

# LOVE ON THE RANGE

BY NELSON C. NYE

## The Story So Far

Under the name of Abe Street, quick-fire Ankrum takes a job on the troubled Rafter 7 ranch to help lonely Lee Trone. Colonel Struthers and his daughter Betty come to visit, and Ankrum recognizes Struthers as an impostor, Kelton Drea. Drea is shot and Betty tells Ankrum she did it. Ratchford, the burly sheriff, questions them all, including Claydell, a neighboring rancher. Then he turns on Lee.

## Chapter 15

### Exposed

EE TRONE'S red lips curled scornfully. "I'll bite," she said. "What was it?"

Ratchford scowled. "You're talking to the sheriff of this county now. I expect a civil answer."

"Very well," she answered, "I was not under the pepper tree when that man was killed."

"Where were you?"

"I was walking toward it from the rear of the bunkhouse."

Ankrum saw suspicion in the sheriff's glance. "Why?"

"It was warm inside and I wanted to get some air."

"Why did you happen to pick that pepper tree to head for?"

"I wanted to be alone. The shadows were dark there and I didn't think anyone would see me."

There were puzzled corrugations on the sheriff's forehead. "I have often felt like being alone myself," he said. "But I can't see why you would want to be alone when old friends you hadn't seen for years had just arrived."

"I felt strange toward them. Somehow I couldn't accept them as old friends," Lee said simply. "I could not help feeling that they were strangers—and they were, you know." Her glance went to the girl who called herself Betty Struthers. "Why did you and that man practice this imposture on us?" she asked curiously.

A tear fell slowly from one moist blue eye as the girl from Paso Pinto faced her hostess. "Miss Trone—you'll never forgive us, I know, but we knew the real colonel and his daughter. He had often told us of the Rafter 7. I have always wanted to spend a summer on a ranch. Finally I persuaded father to impersonate—he broke off and, turning her head away, out a handkerchief to her eyes.

Ankrum wondered if this were the truth. He felt strongly inclined to doubt it, for he knew the man she called her father was Kelton Drea, and so far as he had ever heard, Kelton Drea had no daughter. Too, he recalled the place where the Rafter 7 was. No, he decided, this yarn was a lie. But the girl was a clever actress—

He saw the sheriff looking at her closely, saw the sudden flaring of Ratchford's figure. "Isn't this bogus colored really like Kelton Drea, the Tombstone gambler?"

The golden head drooped lower. "Thought so!" the sheriff grunted. "Drea," he told the others, "is that tinhorn that made a lot of brags about getting that shooting fool, Blur Ankrum. Seen that like Ankrum guessed this Drea's cousin couple years back, and the gambler swore he'd never rest till he evened the account."

"What's all that got to do with us?" Trone asked, putting himself together. Ankrum saw that the girl of shaking had gone out of him.

"Mebbe nothing," the sheriff answered. "Then again it might have a whole heap to do with you. It all depends..." He broke off to frown at Claydell who was grinning.

"He means," Claydell chuckled, "that one way of explainin' Drea's presence on your ranch in any guise..."

"Button your lip, damn you!" Ratchford snarled.

The rancher returned the sheriff's glare with bland surprise. "Was I about to sive state secrets away?"

"Some day," Ratchford's voice was deeply vibrant, "you're going to push me too far, Claydell. When that time comes you better have your holster greased."

"You remind me of a spoiled boy. When you can't have things all your own way you sulk. It's time you grew up."

### A Warning

BEFORE Ratchford could reply, Claydell went on:

"You may be the sheriff of this county, unfortunately, but that don't come anywhere near givin' you a corner on the conversation. Any time I feel the urge to break forth in speech, neither you nor all your sheep-herdin' deputies are going to hold me back. This here's a warning, Ratchford. You watch your step!"

While the sheriff stood spluttering with purple face, Claydell turned to the others regretfully and took his leave, permitting his revolver to lay upon the floor where Ratchford's boot had shoved it. Perhaps, Ankrum thought, he had forgotten the weapon. At any rate, he left without it and a few moments later his

purring motor faded on the distant night.

Ankrum's abrupt laugh broke the silence. Claydell's departure had left behind:

"What the hell you laughin' at?" Ratchford snarled.

"Laughin' at the way that fella curled you up an' left you gaspin'," Ankrum chuckled.

"Oh, you are, are you? Well, you keep right on laughin' then while you got the chance. When you're all through I'll have a few things to say that'll give you an opportunity to laugh on the other side of your mug!"

"Hop to it, then. It's long past my bedtime an' rotatin' makes me so dang obtrusive as missin' my beauty sleep—"

"You knew," growled Old Man Trone, cutting sharply into Ankrum's sentence, "that that fellow impersonating Colonel Struthers was a damned fake, sir! Why don't you expose him?"

Ankrum's face grew sober as he gazed into the stern accusing eyes of Lee's father. "I was waitin'," he answered, "to see how far the skunk would carry it."

He saw Lee's glance travel past him to the girl from Paso Pinto, whose head was still averted. "I think his brain was addled by a pretty face," Lee said.

Hot color flowed through Ankrum's cheeks. "Perhaps it was," he told her quietly. "But you needn't worry about it happenin' again." With a curt bow he turned on his heel and went striding toward the door.

Ratchford's voice came leaping after him: "C'mere! You tryin' to slide out on me like that? You better stick around!"

### Wild Hoofbeats

ANKROM, looking back, saw that Ratchford's hand was at his hip. He grinned coldly at the sheriff. "I expect that's your way of advisin' me to linger in this county. Well, don't fret yourself; I'll stay, all right. I guess you ain't used to my kind, brother. I belong to a breed that sticks to the last gasp."

"All right, Curly Wolf," the sheriff glibbed. "You listen now. You saw me prove that this Struthers dude was really Kelton Drea, the gambler. Drea's been spendin' a heap of time in the last two years chasin' after one Blur Ankrum. This Ankrum killed Drea's cousin in a gun fight. Now it seems to me it would put you in an awkward spot, seein' as how Drea was killed here tonight, movin' on the edge of his bunk several minutes later, bent double in the task of pulling off his boots. But suddenly his fingers ceased all operations. From the slope leading down from the ridge hemming the valley rang a wild rattling of hoofbeats."

For one breathless second he sat there listening. Then with a bound he was on his feet and moving toward the open door with long swift strides. In the shadow outside the doorway he halted to gaze across the night. But no moving thing met his stare along the trail leading down from the ridge.

With hurried quiet he moved to the rear of the bunkhouse. What he saw stilled the breath in his throat, injured as he was to danger.

A forward-bent rider with flapping arms and flapping legs was tearing madly down that treacherous rear pitch from the valley's rim. Ankrum's eyes glinted narrowly as he watched that crazy course. It seemed impossible that horse and rider at that fearful pace should reach the valley's floor alive.

His being quickened as the reckless saddle-slicker drove his rocketing mount across the stream. Between the buildings and straight across the yard they tore, the horse braking to a stop in a cloud of dust as Ankrum rounded the far corner of the bunkhouse. He heard the rider hit dirt, saw him go toward the ranch-house's veranda at a staggering run, stiff-legged from long contact with the saddle.

Ankrum saw the ranchhouse door burst open; saw dark figures come spilling out across the porch like red ants from a burning log. They were silhouetted black against the front room's lighted windows so that by their shapes he could guess at their identities. He heard the sheriff's low curses and Old Man Trone's excited voice hurling questions.

The runner stopped, stood swaying before the ranch-house steps as he fought for breath. There was a sob in the words that finally came: "Ratchford's boss—they've got that beef we had on the northwest range!"

Ankrum saw Trone's form shrink back as from a blow; saw a trembling hand come up to brush across his forehead. Trone's question came from a thickened throat: "Wiped clean?"

"Clean as a hound's tooth!" the puncher blurted.

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Ankrum investigates, 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.



The Forbidden Portal, resplendent with glittering gold and sculptured marble, the Golden Gate of Constantinople was built by Theodosius into a great wall surrounding the city over 1500 years ago.

This famed portal was the official state entrance to Constantinople and was used only on occasions of great importance. When Mohammed II conquered this important city after the great siege of 1453, he ordered the gate closed permanently.

Since 1453 the Golden Gate has remained shut; not a single soul has passed beneath its high arch. Time has left its mark of deterioration on the Golden Gate, but it still stands today in a section of the original wall—unopened.

Stalk-Eyed Shrimp

Unparalleled in the animal world is the eye construction of the oar-shrimp, in which the organ is borne at the end of a slender beam longer than the rest of the body. Other animals have similar stalked eyes, but none in such an exaggerated degree as the oar-shrimp.

When she was born she had living 10 grandparents, eight of whom were on her mother's side of the family. Strange as it seems, Priscilla was

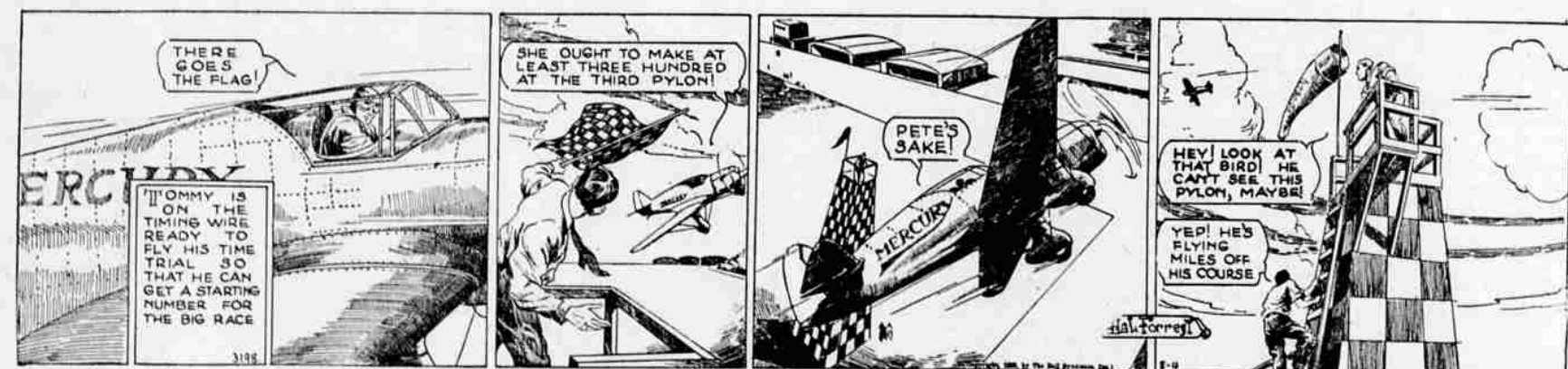
Careless Smoker Causes Big Blaze

BAKER, Aug. 10.—(AP)—A careless motorist threw a lighted cigarette stub along a section of the Baker-Homestead highway last night and caused a grass fire that swept 450 acres of grazing land, surrounded the Macy mine and almost went into the forest.

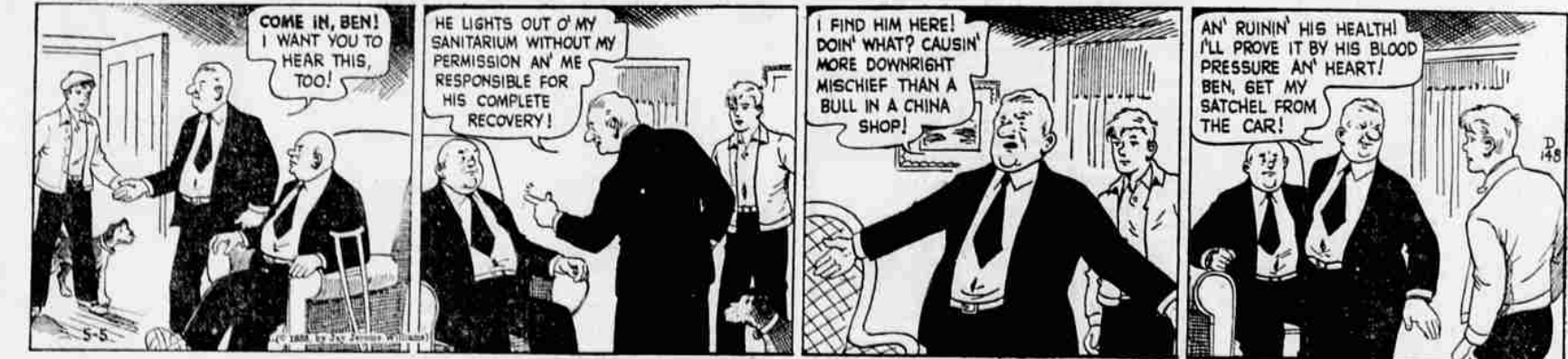
Forty CCC enrollees were hurried to the scene and after four hours of continuous fighting controlled the blaze. The fire traveled so fast before a brisk breeze that it was feared for a time that all of the buildings on the mining property would be lost and perhaps residences at Sparta endangered.

WINDOW GLASS—We sell window glass and will replace your broken windows reasonably. Trowbridge Cabinet Works.

### TAILSPIN TOMMY—Something's Wrong!



### BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—The Lecture!

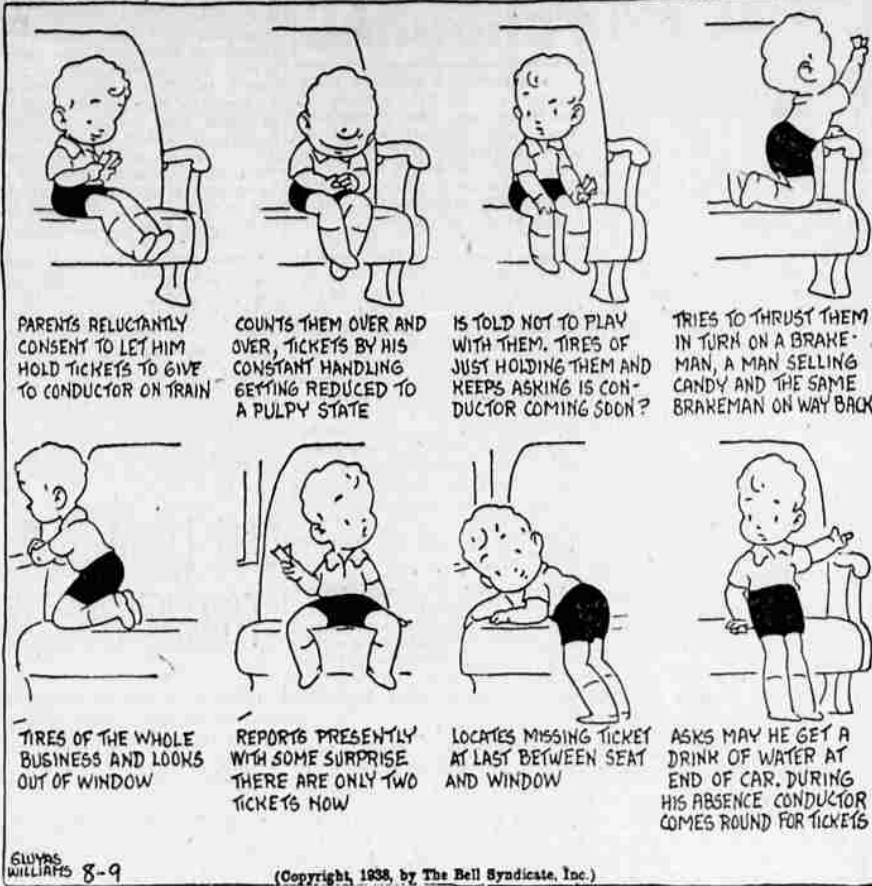


### THE NEBBS—Love



## "TICKETS, PLEASE!"

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



### SMATTER POT

By O M PAYNE



## CHRYSLER'S WIFE DIES OF STROKE

GREAT NECK, N. Y., Aug. 10.—(AP)—Mrs. Walter P. Chrysler, wife of the auto magnate, died at her home here last night of a cerebral hemorrhage, at the age of 61.

The former Della Furker, daughter of an Ella Kans, merchant, she had been Chrysler's constant source of inspiration and encouragement during his rise from railroad worker to manufacturer and financier.

They were married in 1901 when Chrysler was a 23-day roundhouse mechanic in Salt Lake City, and began married life on \$60 a month.

Despite her husband's achievement of fame and fortune, Mrs. Chrysler followed extensive social activities

## New Bantam Auto To Sell For \$399

BUTLER, Pa., Aug. 10.—(AP)—The Ankrum Bantam Car company announced today a new automobile delivered completely equipped at the factory for \$399, which the company said was the first American model to sell for less than \$400.

The previous low on a Bantam machine was \$482 for the 'master coupe.'

The new coupe has slightly smaller wheels.

## Col. Welch Dies In Vets Hospital

PORTLAND, Aug. 10.—(AP)—Col. H. U. Welch, 58, former Multnomah county assessor and veteran of the