

LOVE ON THE RANGE

By NELSON C. HIX

The Story So Far

A plot is on foot to smash the Rafter T. and under another name "Blair" Ankrom takes a job there to help lovely Lee Trone. She saves his life by shooting an impostor, Kelton Dren, but he learns this only after Dren's accomplice, Betty, causes trouble between them. Ratchford, the sheriff and Claydell, a neighboring rancher, both tell Ankrom that the other is after the Trone's land. Lee's father has just learned Ankrom's identity.

Chapter 27

The Sheriff's Office

ANKROM took the old man's hand dazedly. "You mean you're figurin' to keep me on, anyway?"

"Why not?"

"But my reputation, man? You can't employ me openly!"

"Want? The hell I can't! I employ whom I please—when I can get 'em. I wish I had six more of you!"

A sudden thought struck Ankrom. His lips curled. "I see. You're hirin' me for my guns."

"Course I'm hirin' you for your guns!" Trone snorted. "You got the biggest reputation of any man in this part of the country. In my position your name's worth more to me than twenty guns an' the man to man 'em! I'm raisin' your pay."

Ankrom stopped him. "You're doin' nothing of the kind. If I stay on here I take the same pay I been gettin'. Foreman's pay. I'm not hirin' out my guns."

Trone sat down and his scowl ironed out. "Well, if you're darn fool enough to take all that risk for reg'lar pay, I'm sure I ain't the man to beller. Have you got any line on who's back of this business yet?"

"The sheriff claims it's Claydell."

Trone laughed. "Where'd he get that fool notion?"

"He says there's a railroad plannin' to lay track from Amarillo to El Paso; they'll have to cross the Rafter T. Claydell, accordin' to Ratchford, aims to build a town outside this valley some place an' persuade the railroad to bring him in homesteaders."

"Ratchford belongs in an asylum!" Trone snapped. "Who'd want to locate in this desert? An' who ever heard of a railroad bein' built here?"

Ankrom held up his hand. "Did you ever stop to think that this valley could be dammed? The resulting irrigation project would supply water for one whole of a jag of land. Think it over. Some color washed from the old man's cheeks. Ankrom let his remarks sink in, then said: "Claydell blames this trouble onto Ratchford."

Trone's eyes brightened; he sat straight up in his chair. "Now you're talkin'!" he said with conviction. "Ratchford's the man, all right. That breed would nurse a grudge till he froze over!"

Ankrom's soft laugh mocked the old man's interest. "That suits you right down to the ground, don't it? Well, it would suit me, too, I don't like Tom Ratchford none, what-ever but—like you—this thing's got me fightin' my hat. I can't tell you from down about it."

"What's Claydell say? Didn't he offer any reasons?"

"He said that a man who can be bought once can be bought again—meanin' Hefle, of course. Well, you evidently bought Hefle away from Ratchford's ol' man in that war you had here back awhile. It seems to be Claydell's notion Ratchford bought him back. Another thing he said was that an outfit who'll use sheep once will try 'em out again—he aimed that aim at the sheriff. But things like that are oily opinions."

The old, worried light had returned again to the old man's glance. He seemed tired and weak to Ankrom as he sat huddled in his chair.

Ankrom sighed. This business would have been far bad enough if a rugged, dominant man were boss of Rafter T. But with this gaunt old relic rodding the spread with a whisky bottle in his hand, he felt that the end was but around the corner.

Cause Of Action

IN ANKROM'S mind one thing stood out above all others. The force against the Rafter T was contemptuous of its owners. Were Trone the fire-eater he once had been, no man would dared have raise his hand against this ranch.

Plain to Ankrom also was the fact that if this spread were to be saved for Lee, Ankrom himself would have to be the man to save it. He could place no trust in Trone.

He suddenly resolved a course of action. The golden girl knew something; somehow he must get it out of her. "Where's that imitation Struthers dame?" he asked.

"Ratchford took her back to town with him—said he had some questions he wanted to ask her about that gambler's death."

A cold wave rushed over Ankrom; recollection clicked in his mind. With cheeks drawn taut he yanked the hall and out across the broad veranda.

Mounted on a big-boned strawberry roan Ankrom crossed the range. He let the big horse have its head and it ran with a will. When he entered town the big animal was moving at an easy jog trot.

Through a series of back streets he approached the brick building which housed the sheriff's office. One or two open touring cars were drawn up at the curb across the street, their tonneaus being rapidly filled by men carrying rifles, and from whose vests the glint of metal was reflected by the street lamps. Directly before Ratchford's office a group of horsemen were collecting.

Ankrom swung from the roan and ignoring these signs of unaccustomed activity, strode within. His glance raked the office. Three or four men were conversing here, but Ratchford's burly form was not among them. He passed down a hall that led to the cells.

A frail old man with a bunch of keys at his belt sat on a stool at the end of the passage. He rose as Ankrom approached.

"Yes, sir," said Ankrom curtly, "to speak with a prisoner the sheriff brought in. A girl."

"Yes. You mean Miss Betty."

"That's the one. Lead the way. I'm a little pressed for time."

"I shouldn't wonder, sir," the jailer said, "the posse will be leaving any minute. They rounded a corner. Here you are, sir—Number Eighteen."

Ankrom waited till the fellow walked away, then approached the bars. The golden girl's frail figure was slumped dejectedly on the tiny cot within. She did not look up but sat there drearily regarding the floor. There were dark circles under her eyes. For a moment Ankrom felt a trace of pity. "Miss Struthers—"

"Just A Stall"

SHE looked up wildly at sound of his voice; came surging to her feet and grasped the bars. "You!" she said, and Ankrom caught a note of hope leaping upward through the word. "I didn't think you'd come!" She pressed her face against the bars, reaching a hand through eagerly to grasp his own. "God bless you, Abe," she whispered huskily. "I didn't think you cared."

Ankrom held her hand uncomfortably. He dared not disillusion her. So much depended on what she might have to tell him. Hating himself for the part circumstances were forcing him to play, he patted her cold hand reassuringly. "There, there," he said. "I came as soon as I learned you'd been brought to town. What was Ratchford's idea in bring you here?"

"He overheard what I told you about the railroad. He was furious. I thought for awhile he was going to kill me—he took me away as soon as you left."

"Did he question you about Dren's killing?"

"That was just a stall."

"How?"

"He wanted to get me away from the ranch. He had to give the Trones some kind of an excuse."

She, but—

She looked in hurriedly, her eyes pleading and a warrior color in her cheeks. "I told you I shot Dren. I didn't realize—but Ratchford knew."

"Knew what?" Ankrom demanded. "What did Ratchford know?"

"He knew that you were the one who killed Dren. He told me tonight on the way to town."

Ankrom shot a quick glance over his shoulder toward the office. No danger yet. Those men out there were still talking. "When I thought you bent over Dren that night, what were you taking from his pockets?"

Her eyes flew wide. "Didn't you know? Haven't you guessed?"

"I saw you take some papers and a gun—Dren's gun?"

"Yes, I took it from the sand where it fell when he went down." She flushed.

Ankrom guessed she was thinking of how she had forced that gun upon him later, making him think it was the murder gun.

"That's all right," he said. "What was in the paper? Were they any so important you risked detection to remove them when you must have heard us running toward you?"

"I didn't want them found in Dren's pockets—they would have given everything away if the wrong person had gotten hold of them."

"Why?" Restlessness was creeping over him. He looked toward the office again and saw the men going out. Why would they have given things away?

"Ratchford's name was on them—they were I. O. U.'s he'd given Dren."

With crystal clarity things stood out in Ankrom's mind. Dren and this girl had been Ratchford's tools!

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Tomorrow: Tricked!

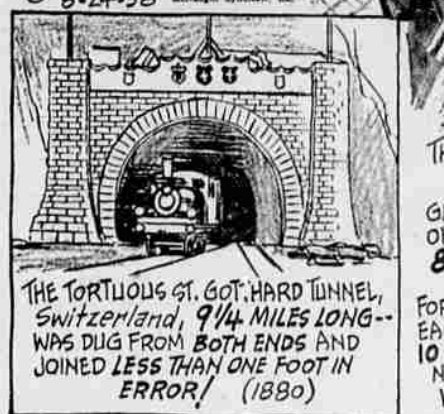
STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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

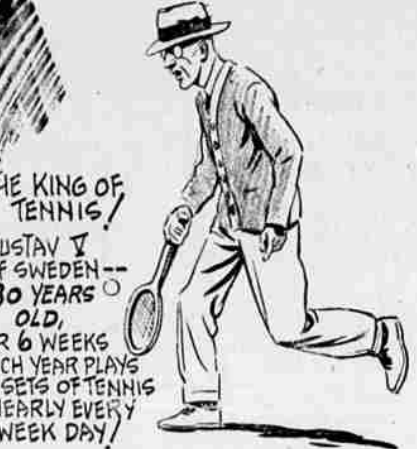


FINGERPRINTS DO CHANGE!
LEPROSY CAN ALTER THEM BEYOND RECOGNITION!

"CLAUDE PEPPER, UNITED STATES SENATOR"—
THESE PROPHETIC WORDS WERE CARVED ON A TREE TRUNK AT CAMP HILL, ALA., BY CLAUDE PEPPER, UNITED STATES SENATOR FROM FLORIDA, 27 YEARS AGO WHEN HE WAS 10 YEARS OLD!



THE TORTILOUS ST. GOT HARD TUNNEL, SWITZERLAND, 9 1/4 MILES LONG-- WAS DIGG FROM BOTH ENDS AND JOINED LESS THAN ONE FOOT IN ERROR! (1890)



THE KING OF TENNIS! GUSTAV V OF SWEDEN-- 80 YEARS OLD, FOR 6 WEEKS EACH YEAR PLAYS 10 SETS OF TENNIS NEARLY EVERY WEEK DAY!

Altered Fingerprints.
Contrary to the popular claim that fingerprints remain unaltered and unchangeable throughout life, actually they are subject to change under certain conditions.

According to the findings of Dr. Leonildo Ribeiro, Brazilian fingerprint expert, the whorling patterns which vary characteristically with the individual are affected by three diseases: leprosy, radi dermatitis and scleroderma.

The fingerprints of lepers change so greatly that it is impossible to match the prints of a leper with his prints prior to contracting the disease, Dr. Ribeiro says.

Concurring with the Brazilian expert's opinion is that of the criminologist, Gosse, who says: "Fingerprint identification amongst persons afflicted with leprosy is impossible—at any rate very un dependable. Aside from losing their prints completely, as is often the case, they may change from time to time."

Aside from these exceptions, no other known cause will change fingerprints from birth to death. Scars and operations will not make the patterns vary; in old age they are the same as at birth.

Youthful Prophecy.
Twenty-seven years ago, as a boy of 10, Claude Pepper carved these prophetic words in the trunk of a tree at Camp Hill, Alabama: "Claude Pepper, United States Senator."

Two years ago, strange as it seems, Claude Pepper was chosen to serve out the unexpired term of Florida's late Senator Duncan U. Fletcher, and in May, 1936, was returned to the senate with the largest majority vote ever given a Florida primary candidate.

Tomorrow: The city built on ice!

First Aided Saves Injured CCC Boy

KLAMATH FALLS, Aug. 24.—(AP)—Speedy application of first aid science by Dwight French, Klamath Falls high school basketball coach, yesterday saved the life of Moll McCollough, CCC youth from Ohio, at Camp Lava Bee in northern California.

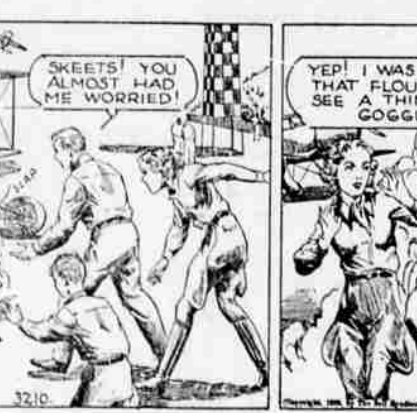
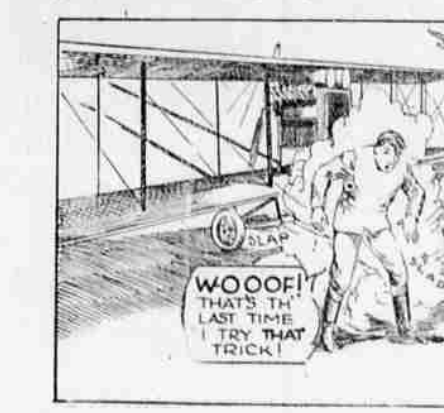
French, a ranger at Indian Wells. Use Mail Tribune Want Ads

TOWNSEND TO DEDICATE NEW TILLAMOOK HALL

TILLAMOOK, Aug. 24.—(AP)—Dr. Francis E. Townsend, founder of the pension plan bearing his name, will dedicate the new Townsend hall here August 26.

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

TAILSPIN TOMMY—Paging Betty-Lou!



BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Two Eggs!



THE NEBBS—Nellie's Children



SUBURBAN HEIGHTS

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



FRED PERLEY FEELS THAT THE NEIGHBORHOOD DISTINCTLY DOES NOT LOOK ITS BEST AT THIS SEASON OF THE YEAR WHEN MOST OF THE RESIDENTS HAVE GONE OFF ON THEIR VACATIONS, FORGETTING TO STOP THEIR PAPERS

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SMATTER POI

By C M PAYNE



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NATION'S FOOD PRICES STILL BELOW AVERAGE DESPITE SUMMER RISE

WASHINGTON, Aug. 24.—(AP)—The price of the nation's foodstuffs crept slowly upward in early summer months, but still remains well below the average for corresponding periods of 1937.

Statistics compiled by the bureau of labor statistics showed 80.2 cents bought as much food in June as could be obtained with 86.3 cents in the same month of 1937—the same amount 100 cents purchased in 1933-35.

But the same quantity of food purchased with the 80 and a fraction cents in June could have been

SAMS VALLEY SCHOOL OPENS SEPTEMBER 5

SAMS VALLEY, Aug. 24.—(Sp.)—Sams Valley schools will open Monday, September 5 with Professor Roscoe Loren as principal and Mrs. Gale Wyatt as assistant. D. D. Lowe will teach the upper grades and Miss Anna Metzger the primary room. The schoolhouse is now in excellent condition, the walls, woodwork, desks and floors having recently been completely refinished.

8-22

By SOL HESS