

LOVE ON THE RANGE

BY NELSON C. SWAN

The Story So Far

Someone is out to bust the latter T ranch. To help lovely Trone, "Blitz" Ankrum takes a job there under the name of Streeter. A man and woman posing as friends of the Trones are revealed as impostors, and the man is mysteriously killed. Hackett, the sheriff, is suspicious of Ankrum. Then rustlers wipe the range clean and Ankrum discovers the cattle have been removed in trucks. Moss Hackett, the range boss, is also somewhere else when the rustling occurs.

Chapter 17 New Range Boss

"I can prove 'em. I've got those three men of yours tralling tire marks right this minute. They've got orders to find out where those racks are headin' for an' then to come back here an' report. Mebbe when they return you'll know a little more about what's been happenin' to your cattle."

Dawning belief was struggling against the suspicion and incredulity in Trone's eyes. Ankrum looked his thumbs in his belt and waited for the rancher to speak.

"By golly," Trone said at last, "it could be done."

"It's being done. They've been rustlin' steers by truck in Colorado for the last couple years. Swoop down on a herd of a dark night an' in the morning the cattle are clear out of the state. Your cattle are goin' either by truck alone, or by truck an' train."

"How come Alkali didn't see no truck then?" Trone asked.

"If by Alkali you mean that puncher that fanned in here with the news, he did," Ankrum stated. "He also tells me one of the other boys mentioned something about tire tracks crossin' the trail of one of your herds several months ago—one of your rustled bunches. Alkali says Hackett fired the man the same day he made the crack about searin' those tire marks. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Are you tryin' to talk me Hackett's crooked?"

"I'm lettin' Hackett's actions answer that," Ankrum said. "He's comin' now."

Moss Hackett, followed by three punchers, was dismounting. "Never mind unsaddling that pony," Ankrum said. "Mr. Hackett isn't stayin' long."

Hackett swung round with a hard stare. "Huh? Who are you to be sayin' what I'm gonna do or not gonna do?"

"I'm the new range boss," Ankrum told him. "You can come up to the office an' get your time. We've got no use for double-crossin' polecats on the Rafter T. Those men of yours can come along an' get their time, too. We won't be needin' 'em any longer."

The three men mentioned turned startled glances upon Ankrum, then looked at Hackett inquiringly. Hackett's face was livid as he ripped out a lurid oath. His burly figure slid into a crouch and his right hand hung poised and talon-like above the bone-handled gun protruding from his holster.

But Ankrum's soft laugh mocked. "Wash the sweat out of my sonny. You're dealin' with a man that's got your measure."

Hackett's hand stopped where it hung above the handle of his pistol. His lips twitched spasmodically, yet no words left his mouth. "If you're tryin' to have a fit, Ankrum said, 'you better have it someplace else."

'Rustlin' Snake'

HACKETT'S belligerence drained from him. The spot of color staining either cheek spoke, as did his twitching fingers, of a morning that was cracking. He licked his lips. Twice he cleared his throat before the stumbling words came out.

"What... what's wrong?"

"Hackett," said Ankrum, "when a man finds a sidewinder in his blankets there's only two things he can do—drive it out or kill it."

"Why—why, what do you mean?"

"You can write your own ticket."

"You're makin' it pretty boggy. Can't you ride that trail again?"

"I said you can write your ticket the way you like. I'm leavin' it up to you to say what I ought to do with the rustlin' snake I've cornered."

Hackett started like a man smashed unexpectedly across the mouth. The burning spots washed out of his cheeks. His voice was hoarse. "Rustlin' snake—what you mean?"

"I'm calling you the sidewinder that's been tippin' off the rustler fraternity to the best time an' place to strike the Rafter T. You are the leak them rustlers been dependin' on. Hackett," Ankrum's drawl grew low and cold, "you're not a snake—you're a dirty stinkin' skunk!"

Hackett's eyes bulged wide and the pallor of his face betrayed his fear. He threw his glance about him with the desperation of a trapped rat. But always it came back to Ankrum's face.

Hackett's three companions, now equally pale, began to edge away

from his proximity. Their arms went above their heads in token of the peacefulness of their intentions. Hackett cursed them roundly until his glance crossed Ankrum's once again. Hardly conscious of the fact, he joined the backing movement.

"Exit los bravos," Ankrum jeered. "Four coyotes in eagle feathers!"

Slowly Hackett backed away. He moved haltingly foot by foot. At last he felt his horse behind him and sent his left hand questing upward for the horn. He seemed afraid to take his eyes from his accuser.

Ankrum's voice reached out with cold authority:

"Get off this ranch an' don't come back. That goes for all four of you. From now on the Rafter T is going to take open season on snakes and other varmints. Get goin'!"

A scowl creased Hackett's ugly features. His poised right hand swooped downward and got his gun. Ankrum's turning body did not stop but whirled clear round with the speed of light.

Too late Hackett saw the leveled gun in Ankrum's hand. His own was half-way out when Ankrum's roared—just once. Hackett seemed to bend forward to meet that leaping spurt of flame. For a moment then he hung poised in an awkward bow. His knees gave way and he spilled him forward.

"Geez!" the exclamation burst from one of Hackett's men.

Cold fire smoldered now in Ankrum's gaze. "Anyone schin' to take up where Moss left off?"

Hastily the men denied their interest.

"Fork your broncs then an' keep on travelin'," Ankrum advised. "An'," he added softly, "be right careful our trails don't cross again."

'Powerful Tall Brags'

IN the days immediately following Ankrum's fight with the crooked range boss, the surface of life at the Rafter T flowed on with no ripple. To be sure, Trone's beef had apparently vanished from the face of the earth; but the three men Ankrum had set trailing the marks left by the trucks had returned that very night, sheepishly confessing the rustlers had eluded them. The tracks, these men claimed, had just plumb petered out!

Sheriff Ratchford had left the ranch before Ankrum's set-to with Hackett, and he had not returned since, though he had told Trone upon leaving that he would soon be back to wind up the matter of Kelton Dreen's killing. One of the Rafter T hands reported having seen the sheriff one night in Paso Pinto roaring drunk.

"He was makin' some powerful tall brags," the hand—Windy Jones—said. "Ankrum, confidentlly, 'Ratchford is a lot smarter than most folks gives him credit for. He was drunk. I'll concede you that. But he was sure doin' some awful plain talkin' Allowed as how he's goin' to cinch that tinhorn's killin' onto that Arizona gun-slick, Ankrum. I ain't acquainted with the gent, but from what I've heard about him, I'd sing low was I Tom Ratchford."

He looked at Ankrum speculatively.

Ankrum grinned. "By that remark, I judge you think he's got some sort of evidence against Ankrum."

"The puncher rasped his jaw. 'Well, if he ain't he's sure gettin' uncommon careless! Don't think he cottons to you, Streeter.'

"I expect there ain't much chance of us gettin' on huggin' terms," Ankrum said. He did considerable thinking about Windy Jones' remarks in the days that followed. He felt certain the sheriff knew about his gunning of Hackett, for he'd sent Alkali in to report the man's death. The corner and one of Ratchford's deputies had come out, asked a few questions and taken the body back to town. Ankrum had a feeling that the incident was no more closed than was the business of Dreen's death. Ratchford, he decided, was merely biding his time.

But with what object? Ankrum could not guess.

Not could he guess why the girl calling herself Betty Struthers continued her visit with the Trones. Following her inquiry by the sheriff, Ankrum had expected her to pack her bags. She remained on the Rafter T, however, and often sought him out at the home ranch.

Lee Trone, on the contrary, avoided him and took pains to show him that the avoidance was deliberate.

Not that he cared, he told himself. The less they saw of each other the better it would be for both of them. He could not risk many close contacts with a girl of Lee's magnetism. He could not afford to fall in love. That the fact was not entirely his fault made no difference. To a man of his adventurous breed the better things in life must needs be barred. That was Ankrum's way of looking at it.

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Betty makes a play for Ankrum, 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.

"THROW OUT THE LIFE LINE" -- FAMOUS CHURCH HUMAN, WAS WRITTEN IN 15 MINUTES BY THE REV. E. S. UFFORD, AFTER WITNESSING A LIFE-SAVING DRILL AT POINT ALLERTON, MASS. -1888-

BILLY ARTHUR-- ONLY 36 INCHES TALL, IS THE SMALLEST OFFICIAL SCORER IN ORGANIZED BASEBALL... (New Bern, N. C., Coastal Plain League)

POLAR BEARS DO NOT SWIM WITH THEIR HIND LEGS

ENCYCLOPEDIA OIL STRIKE! GIVEN AWAY AS PREMIUMS WITH ENCYCLOPEDIA SETS IN 1900. 25 "WORTHLESS" LOTS AT HUNTINGTON BEACH, CALIF., 20 YEARS LATER WERE FOUND TO CONTAIN RICH OIL DEPOSITS! THEY HAVE SINCE BROUGHT OVER \$5,000,000 TO THEIR OWNERS!

8-12-38 McLaughlin Syndicate, Inc.

Encyclopedia Oil Strike

Back at the turn of the century, a California land promoter found on his hands a worthless tract of land which would not "turn over." At the same time, a New England publisher found on his hands several thousand editions of the Encyclopedia Britannica—and few buyers.

Fate threw the two together; they exchanged "hard luck" stories. Finally a bargain was struck. For a price of \$300.00 they decided a "California seaside lot" could be given away as a premium with a set of encyclopedia.

In this manner 25 lots in the tract, each 20 by 90 feet, were sold in 1900. The lots were not seaside lots but today are included within the limits of Huntington Beach.

Twenty years later J. H. Macklin, an oil field geologist, saw bubbles rising to the surface of the Pacific off Huntington Beach. He knew at once that the land contained oil. Failing to interest the oil company he worked for, Macklin set out on his own to buy the titles of the property—for \$5.00 per lot.

A search of the county records amazed him; owners were listed in

the highest in the history of the state and 183,421 more than for the presidential election two years ago.

The Democratic registration reached the record total of 3,022,726, a gain of 140,712. A loss of 105 dropped the Republican figure to 1,234,402. These figures were compiled from information obtained from officials in all of California's 58 counties.

Manufacture of shoes in this county was begun in 1829 by Thomas Beard.

Shirley Ann's body was found in a wooded tract on Decoration day, some 20 hours after she disappeared while at play.

Parrot Ban Tight

ALBANY, N. Y.—(UP)—Parrots and similar tropical birds may some day be rarities in the United States. A New York public health regulation, aimed against carriers of deadly psittacosis or parrot disease, prohibits importation, sale or breeding of all birds of the species.

BOY GETS LIFE TERM FOR MURDERING CHILD

CINCINNATI, Aug. 12.—(P)—Lindberg Trent, 15, confessed slayer of six-year-old Shirley Ann Woodburn, was convicted by a three-judge court of first degree murder and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Young Trent pleaded guilty to two indictments charging premeditated murder and murder in the course of attempted criminal attack.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—The Chief Arrives!

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE TO SERVICE AND WEIGH IN MY SHIP?

ABOUT THIRTY MINUTES, MISTER TOMKINS!

COME ON, BETTY! YOU! THAT'LL GIVE US TIME TO GRAB A BITE TO EAT!

I LOVE A LOT TO YOU, HONEY, FOR HELPING ME TO GET BACK MY CERTIFICATE

BETTY! LOOK! IT'S... THE CHIEF!

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Diagnosis!

HMMM! JUST WHAT I THOUGHT—NOT CONTENT WITH A BROKEN LEG, YOU'RE COAXIN' A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN!

HONEST, DOC?

YES, AND YOU HAVE TO TAKE A REAL REST CURE AT A PLACE IN THE COUNTRY—FAR, FAR FROM HERE!

I'LL DO ANYTHING YOU SAY, DR. KILEY.

BEN, I RECKON MY NERVES GOT THE BEST O' ME—ABOUT RUSTY, I MEAN—HONEST, I'M TERRIBLE SORRY!

JASON JONES, WE HAVEN'T EVEN GOT TIME TO TALK OF RUSTY! YOU COME WITH ME!

YES, DOC—YES, YES!

THE NEBBS—So Unhappy

I WONDER WHAT I COULD HAVE SAID OR DONE... NELLIE SAID GOOD-NIGHT TO ME SO SNIPPY-LIKE AND WHEN I SAID, 'FACE-TAG,' SHE NEVER LOOKED AROUND!

FANNY, I FEEL SO BLUE... NELLIE WAS SO COLD TO ME TONIGHT... I SAID MY PRETTIEST WORDS AND COULDN'T INTEREST HER

MAYBE SHE WAS A BIT OUT OF SORTS... I WOULDN'T TAKE ON SO

YOU'RE TOO MUCH IN LOVE BUT MARRIAGE WILL BE A CURE FOR ALL THAT... YOUR BROTHER WAS JUST LIKE YOU ARE NOW BEFORE WE WERE MARRIED... HE WANTED TO HELP ME LIFT A COFFEE CUP TO MY LIPS... TWO MONTHS AFTER I WAS CARRYING IN THE COAL

DIFFICULT DECISIONS

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

WITH A GAME SCHEDULED IN FIFTEEN MINUTES, UNCLE EDGAR, WHO IS INCLINED TO BE PRETTY TESTY IF DISTURBED AT HIS AFTERNOON NAP, GOES TO SLEEP ON JUNIOR'S BALL AND GLOVE

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'MATTER POF By C M PAYNE

MISTER WIMPUS, I'D CERTAINLY LIKE TO PRACTICE ANOTHER RADIO JOKE WITH YA

WHATCHA GOT?

I DO LOVE ANIMALS!

ANY ONES IN PARTICULAR?

YES! PORK, BEEF, AN' LAMBS!

OKAY! HEP!

LOUD LAUGHTER

4AW

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By HAL FORR'

LADY ON DUTY AS CINNIBAR LOOKOUT

BIG APPLEGATE, Aug. 12.—(Sp.)—The thrill of being one of the vast army of sentinels guarding the nation's forests from fires belongs to Mrs. Jack Crump this week, who was left in charge of Cinnibar lookout station Wednesday in the absence of her husband who was called as a section boss on a large fire in the Smith river section near Gasquet. Albert Young from Star ranger station also was called as a division boss and 49 CCC men and two foremen from Camp Applegate were taken for duty. Mrs. Crump will be a competent lookout, having been on the post with her husband all summer, when she received training in locating and

reporting fires and giving weather reports.

At Whiskey Peak a new lookout was put on duty Wednesday, Russell Mitchell of Steamboat, who succeeds Lawrence Kaiser, Mr. and Mrs. Kaiser and son, Dickie Frank, have gone to Gold Hill, where Mr. Kaiser was called in connection with his teaching profession which he will assume there next month. Mr. Mitchell is a former college professor from the University of Oklahoma and has been in the Applegate section for several years for the benefit of his health.

Democrats Gain In California Registry

SAN FRANCISCO, Aug. 11.—(AP)—Democratic registration in California is seven and one half per cent higher for the August 30 primary than it was in the 1936 general election while the Republican figure is slightly lower, an Associated Press survey showed today.

The total registration of 3,487,943

By SOL HEP'