

LOVE ON THE RANGE

By NELSON C. WY

Chapter 30
Ripping Lead

A WIDE grin broke over Ratchford's face; his eyes began to glow. "Well, now!" he said with heavy pleasure. "That's sure too bad—poor fella." He shot a glowing look at Ankrum; tensed. Slowly his grin took on a sickly look and faded. The hand holding his pistol dropped.

Ankrum's gun was in his hand, held rigid at his thigh. How it had gotten there Ratchford could not have told but there it most certainly was, its muzzle covering the third button of the sheriff's vest. The alertness of his glance never strayed from the sheriff's mottled features.

"The responsibility for Trone's death is yours, Ratchford. It's the thing you've been strivin' to bring about for months—perhaps for years. I reckon it's time you paid."

Ratchford glared in silence. "Sheath your gun," Shadow-like, it was—just a blur of motion. Yet Ankrum's heavy pistol had been holstered. Ankrum's hand hung empty at his side.

There was a shake to Ratchford's hand as he pounced his own. Or had Ankrum botched it? "Windy here'll count three," he said. "You can yank your gun any time you've a mind to. I'll fire when Windy hits the three."

Ratchford's face appeared to pale. "You can't—I won't be no party to it!" he muttered. "I— I wouldn't stand a chance against you!"

"What kind of a chance," asked Ankrum coldly, "do you think Trone had against you an' all your hirelings?"

A tremor shook Ratchford's massive frame. "You can't make me do this! I had nothing to do with his death! It was Claydell that got him drinkin', Claydell that's been supplyin' him with booze! I had nothin' to do with it, I tell you. It wasn't me."

"It wasn't you what?" "It wasn't me that's been tryin' to smash him." He seemed to make an effort to pull himself together, as though his fears were partially allayed at Ankrum's continued inaction. "Claydell's the man you want."

"Yeah?" Ankrum's glance was sceptical. "What about that bedtime story you was spinnin' me about how you was goin' to marry Lee Trone?"

"I was only funnin'," Ankrum's lips grinned coldly. "Well, that may be so. Peel off that badge an' hand it over."

He watched narrowly while the sheriff did so. Then he pinned the bit of metal to his own vest, using his left hand in the operation.

"Now we'll stroll up front an' visit your office," he said pleasantly. "Any time durin' these proceedings you think you've got a break just make a pass at your gun an' find out for sure."

As they traversed the narrow corridor Ankrum wondered what had become of the frail old jailer. He had not seen the man since he had left him at the entrance to the cells. And the fellow was not sitting there now.

Once the sheriff turned his head to cast a look behind him and Ankrum saw the smouldering fury in his eyes. It came to him that Ratchford's momentary show of fear might well have been a sham designed to catch him off his guard, even as he himself had turned the tables on the sheriff.

He cast a fleeting glance at Windy as they gathered in the office and Ratchford closed the door. The puncher's face was stamped with an expression telling far more plainly than words that events were moving much too fast for his comprehension.

Ankrum faced the sheriff and his jaw thrust forward grimly. "Ratchford—sit down behind that desk an' get out some paper an' a pen. You're goin' to do some writin'."

"Your Resignation?" "Yeah? What am I goin' to write?"

"Your resignation from the sheriff's office. To take effect immediately."

"Are you crazy?" "We won't argue that. Get busy writin'."

"You're bitin' off considerable more'n you'll be able to chew."

"You watch my dust."

"This thing ain't over yet."

"Stock phrase. Why'n't you think up a new one?" Ankrum jeered. His cold blue eyes bored steadily into the long, smoky ones of Ratchford, who suddenly broke forth in a flood of invective. A gleam of derision entered Ankrum's glance. "Turn it off. You're wastin' steam. Get busy an' add to that paper that you're recommendin' me to finish out your term."

"You don't think that'll buy you anything, do you?"

"You do as I say an' never mind what I think. There's a number of polecats still stinkin' up this country. That paper ought to cover me long enough to get 'em exterminated. Far as that goes, this office would make a fine—"

Ankrum broke off abruptly. A knock had sounded upon the office's outer door—and Ankrum's back was toward it. He dared not turn his head for he was in a line

between the sheriff and the doc. He raised his voice: "Who's there?" "Craig," there was impatience in the answer.

Ankrum looked at Ratchford. Ratchford's grin faded in a crumpled, unrinkled forehead expressed a mighty satisfaction. "My deputy," he chuckled. "Your game's up, fella."

The calm tranquillity of Ankrum's glance was disconcerting. His buckles matched the sheriff's. "Think so? Go ahead an' call him in."

For the space of a dozen heart beats there was stillness in the office; a lack of sound that was tight with danger, wherein the clicking of clashing thoughts was almost audible; a silence strained and electric—a thing to cock one's muscles, to set one's teeth on edge.

Across this hush the two men stared malignantly, each striving to eye the other down. Slowly Ratchford's face went purple.

Ankrum was leaning a trifle forward. "Go on, Ratchford—call him in," he purred.

Ratchford choked. His lips worked several times before words came, and when they did his voice was shaken by the repression with which they were uttered.

"Go back to the men, Craig. I'll be with you in a minute."

With a short laugh, Ankrum straightened. "Shucks, Windy," he drawled. "This Ratchford's just a whizzer. There ain't no bottom to him—ain't no end in his craw."

He crossed to the desk and picked up the paper Ratchford had written and tucked it in his pocket, while Ratchford hung there tense with anger, his eyes blazing.

Ankrum sent a contemptuous glance across the sheriff's burning features. "You're not sheriff any longer, Ratchford," he said evenly, "you're just an ordinary man. As such I'm warnin' you. Never set foot again on Rafter T territory. He backed to the door with Windy; opened it.

"If you do," he finished, "I'll see that you're planted there."

The Sheriff's Star

A LARGE moon, aided by the lamp on the telephone pole across the street, made the space before the sheriff's office fairly bright. The two machines which had been parked beneath the light had disappeared. But the group of horsemen were still gathered. Most of them were in saddle, but two or three stood beside their mounts engaged in a low-voiced conversation.

These looked up at Ankrum as he walked up the street. Windy emerged from Ratchford's office.

"What's holdin' Ratchford?" called one of the group.

"He's windin' up one or two matters," Ankrum said. "He'll be with you boys in a jiffy. I shouldn't wonder."

He knew these men would not recognize him for he had not appeared in town since the day he had driven the phony Struthers in from El Paso. But some of the posse could and probably did recognize Windy.

"Better git in the car with me," the puncher muttered. "Somethin' tells me we better hump ourselves."

"Don't put on like you're in a hurry," Ankrum cautioned softly. He lit the glint of the sheriff's star where he'd pinned it on his vest; with the sight came inspiration. He raised his voice so that the posse might overhear:

"All right, fella," he said. "Don't try any of those gags on me—been in this sheriff's game since you laid the chunk an' I reckon to know all the tricks. This your car?"

"Huh? My gosh, you oughta know—"

"Get it started then. You heard what Ratchford said. I've just about got time to get into your tires!" he asked. "Ain't expectin' any blowouts, are you?"

Windy's shin got a heavy kick. "Them tires are all right. If they're good enough for Rafter T, they're good enough for the likes of you," Windy's grunter said, and jammed his foot down on the starter. With a roar the engine came awake. Ankrum thanked his gods he'd thought to borrow Ratchford's star. It was that glint of metal on his vest which so far had held the posse silent, without that star their natural curiosity might have spelled disaster.

Windy let out the clutch and the car began to roll. Just as he shoved it into second, the door of the sheriff's office banged open and Ratchford appeared with a rifle. He did not seem to pause, but dropped it at once to a knee and whipped the long gun to his shoulder.

Ankrum swore. "Here's Ratchford on the prod. Duck low an' give this can the juice!"

Windy ducked and his foot slipped on the floor.

"Zang-g-g-g! Zang-g-g-g!" The motor's roar as the car leaped forward into high drowned the reports of Ratchford's rifle, but it could not obliterate the ominous sound of lead ripping through sheet metal nor the ping-pong of bullets knocking splintered holes in the windshield's shatter-proof glass!

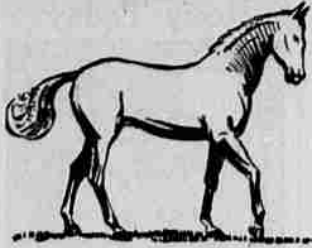
Windy's foot on the accelerator went down to the floor and stayed there!

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Tomorrow: Escape.

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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



MEMBERS OF THE HORSE FAMILY ARE THE ONLY LIVING ANIMALS WITH BUT ONE TOE ON EACH FOOT...



WASPS BUILT A NEST INSIDE A TENNIS BALL! (Found by Herbert Reh, St. Louis, Mo., 1933)



EQUADOR HAS A 2000-MILE COASTLINE, YET GUAYAQUIL, ITS CHIEF HARBOR, IS 30 MILES INLAND!



FRED SOISSON-- Hastings, Pa., sharpshooter, CAN BREAK 3 CLAY PIGEONS TOSSED INTO THE AIR AT THE SAME TIME WHILE STANDING ON HIS HEAD!

Pigeon Buster.

"Bang! Bang! Bang!" Not Redkins, but three more pigeons "bit the dust" for Fred Soisson, Hastings, Pa., sharpshooter, who was standing on his head at the time.

Soisson shoots just as consistently sitting or lying down as he does standing. Catch him flat on his back, and he can break five pigeons thrown into the air at once.

Throw a block of wood into the air and Soisson will keep it bounding—by shooting at it with a pistol—as long as the bullets hold out. Paste a

succession and established the highest score ever made in the Allegheny Skeet league. It was the third time he had ever tried his hand at the sport.

Master of any trick shot you can think up, Soisson's upside-down pigeon-busting with a shotgun is one of the most amazing feats of his repertoire.

Last year, Soisson, standing right-side up, broke 111 clay pigeons in

piece of adhesive plaster over the hole in an iron washer, then throw it into the air. Soisson will shoot a rifle bullet through its center.

Most difficult feat in Soisson's own opinion is to throw three clay pigeons over his shoulder, whirl around, and hit all three before they touch the ground.

Soisson trains like an athlete to keep his faculties sharp; he attributes much of his skill to an ability to "snap focus" his eyes from a near object to a distant one, or vice versa.

TURPINS HOLD REUNION IN JAIL

OLYMPIA, Aug. 27.—(AP)—It was "old home week" in the Thurston county jail for the Turpin family Friday night. Grandmother Ellen Turpin, 77, was held in \$500 bail for assault. Son

Jack, 38, was held for auto theft, under \$500 bail. Grandson James, 19, was under \$250 bail, charged with using obscene language.

Boat "Swims" Upstream SANTA CRUZ, Cal. (UP)—Frank C. Ekman, South Sea pilot, has perfected the model of a boat that will "swim" upstream like a fish. The boat is equipped with fins, as its sole motor power, in such a way as to take advantage of every zephyr and current, either of wind or wave, regardless of the direction from which it comes.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—Too Late Now!



BETTY-LOU IS ABOUT TO MAKE A DELAYED PARACHUTE JUMP FOR THE SPECTATORS AT THE MIAMI AIR RACES. TOMMY IS MUCH CONCERNED OVER HIS SWEETHEART, AND CONFIDES TO SKEETS THAT HE HAS A STRANGE FEELING THAT SOMETHING MAY GO WRONG.



IT WOULDN'T HAVE DONE ANY GOOD, SKEETS! CHUTE JUMPING HAS GOT INTO BETTY-LOU'S BLOOD.



KEEP YOUR EYES ON THAT PLANE, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN! IT'S GOING TO CLIMB TO TWENTY THOUSAND FEET!



FROM THAT ALTITUDE, MISS BARNES WILL BAIL OUT, MAKING A DELAYED PARACHUTE JUMP OF OVER FIFTEEN THOUSAND FEET BEFORE SHE PULLS THE RIP-CORD!



ON THE WAY DOWN SHE WILL RELEASE A SACK OF FLOUR TO MARK THE PATH OF HER DROP!

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Jippem Plans!



MEANTIME, AS RUSTY GOES JUBILANTLY ABOUT HIS BUSINESS OF BUYING CHICKENS, LET US LOOK INTO THE JIPPEN HEADQUARTERS—



—WE SHOULD WORRY IF WE LAND ALL THE CHICKEN AND EGG BUSINESS, POP—



EXACTLY! AND THAT'S PRECISELY WHAT WE HAVE TO DO, SON— I'LL SPARE NO EXPENSE!

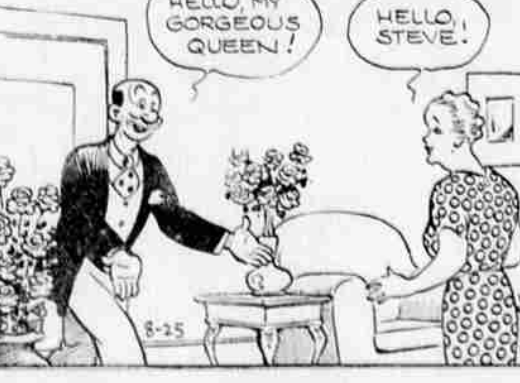


SHALL I START GETTIN' ORDERS IN TOWN, POP?



AT ONCE! CUT PRICES TO THE BONE! WE'LL DRIVE OUT ALL COMPETITION, THEN JACK PRICES SKY HIGH!

THE NEBBS—Just a Little Time



HELLO, MY GORGEOUS QUEEN! HELLO, STEVE.



IT WOULD JUST BE WRONG, NELLIE, IF A LOVE LIKE MINE COULDN'T FIND ITS WAY INTO YOUR HEART.



IT ISN'T THAT, STEVE, IT'S THE CHILDREN— THEY'RE SO OVER-INDULGED THAT YOU COULD NEVER BE HAPPY WITH THEM!



GIVE ME A LITTLE TIME, NELLIE, I DON'T BLAME THEM FOR NOT GOING MAD OVER ME— I'M NOT MUCH TO LOOK AT BUT GIVE ME A LITTLE TIME AND I'LL CUDGLE INTO THEIR AFFECTIONS.

PRINCE IN LOVE DEFIES POVERTY

OXFORD, England, Aug. 27.—(AP)—An imperious message from his sultan brother failed today to weaken the determination of a 39-year-old Malay prince to marry a young English chiroplast.

Prince Mahmud, brother of the ruler of Trengganu in the underdeveloped Malay states, was warned by the sultan he could "expect nothing from Trengganu" unless he returned home "immediately and unmarried."

The youth declared, however, he had "no intention of going home without Joyce"—30-year-old Miss Joyce Blencowe, an Oxford tailor's

daughter with whom he fell in love while studying at Oxford university. Almost penniless since crown agents for Malay stopped his allowances, Prince Mahmud said he would take any job and added he and Joyce are determined that nothing shall stand in the way of their marriage.

Arked Eugene Wields Rifle, Collector Says

EUGENE, Aug. 27.—(AP)—Arrested Friday evening by city police after she had allegedly threatened a finance company employe with a loaded rifle, Mrs. Zena Vitus, Eugene, pleaded not guilty to charges filed against her when arraigned in justice court here. She is being held in the city jail in lieu of \$2,500 bail.

Mrs. Vitus allegedly turned a .22 calibre rifle on L. C. Kirschfeld, finance company collector, when he went to her residence to repossess some household furnishings which he

DIFFICULT DECISIONS

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



WONDERING WHETHER TO KEEP ON OR TURN BACK WHEN IN SPIE OF YOUR PASSENGERS' ADVICE YOU PASSED UP A GAS STATION FIVE MILES BACK BECAUSE YOU DIDN'T LIKE THE LOOKS OF IT, AND NOW FIND THE COUNTRYSIDE GETTING MORE AND MORE DESOLATE AND THE GAS GAUGE CLOSER TO ZERO

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SMATTER POI By C M PAYNE



POP, DO ELEPHANTS GET MOTHS IN THEIR TRUNKS?



IF THEY DO, DO THEY FEED THEM MOTH-BALLS?



HOW DO ELEPHANTS ENJOY MOTH-BALLS, POP?



SMATTER?

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By HAL FOREST

By EDWIN ALGER



MEANTIME, AS RUSTY GOES JUBILANTLY ABOUT HIS BUSINESS OF BUYING CHICKENS, LET US LOOK INTO THE JIPPEN HEADQUARTERS—

By 80L HERR



HELLO, MY GORGEOUS QUEEN! HELLO, STEVE.