

# LOVE ON THE RANGE

BY NELSON C. NYE

## Chapter 31 Question Marks

THEY were just out of rifle range when Windy, via two wheels swung a corner and put the car on the smooth, wide macadam of the state highway. Ankrum saw him turn his head to voice a question.

"Keep your damn eyes on the road or we'll both wake up in hell!" Windy's head jerked front again and Ankrum said more softly:

"Straight for the ranch, Ratchford'll probably follow, so keep 'er wide open an' watch what you're doin'. We've got a pretty fair start. He won't be able to commandeer a machine right off, so we're that much to the good—see that we don't lose our lead."

"What's he up to, anyhow?" "He's after my hide. He's the gent—one of 'em, anyways—that's been tryin' to bust the Rafter T. Old grudge's still workin' on him, likely. Got a new inducement too. Some railroad's figurin' to lay track between El Paso and Azusa. Have to cross the Rafter T. Ratchford wants to cash in."

Windy whistled. "So that's what it's all about. This business sure has had me flightin' my hat. Best thing for you right now is to get clear outa the country. Ratchford'll be after you sure as Gawd makes little apples! He can hate like a injun!" "I'm a pretty good hater, myself."

Ankrum relapsed into silence. Talking was a strain on the vocal chords at the pace they were traveling.

One thing was certain, he thought; regardless of how many different factions were trying to break Trone and get the Rafter T, Ratchford certainly was one! There was no longer any doubt in his mind about it. Ratchford was doing his damndest—by hook or crook he was set on getting the ranch. And wanted Lee thrown in.

Claydell! Well, Claydell might also be striving to possess himself of Trone's domain, but what was his motive? Claydell was a big rancher—and a politician—one of the big men in this country. It would be a mighty risk for him to dabble in this business; a much greater risk than was Ratchford's, since he had more to lose than Ratchford.

Claydell was suave—a cool customer. If he went after something, as Ratchford was going after the Rafter T, his chances of success would be realized could be in a better position to start Trone on the down-grade than could Claydell—a trusted friend.

Four-Square And Upright  
LEE had told him of many little things the boss of Swinging J had done to help her father at various times; the man, according to Lee, was four-square and upright.

He'd met such prodigies of virtue before. Usually if one dug deep enough — Ankrum softly swore. Claydell was top-hand stuff; there was no sense nor fairness in letting Ratchford's charges and insinuations fill him with suspicions of the man. Why, at one time and another, so the boys had told him, Lee and Claydell had been spoken of as a pair who'd soon hitch up an' travel in double harness.

Ankrum grimaced. Why, he was old enough to be her father! Well, almost, anyway.

Yet he had to admit that as a suitor Claydell would be bound to be attractive. Like Ratchford, the fellow was magnetic, likeable; a good catch for any woman. He was successful in his business, he held good prospects for the future. And the fierce vitality of his dark and lean-carved face—As a friend, Claydell would be in a strategic position to bring about Trone's downfall. Ankrum scowled. Those insinuations of Ratchford's, he could not get them out of mind.

He had thought when they'd stepped from the sheriff's office that this shove against Rafter T was over. He'd bluffed Ratchford to the wall, forced him to step out of office. By all the rules of tradition Ratchford should now be hunting himself a hole.

But he wasn't! He'd got his teeth in Rafter T now and wasn't aiming to let go till death grabbed him by the ankle. And even then, the burley ex-shepherd would likely do some powerful kicking.

Ankrum started for the futuburner enough to hang on till hell freezes an' then try an' skate across the ice! But he's out in the open now, an' he won't have the law to back him up."

"Who yuh talkin' 'bout?" yelled Windy. "Ratchford, Hey! Keep your eyes on the road!" "I'll bet he's mad enough to chew the sights off a six-gun! He won't be layin' down again."

"This thing ain't over yet, Ankrum grinned as he remembered that these had been Ratchford's words. "We're goin' to have to hire more men an' cartridges. Now that this business is in the open it'll be shoot first an' ask questions later an' hell for the guy that ain't lookin' in!" It may make Tonto Basin look like a picnic 'fore we shake Ratchford loose. Now Trone's out of the way an' he's got a taste of blood, he'll throw the hooks to Rafter T hard. We're goin' to play hell with Trone's bank account."

"Not much we ain't," snapped Windy. "There ain't no Trone bank account—bunch of damned coyotes cleaned the bank plumb out today!"

"What?" Ankrum half rose from his seat.

"I said it, Lee tol' me tonight right after I bring the ol' man in. That's what she was goin' to town for—Ratchford sent her word."

Ankrum sank back heavily in his seat. Here was a blow beneath the belt! No need to wonder was this robbery just coincidence—it happened at much too bad a time for Rafter T, not to have been planned deliberately. This robbery bore the mark of a more subtle hand than Ratchford's heavy paw. This was the balanced stroke one might expect of having emanated from a mind like Claydell's.

No Motive  
ONE thing only kept Ankrum on from considering the cold suave boss of Swinging J as the chief menace. He could find no apparent motive strong enough to lure or force the man into risking all that he now had. He could find nothing which the man might possibly gain that would be commensurate with his losses should he lose.

To be sure, Ratchford had claimed to have found that thing which Claydell was after. But had the former sheriff actually made such a discovery, or was this but another of his smoke screens designed to further Ankrum's belief in the rancher's possible guilt? The devil of it was that so much might be hanging on the issue. And upon his correctly gauging it. If Ratchford alone was responsible for the calamities descending so steadily upon the Trones, things would indeed be sufficiently bad. But if Claydell, too, was having a hand in them, one might as well admit that Rafter T was licked. He and the three hands might possibly hold off Ratchford and his unofficial posse if it came to an open fight, however, as long as their supply of ammunition held out. But Ankrum and Trone's punches could not fight off the whole damned county!

Ankrum's chin sank momentarily forward upon his chest. It was hard, he told himself, bitter hard to know what a fix Lee Trone was in and to realize at the same time that he could do nothing toward alleviating matters.

Then abruptly his chin came up and out. His grim jaws squared, and he set his teeth together, causing the muscles beneath his tawny skin to stand forth like stiffened ropes. He could not successfully combat the united forces of this country—but he could make a damned good try!

Ratchford when he had left the Rafter T with Betty Struthers that afternoon, had not gone directly back to town as he had informed Trone he intended doing. He had gone first to the Swinging J. Claydell had him badly worried. This, coupled with the humiliation he had suffered before the Trones at Ankrum's hands, had put the man in a vicious temper. He denounced the golden girl for a scheming hellcat, a double-crosser. She had reminded him of his own business, calling anyone a double-crosser after the way he had treated her. Accordingly, when they reached Claydell's ranch, neither of them could have been described as being in a jovial mood.

They dismounted before the porch. Claydell met them at the door.

"You came to apologize perhaps for the accusations with which you connected me with Dream's death?"

With an effort Ratchford ironed the scowl from his features and essayed an answering smile. "Yeah," he said. "I've discovered that it was that Streeter bird who blowed out Dream's light. Miss Struthers, here, saw him fire the shot."

"Well, that's something," Claydell's tone was non-committal. "Have you arrested him yet?"

"Not yet. But I will soon's I gather me a posse."

"Posse? To arrest one puncher?" he drawled.

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Ankrum faces Claydell, tomorrow.

## Wife Seeks Prison To Soothe Husband

LOS ANGELES, Aug. 29.—(AP)—If Allen Pirigly, up in Poleson prison hears how hard his wife, Josephine, 24, tried to get sent to prison too, maybe he won't hate her, as she fears.

After Pirigly was sentenced for stealing an automobile trailer, his wife began to try to get officers to send her to prison.

"I'm as guilty as my husband, and if he is in prison and I am not," she said, "I know he will hate me."

Finally Mrs. Pirigly was allowed to plead guilty to grand theft charge but probation officers intervened against her to a year in jail. Mrs. Pirigly was angry and disappointed.

Blocked Crossing Costly  
PHILADELPHIA, Aug. 29.—(AP)—The U. S. circuit court of appeals ruled it was unlawful for a freight train to block a crossing in Lancaster county and hold up firemen 20 minutes while Mrs. Mary Felter's home burned. The court adjudged the railroad negligent and upheld a \$3,833.33 judgment in favor of Mrs. Felter.

## State Medical Aid For Indigents Near

PORTLAND, Aug. 29.—(AP)—A state-wide plan for medical service for Oregon indigents was approved Friday by the state relief committee.

Described as a pioneer move in the United States, the program will provide competent medical, dental and hospital service for the needy under supervision of the state committee, with cases cleared through county relief committees.

Counties and the state will share the cost. The plan included a schedule of fees considerably below the usual charge made by physicians, dentists and hospitals.

Brakeman Dies  
NEWBERG, Aug. 29.—(AP)—William A. Laughlin, 40, Portland, railroad brakeman, was killed Saturday when he fell beneath a train in the yards here.

Reward of Crime  
ASTORIA, Aug. 29.—(AP)—Garwin Diehl, charged with assault with intent to rob in connection with the shooting last December of John Jackson, service station operator, pleaded

# STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOHN HIX

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"SHADOW-BOXER" A ROBIN "SPARRED" WITH ITS OWN REFLECTION IN A PHILADELPHIA WINDOW PANE FOR 3 WEEKS! -1935-



Amazing in the manner in which it overcomes seemingly impassable natural barriers is the railroad of the Central Railway in Peru, world's highest standard gauge railroad. Winding, creeping, and doubling back over and around precipitous cliffs high in the Andes, trains on this line enter a tunnel that pierces the very heart of a mountain of solid granite.

Through the larkness the train charges, then suddenly it emerges into the blinding daylight only to find itself hurling across the spiderweb framework of a steel bridge spanning a wide chasm through

which tumbles a river of icy-cold water. Then, as suddenly, back into another mountain the train puffs, to continue its eccentric journey up into the clouds. The bridge is known as Puente del Infiernillo—Bridge of the Little Hell.

Fingerprint Diary  
Although fingerprint experts agree that there are no two sets of fingerprints exactly alike Frank B. Prucnal, of New York City, has a complete file of more than 400 sets of prints—all the same.

The prints are his own, taken daily since June 24, 1937, as a hobby.

Prucnal plans to continue taking his prints for the next 90 years.

Desert Jungles  
Strange as it seems, all jungles were once deserts! Although the present meaning of the word, "jungle" is a tangled, impenetrable mass of vegetation, the Sanskrit, "jangala," from which "jungle" is derived bore the meaning of a dry wasteland, or desert, just the opposite of what jungle means today.

Tomorrow: What two famous explorers passed within 100 miles of each other in the "New World" without knowing the other man existed?

"That's pretty good," said Medway. "Discharged."

Deny Pastor Called  
MOSCOW, Idaho, Aug. 29.—(AP)—The official board of the Church of God here denied today a report the church had issued a call to the Rev. Charles Buckle, of Albany, Ore., effective Sept. 1. The church said a call had been issued to an unnamed California minister.

# HOME FROM CAMP By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



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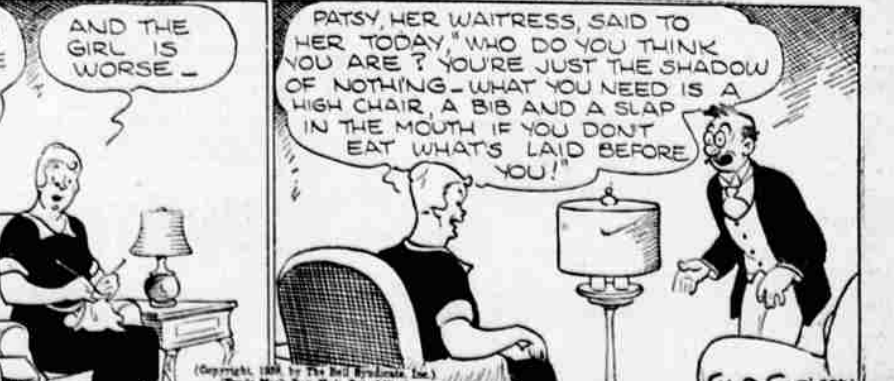
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## BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—Other Plans!



By EDWIN ALGER



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By SOL HERSH