Know Thyself



## SUBURBAN HEIGHTS

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



8-8

## S'MATTER POF

By C M PAYNE



(Copyright, 1938, by The Bell Syndicate, Inc.)

By HAL FORREST



By EDWIN ALGER



By SOL HESS



## W. C. T. U. LEADER CRITICIZES FILMS

SAN FRANCISCO, Aug. 9.—(AP)—Motion pictures were declared by Miss Maude M. Aldrich in a report to the Women's Christian Temperance Union convention today "probably the most powerful medium in putting the cigaret between the lips of American women."

Miss Aldrich of Gresham, Ore., national motion picture department director for the W. C. T. U., also blamed the films for "dulling the perception of many as to the unwomanliness and menace in the use of alcohol; in creating standards of dress and conduct which completely ignore the sacredness of person; and in spreading the cheap compromising ideas of love, marriage and home life so prevalent today."

The report urged the convention to support "proper regulation" of motion pictures.

## SHELL EMPLOYEES TO GET PENSIONS

ST. LOUIS, Aug. 9.—(AP)—The Shell Petroleum and Pipe Line corporations announced today the adoption of the retirement pension plan for its 27,500 employees in the United States and Canada.

Upon retirement, an employee will receive a pension equal to 40 per cent of his annual wage during the previous five years. Normal retirement will be 50 for men, and 55 for women, although retirement at these ages will not be compulsory, the companies pointed out.

Disability pensions for employees under 50 will be 62½ per cent of the full pensions, it was announced.

Alexander Fraser, president, said the plan, which will date back to Jan. 1, is "designated to round out a board program of social benefits already in force."

The pensions will be provided by the companies without contribution by employees.