

# LOVE ON THE RANGE

BY NELSON C. NYE

## The Story So Far

Someone is out to bust the Rafter T ranch. To help lovely Lee Trone, "Blair" Ankrom 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. The girl, Betty stays on. Then rustlers wipe the range clean and Ankrom traces the lead to Moss Hackett, the range boss. In a showdown, he beats Hackett to the draw. Hackett, the sheriff, seems to have guessed Ankrom's identity, but is biding his time.

## Chapter 18

### The Golden Girl

ONE afternoon when Ankrom rounded a bend in the dry wash he was following he came abruptly face to face with another rider—the golden girl, Betty.

If he was surprised by this unexpected meeting, she appeared equally so. But Ankrom, having witnessed previous samples of her excellent acting, would have been willing to bet his last cent that she had somehow deliberately engineered this encounter.

Her curls were tousled by the wind, for she persisted in wearing her hat looped by its chin-strap on the back of her neck. Yet he had to admit that she made a most enticing picture.

"How does it happen that you're still staying on at the ranch?" Ankrom inquired.

"I'm suffering on Rafter T's orders. He forbade my leaving until after the solving of the mystery surrounding the death of Kelton Dreen."

"Then you admit the colonel's real name was not Streeter?"

"Sure—why not? They could find that out easily by a little investigation. I don't think I'd want them to look into things too closely."

"Why not?"

"She regarded him thoughtfully. 'No—I don't know. I will answer that—now. Perhaps when all this is past I may.'

But he did not grab at the bait she dangled with that last sentence. He said, "What were you doing in that cabaret in Paso Pinto?"

"Her eyes clouded. 'I worked there. You don't like me, do you? Is it because you saw me first in there?'"

"If I don't appear to like you," Ankrom evaded, "it is because of the manner of your introduction to this ranch."

A strange light had come into her eyes, he thought. They looked somehow darker, deeper. When she spoke her words were low and vibrant, as though great feeling lay behind them.

"If there was deceptio, in the way I came to the Trones it was only in my association with Dreen. It happens I lent myself to his plan when he approached me because it seemed to offer the only possible escape from my environment. Do you think I don't not have stooped to anything that offered me my chance?"

In that moment Ankrom thought her almost beautiful. His glance must have reflected the thought, for her face went white and she turned her horse abruptly. "I'm going back to the ranch."

They rode possibly half a mile in silence. The pace was fast at first, but gradually slowed. Then Ankrom put a question. "Do you know what Dreen was up to?"

"In coming out here?"

"Yes. 'I'm trying to get at his purpose. I don't think he'd have come unless he saw money in the scheme. It appears to me that he was not acting on his own—that he was following the orders of some man in the background.'"

"Why do you think that?"

"That's hard to explain. Queer things are goin' on in this country. Some man has been sharpening up his knife for Old Man Trone. That night you cided to me in Paso Pinto, a bunch of thugs had lured Miss Lee to an empty house. I busted in as they were threatening her with a red-hot branding iron. Sort of spectacular, isn't it?"

"But of course they weren't going to use it," she smiled. "You quite melodramatic in this hum-drum day and age."

### Those Boys Are Experts

"ANOTHER thing about this business," Ankrom went on. "Trone has been losing cattle. Rustlers have been workin' his range in a wholesale way. An' I'm here to state those boys are experts. They're ridin' Trone's beef out of this country in trucks—an' they're getting away with it. There's head work back of that. Dreen was crafty in his way but he never had the brains for that. Dreen, I shouldn't wonder, was just a two-bit pawn in a big-shot game."

"You're thinking," she said, "that Dreen wouldn't have been interested in cattle. Well, perhaps the man you think was behind Dreen isn't interested in cattle, either."

Ankrom looked at her sharply.

"Mebbe not," he finally said. "Anyway, he's getting at Trone from all angles. The stolen cattle ever heard of rustlers bein' so finicky—or lucky. Well, they've stripped his range of saleable stuff. That means that unless he's got money in the bank—"

"He has," she cut in swiftly. "The bank at Paso Pinto. Dreen told me he had. Does that help?"

"Can't say it might help Trone, if he's got enough. Probably depends on things I know no more about than you—"

"Would you care to know more about me?" she cut in.

Ankrom felt heat come into his cheeks. "We're discussin' Trone, right now?"

Her horse lunged ahead beneath sudden drive of spurs. Remorse for his rudeness came to Ankrom as he urged the buckskin after. He did not wish to hurt her needlessly. Already he guessed she'd suffered enough. But love must have no place in his life; and if it could, that love would have belonged to Lee. Why did this girl persist in injecting the personal equation into their conversation?

Urging his horse alongside the running blue he was about to make his peace-talk when her voice came at him evenly: "Please on."

Relieved, Ankrom said, "Well, here's another angle. Trone's name is taboo among his neighbors. There could only be one reason for that since it ain't all likely that the whole country has a mad on at him. These people are onto the fact that someone's got his knife out for Trone, an' they want to keep out of it."

"Sounds fairly reasonable."

"It is reasonable. These neighbors of Trone's are mostly men with families to think of. They can't afford to get involved in a range war—another man's bread might come too high. The way things are shapin' up right now, I would hate to bet that even the Rafter T will go to war."

"Then there is a silver lining to this cloud?"

"If there is, I haven't seen it," Ankrom grunted. "What I mean is that it looks like Trone's opposition isn't aiming to leave him any weapons to fight with—an' darn few men. Look: counting myself, Trone has exactly four men on his payroll. You can't stage much of a war with four men. No matter how much coin Trone's got tucked away—this man that's out to smash the Rafter T has fixed it so that Trone can't hire any men!"

Gun Man

"I HATE a quitter!"

"I never let a man down yet. Remember, though, that I'm just one puncher—not an army."

"You might hand somebody that line an' get away with it," she grinned, "but little Goldie's been around."

"What are you getting at now?"

"Lee Trone."

"What about her?"

"Listen," she came back at him. "I may not know more than a hoot or two about ranches, but brother, when it comes to women, you don't know a thing."

"I won't argue that," said Ankrom; "I never claimed to know much about them."

The golden girl leaned forward, facing Ankrom earnestly. "What you need, friend Abe, is someone to wise you up on a little female psychology."

"Some women," she went on swiftly, "would go through fire for the man they love. And right now I'm not talking of your blue-ribbon thoroughbreds like Lee Trone, who decorate drawing rooms and swanky tees I'm speaking of the real women—the kind that don't mind workin'. Women who've never had much to make life worth livin'—ordinary women. Girls like me! They wouldn't care what their husbands were, what their men did—if they loved them."

"Do you think the Lee Trone of this world would ever marry a gun man? That's what the ciled you—a gun man?" Her voice grew hard, scornful. "She told me she saw you kill Hackett. She said you egged him on; turned your back so he would reach for his gun, and when he did you turned and shot him. She said if it wasn't that they needed you here so badly now, she would have made her father run you off the ranch just as you ran those others off!"

There was bitterness in her blazing eyes. "That's the kind of a person your fine Lady Lee is! She hired you for your gun because she was afraid that this some one you've been talking about would get her old man. And while you risk your life providing protection for that drunken has-been, she despises and loathes you for the very prowess that caused her to hire you!"

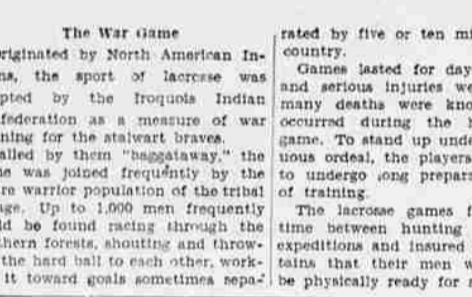
"Let's go," Ankrom said, and jogged the buckskin into motion. But where it carried him he did not see. He had not known what it felt like to be really cold, till now. His heart was a ball of ice.

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Ankrom snubs Lee, tomorrow.

# STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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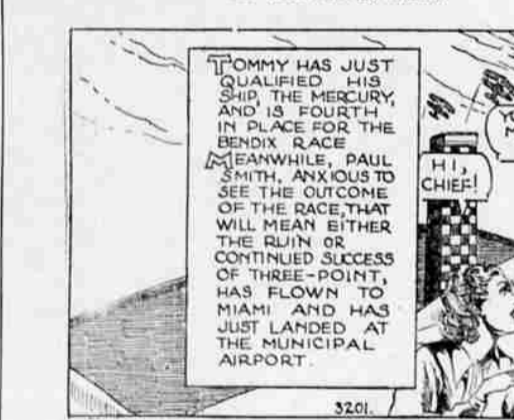
**The War Game**  
Originated by North American Indians, the sport of lacrosse was adopted by the Iroquois Indian confederation as a measure of war training for the stalwart braves. Called by them "bagawayau," the game was joined frequently by the entire warrior population of the tribal village. Up to 1,000 men frequently could be found racing through the northern forests, shouting and throwing the hard ball to each other, working it toward goals sometimes separated by five or ten miles of rough country. Games lasted for days at a time, and serious injuries were frequent; many deaths were known to have occurred during the heat of the game. To stand up under this strenuous ordeal, the players were forced to undergo long preparatory periods of training. The lacrosse games filled in the time between hunting and fishing expeditions and insured tribal chieftains that their men would always be physically ready for a real war.

**Coffee Pipeline**  
Considered the best grade of coffee by experts is that grown on the slopes of the Santa Maria mountains, in Colombia, South America. The difficulty of transporting the beans from the steep plantations to the hills led Colonel Fly, an American who took over the plantations, to build a long pipeline to wash the coffee down the hillside. Monday: What political constituency, largest in the world, is represented by a woman? Wis., administration supporter seeking re-election. His announcement, made in an interview, apparently indicated an end—so far as Wisconsin politics are concerned—to the political semi-alliance he has had with the administration. When Duffy first was elected to the senate in 1932, he had the backing of La Follette. President Roosevelt had urged Duffy's election. The number of men in gainful occupations in 1930 was three and a half times the number of women.

## LA FOLLETTE WILL FIGHT NEW DEAL

WASHINGTON, Aug. 13.—(AP)—Senator La Follette (Prog.-Wis.) said today he would campaign for the candidate nominated by the Progressive party to oppose Senator Duffy (D- Wis.), administration supporter seeking re-election.

### TAILSPIN TOMMY—The Voice in the Plane!



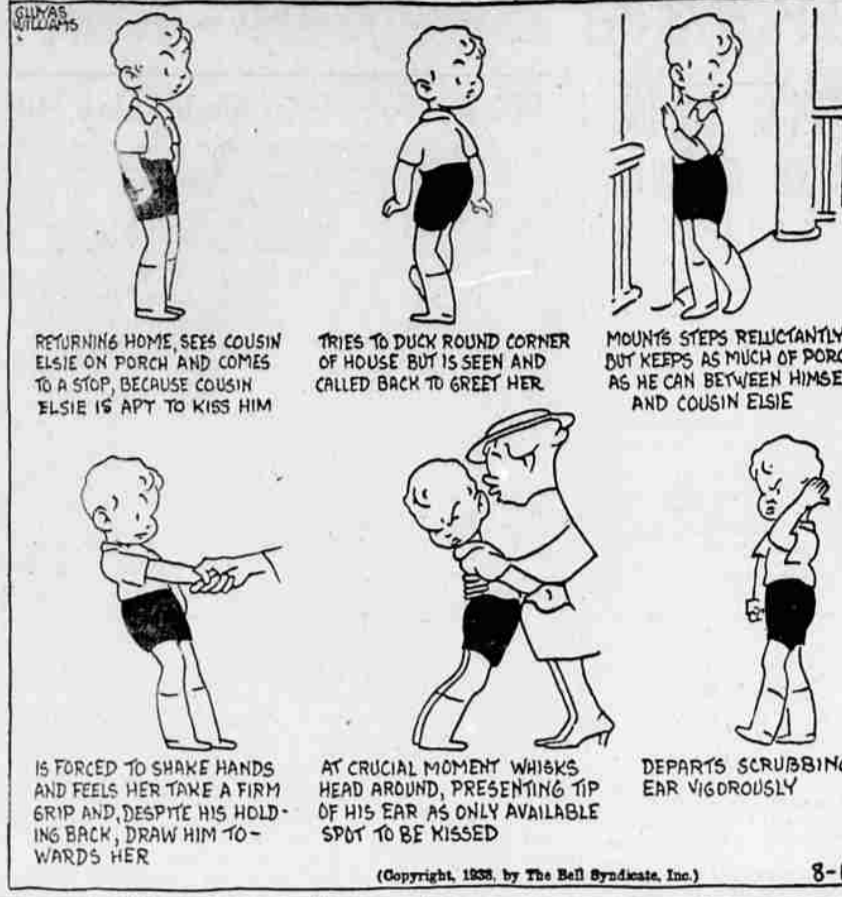
### BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—New Mystery?



### THE NEBBS—Before and After

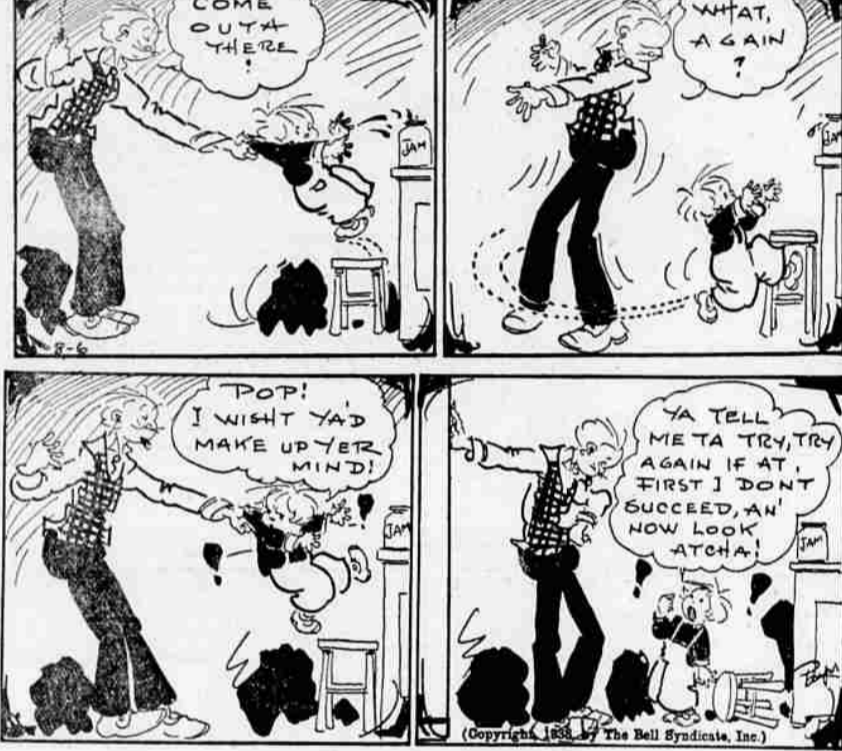


### ORDEAL



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### S'MATTER PO!



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### By HAL FORREST

## YEAR AGO POLAR PLANE VANISHED, PROBE LONE CLUE

FAIRBANKS, Alaska, Aug. 13.—(AP)—A year ago today—it was Friday, the 13th, when a north-polar radio message from the exploring party told of a falling motor, then faded into silence. That silence today still enveloped the missing Soviet transpolar plane which vanished shortly after crossing the pole en route here from Moscow. Only one rescue effort was being planned on the first anniversary of the disappearance of the expedition. Lieutenant, who flew the transpolar plane in a big flying boat, then returned in a

W. "Jack" Smith, trader at Beechey, remote arctic coast settlement, planned to investigate the story of Eskimos they saw and heard a crash off Oliktuk, small village 140 miles southeast of Barrow "about August 30" last year. Smith expressed the opinion the natives could have been off a week in their reckoning. Muddy water and bad weather have hampered his operations this year. An Eskimo woman told him last year "I saw it with a telescope, it then submerged. Oil washed ashore later." The district is near the 130th meridian. The missing plane piloted by Sigismund Levanyefsky and carrying five others was to have flown north along the 148th meridian, a short distance eastward. Planes and pilots from three governments joined in the search last summer, fall and winter for the missing plane. Chief among the expeditions was the George Horner Wilbur, who flew the transpolar plane in a big flying boat, then returned in a