

LOVE ON THE RANGE

BY NELSON C. BYE

Chapter 33 Sudden Death

THIS, Ankrum told himself, as in the darkness he turned back toward the fireplace, was the very thing he had ridden into this country to avoid—murder, battle and sudden death. Yet he had found them even as he knew he would. Reaching above the mantel for a rifle it came to him that a man cannot escape his destiny.

Not that it mattered, he told himself. Since Lee Trone had flung those words at him across this room and turned her back, he no longer cared. He'd deserve the words she'd used on him, and more. His censure was for himself.

The rifle was a repeater. He examined it and found the magazine full. His wide lips pulled downward grimly as he crossed the moonlit floor and crouched beneath a window. A glance across his shoulder showed him Claydell at another; there was the glint of a six gun in the rancher's hand.

With the barrel of his rifle, Ankrum knocked the glass from the lower sash. Jerking his hat-brim low, he peered out across the yard. Some two hundred yards away a pair of touring cars were drawn up in a loose V, its apex pointing toward the house. Bursts of yellow flame blossomed magically in the darkened space beneath.

"Reckon they're all behind those cars?"

"I doubt it," Claydell answered. "They got into position mighty quick, but not so quick I didn't see two shadows flittin' away—one to either side. Those two will flank my men and drive 'em into the house. You wait 'n' see. Ratchford savvies this Indian game better'n any gent I ever met. We'll have our work out for us."

"How many men you got out there?"

"Let's see... five. Countin' Bandera."

"How many men you figure there is with Ratchford?"

"I'd say eight or ten, anyway." "Didn't you cut your string pretty short?" Ankrum's tone held a note of mockery.

"You're thinkin' I was kind of tight on men. Well, I wasn't at all sure Ratchford was plannin' to strike to-night. I only brought my bunch to be on the safe side. I don't see now how it is Ratchford's raidin' here, 'stead of over at my place. He knows he'll have to smash me first."

"He was comin' here for me," Ankrum explained, and showed his rifle across the sill. "Still, you posted your men outside with orders to open up as soon as Ratchford showed. How come you did that if you weren't expectin' him?"

"I told you—was figurin' to play safe. If Ratchford came I was ready for him. If he didn't, there wasn't any harm done in bein' ready." Claydell leaned closer to his window, peering out into the drifting shadows. "I wish they'd get out into the open where we could pick 'em off."

"You needn't worry about Ratchford stickin' too close to shelter. He's in no mood for cautious fightin'. Right now he's feelin' meaner'n a new-sheep."

"You talkin' to keep your courage up?" Claydell sneered. "If you ain't then shut up! I want to hear the music, I've tried for a good many years to make Ratchford get into pullin' something like this."

"Ratchford's land appeal to you, too?"

A Rush
BUT at that moment a bullet knocked glass slivers from the upper sash of Ankrum's window. At that moment also, he sighted a forward-creeching figure edging forward from the black shadow of the cars. He elevated his rifle's muzzle just a fraction. His finger squeezed the trigger—the crawler ceased all movement.

Ankrum cuddled his weapon's butt against his shoulder and waited for another target. "You wantin' Ratchford's land, too?" he repeated. "Must be damn' valuable dirt in this country. What's in it, anyway—diamonds?"

"You wouldn't be doin' so much scoldin' if you knew what I know," Claydell answered emphatically. "Trouble is with you, you don't use even the one brain you been equipped with."

Before Ankrum could find a sufficiently scolding rejoinder, a deafening lull became apparent in the sound of cracking rifles. "Well, you were right for once, at any rate," he said. "This won't last much longer. They've driven your coyotes off."

"Not off," Claydell corrected. "Just inside. They'll be with us in a second."

The prescribed second had hardly passed when two men entered from the hall. Their faces as they entered were in shadow, lit by their gear. Ankrum picked one for Bandera. He'd known the Mexican would not be hurt—the

fellow was far too careful of his hide. Bandera swore when he recognized Ankrum by the moonlight that was streaming in the windows. The Mexican's companion said: "They got Tim, Ed an' Baldy sloped."

Claydell continued his watchful scrutiny of the yard. Abruptly Ankrum realized that someone was crouching at his side. With sidelong glance he attempted to determine who. What he saw brought his head full around. Anger marked his voice:

"You can't stay out here! D'you want to get shot?"

"I'll do as I please in this house," Lee Trone answered defiantly. "Kindly tend to your own business."

Ankrum scowled at her through the semi-gloom. Always, he was thinking, they had had to clash. His scowl grew blacker as he observed a gun in Lee's right hand. She was not looking at him now, but at something behind him. He saw her gun start up. Letting go the rifle he flashed a glance across his shoulder.

Across the room Bandera was crouched, one arm above his head. From something in his back-flung hand the moonlight struck silvery gleams. Ankrum hurried himself aside as that unmissable hand snapped forward. With a chuckle a knife buried its point in the sill behind him; a flame lanced out from Ankrum's hip, and from the gun in Lee Trone's hand.

Bandera sprang, reeled sideways and crashed down on the table. Claydell's oath, as lost to the startled cry of Bandera's companion:

"Quick! They're makin' a rush!"

Reconciliation
THE man's warning had come too late to stem the tide of Ratchford's rush. The outer door bulged beneath the onslaught of a battering log. With a shriek of rending wood the door was torn from its hinges and smashed to the floor as Ratchford's wolves came surging in with blazing guns.

Ankrum's heart thudded crazily against his ribs, as brushing Lee behind him, he thumbed swift shots into the huddle of crowding men showing dimly in that open doorway. Shouting, cursing, Ratchford's crew came swarming in, and the moon-dappled murk was illumined by criss-cross stabbing streaks of flame.

Ankrum did not know his gun was empty, it on smiling useless brass. Bandera's aim, unerring of his side caused him to slip a freshly-loaded pistol.

Then through the gloom a towering, rocklike form thrust up before him. There was no mistaking the man's burly figure.

"Tom Ratchford," Ankrum breathed, and whipped his weapon up. Yet even as his thumb released its hammer, he saw Ratchford's big shape lurch sideways—fall sprawling to the swift trip-hammer beat of Claydell's gun from the opposite window.

Drawing a deep breath, Ankrum looked down. A bar of moonlight poured liquid silver across Ratchford's heavy face; revealed his working lips as, stubbornly, the dying man strove to speak.

Words came at last in a broken whisper: "Claydell... was after... oil."

"Damn you to hell!" swore Claydell, and flame burst redly from his hip.

Ankrum's voice crossed the silence raggedly: "That was a dog's trick, Claydell!"

Through the murk of smoke and shadow the rancher's tall, lank form stood stiff.

"Now!" said Claydell, and his gun belched flame again.

A burning shock seared Ankrum's side, but he kept his feet. "Not good enough," he muttered. Claydell's hand was shaking now. Ankrum could hear the bullets shrill; could hear them chunk! into the wall behind him. He shot coldly from the hip—just once. Claydell crumpled, stretched motionless on the floor.

Then everything went black. Minutes later he opened his eyes to find his head pillowed on something soft. He turned his head a little, realized that it was resting in Lee Trone's lap. He tried to struggle up, only to find that her arms, clasped about him, would not let him rise.

Something hot and moist fell on his face. Tears! Lee Trone was crying.

"Why, ma'am—" he began, but she broke in, and there was unimagined tenderness in the low, throaty murmur with which she asked:

"Oh, Abe—why did you make me love you, so?"

A tremor ran through his body, the blood pumped furiously through his veins. "You—you don't—you can't mean—?"

"Of course," she said smiling through her tears at his incoherence. "I've loved you all the time!"

THE END

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS—By JOE HIX

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

CLAR OF TRAGEDY!
NICHOLAS II--last Russian Czar DROPPED THE GOLDEN SCEPTRE AT HIS CORONATION -- THEN OVER 3000 PERSONS WERE KILLED AT HIS CORONATION FESTIVAL -- 489 OF HIS OFFICIALS WERE ASSASSINATED OR WOUNDED -- HE LOST HIS FLEET TO JAPAN -- HE LOST HIS THRONE IN THE RED REVOLUTION -- AND, WITH HIS ENTIRE FAMILY, WAS HIMSELF MURDERED IN 1918!

THE ANGLER FISH'S ENORMOUS TEETH CAN BE DEPRESSED AT WILL TO ALLOW SMALLER FISH TO SWIM INTO ITS MOUTH!

ROY FLAGG BOWLED 870 IN 3 SUCCESSIVE GAMES!
1906-
8-31-38

AN OIL WELL FIRE-- at Tampico, Mexico, WAS SO BRIGHT NEWSPAPERS COULD BE READ BY ITS LIGHT 17 MILES AWAY! IT LASTED 2 MONTHS... -1908-

Czar of Fate
The unfortunate reign of Nicholas II, last of the Romanoff dynasty of Russian rulers, began most inauspiciously in May, 1889, when the Czar dropped the sceptre from his right hand at his coronation in Moscow. Then, at the Moscow festival of his coronation, more than 3,000 people were crushed to death through the negligence of officials who had arranged for a distribution of bouquets. These events were regarded by Nicholas with an attitude of mystic resignation.

As if they were part of a huge scheme to dog Nicholas' life with tragedy, a series of deaths, assassinations, political setbacks and military losses followed with startling regularity.

Of his immediate family, Nicholas' father had died of injuries received in a train wreck—trying to save Nicholas. His brother, George, died from an injury received in a wrestling match—with Nicholas. He had witnessed the assassination of his grandfather.

In 1907 his former Minister of the Interior, Sipyagin, was assassinated. In 1908 the same fate befell his President of the Court of Ufa and his President of the Police of Bjalostok.

The next year a terrorist bomb took the life of Plehve, his Minister of the Interior; in 1905 his President of the Police of Kiev was assassinated. Throughout his reign 489 of his officials were either murdered or injured.

Nicholas lost his Pacific fleet to the Japanese in the Battle of Tsushima in 1905. During the Red Revolution in 1917 he lost his throne and next year his own life and those of his wife, his four daughters and his son were taken in Siberia.

Tomorrow: How do birds "stake out" a new nesting territory?

Confederate Army Stages Last Camp
COLUMBIA, S. C., Aug. 31.—(AP)—Reveille at dawn and a salute to the flag opened today what in all probability will be the last encampment of the Confederate army. Officials estimated about 500 veterans would attend.

The joint conventions of the confederated southern memorial association and the sons of confederate veterans are being held here at the same time.

G.O.P. Leader Dies
VENTURA, Cal., Aug. 31.—(AP)—George A. Newell, Jr., chairman of the California state Republican assembly, died last night in a hospital here after a stroke of apoplexy. He had been ill for two weeks. Newell, a stock broker, formerly was mayor of Ventura.

TAILSPIN TOMMY—Anxiety!

JUST AS BETTY BAILED OUT OF THE PLANE AT AN ALTITUDE OF 20,000 FEET, INTENDING TO MAKE A DELAYED "CHUTE JUMP OF 15,000 FEET BEFORE PULLING THE RIP-CORD, A DOWNDRAFT CAUSED THE SHIP TO PLUNGE AND SHE STRUCK HER HEAD AGAINST THE TAIL ASSEMBLY OF THE CRAFT.

RENDERED UNCONSCIOUS BY THE BLOW, BETTY PLUNGES EARTHWARD!

ANY MOMENT NOW MISS BARNES WILL RELEASE THE FLOUR TO MARK HER DOWNWARD PATH!

I DON'T SEE ANY FLOUR! WHERE IS SHE?

I SEE 'ER! I SEE 'ER!

SOMETHING IS WRONG! GOOD LORD! SHE ISN'T CUTTING LOOSE WITH THE FLOUR!

GREAT SCOTT! WHY DOESN'T SHE DO IT?

BEN WEBSTER'S CAREER—News

RECKON I'LL CHECK WITH MR. SAXTON FIRST—HE OUGHT TO HAVE A LINE ON THINGS—

FOR PETE'S SAKE, BEN, DON'T MENTION CHICKENS OR EGGS TIME! LET'S TALK ABOUT SOMETHIN' PLEASANT!

WHAT'S HAPPENED, MR. SAXTON?

THAT! EGGS IS SO HIGH I'M EVEN AFRAID TO PUT THE PRICE OF 'EM ON THE SIGN!

BEN WEBSTER, THE EGG AN' CHICKEN BUSINESS O' THIS TERRITORY IS IN THE HOLLOW O' ONE MAN'S HAND—AN' THE CRITTER'S NAME IS JUNIUS JIPPEM!

THE NEBBS—Nothing Doing

WELL, CHILDREN, AREN'T YOU BEGINNING TO LIKE STEVE NEBB A BIT?

OH, MOTHER, BE SERIOUS! WHAT IS THERE TO LIKE ABOUT HIM?

HE'S SHOWING YOU THE BEST SIDE OF HIMSELF. THERE IS ANOTHER SIDE YOU HAVEN'T SEEN YET—AND BESIDES HE'S NO ORNAMENT TO ANYBODY'S HOME UNLESS YOU'RE COLLECTING ANTIQUES!!

DON'T DAD LEAVE ENOUGH MONEY FOR YOU TO GO TO EUROPE AND PICK UP SOME SORT OF TITLE? YOU'D GET A LOT OF NEWS-PAPER PUBLICITY AND THE GIRLS WOULD PAY SOME ATTENTION TO ME AT SCHOOL.

SUBURBAN HEIGHTS

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

MRS. PLUMER, GOING OUT FOR THE DAY, HAD GIVEN HER KEY TO MRS. LAPPET, IN CASE HER HUSBAND SHOULD COME HOME BEFORE SHE DID; AND MRS. LAPPET, BEING CALLED OUT, HAD LEFT A NOTE SAYING SHE WAS LEAVING THE PLUMERS' KEY AND HERE WITH FRED PERLEY, AND FRED HAD FORTUNATELY GOTTEN ALL ABOUT IT AND DONE TO THE MOVIES.

GLUYAS WILLIAMS
8-30

SMATTER POT

By G. M. PAYNE

OH, HELLO AMSTRODE!

HOW COME YAR DOIN' THAT?

HOW COME I'M DOIN' WHICH?

WALKIN' BACKWARD!

OH, MY MAW TOLD ME I DASN'T GO ANYWHERE!

Oh-h-h-h!

Tomorrow: How do birds "stake out" a new nesting territory?

By HAL FOREST

OFFICERS SLAY PAIR OF GUNMEN

INDIANAPOLIS, Aug. 31.—(AP)—Two gunmen were shot to death in a wild exchange of gunfire with three deputy sheriffs in southeastern Indianapolis today.

Without warning, the gunmen opened fire on the deputies, who had halted to investigate a taxicab in which the men rode. The officers proved to be better marksmen and felled the men, one by one. None of the deputies was struck.

Deputy Robert Harritt said the gunmen registered at a hotel yesterday as Earl Lindsay and William Davis, both of Council Bluffs, Iowa.

In the list of one of the men was written the name "A. V. Bradshaw of Pecos, Okla."

In the gunmen's automobile, parked in the hotel garage, were a rifle, two sets of Arkansas license plates and a police tag.

Harritt said he and the other of-

BIG EVERETT SAWMILL DESTROYED BY FLAME

EVERETT, Wn., Aug. 31.—(AP)—The big mill of the Old Crown Lumber company, since 1903 a Puget Sound landmark, exploded into flames this morning and was almost completely destroyed when a workman, engaged in removing machinery from the plant, dropped a cutting torch. Loss was estimated at between \$75,000 and \$100,000.

The mill was constructed by the Mukilteo Lumber company, an affiliate of the Clark-Nickerson company of Everett. In 1909 it was taken over by the Nelson Steamship lines and was in constant operation up until about seven years ago, having a capacity of over 250,000 board feet a day. For the past seven years it has been idle.

Use Mail Tribune Want Ads

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