

WHISPERING ROCK

by JOHN LEBAR



NINTH INSTALLMENT

Old Charley was explaining his purchases: "You see, I hunted all over town but I didn't have no luck with habits like you wanted. I could have got one outfit but it didn't look like it would last long so I got you there."

Ruth opened the package and found three pairs of overalls with short jackets to match. There was a bright copper rivet at the beginning of each seam. She rolled them up hastily.

"Most everybody in this country wears them," said the old man. "They ain't fancy but they're good riding clothes."

Old Charley took another package from the car with some embarrassment. "I had some money left, Mrs. Warren, and I figured I'd add something to your outfit." He paused soberly. "I think you ought to have this—never can tell when you'll meet up with some—some varmint or other—coyotes, snakes and such."

Old Charley had unwrapped two heavy little boxes and now took from the side pocket of the car a large revolver. "This gun's one of mine—she's a dandy—I'd like you to have it, Mrs. Warren." There was a quiet sincerity in the old man's voice which seemed to tell the girl clearly that she should have the weapon.

"Why—thank you—I—heavens! I'm scared to death of it!"

"Here, take it."

Ruth took the gun gingerly.

"I brought along an extra box of shells," said Old Charley, "and we're going to have some target practice right now—when once you learn how to handle a gun, and won't be scared of it—you'll find it a heap of comfort."

And Ruth did find comfort and a satisfying thrill, when after the fourteenth consecutive shot she sent a forty-five bullet through the lid of David's hat box at a distance of twenty feet. At about the thirtieth she found that she could keep her eyes opened, and became really interested. Already the heavy black gun seemed not a terrifying monster but a powerful friend. Ruth's spirits rose.

"Well, practice is what does it," remarked Old Charley; then quickly "but I wouldn't practice much around the home ranch if I was you, Mrs. Warren." He paused and added significantly, "I don't know as Jap Snively would like it—you might hit a horse or something."

Then for an hour Ruth discussed ranching with Old Charley. She soon found that the son, too, was much interested in the subject. Ruth suspected that Will Thane had gone to the city to be educated and to make some money, and that having done both his thoughts were turning toward the country and the work he had known in boyhood. Several times she saw his eyes fixed on the mountains or gazing into the valley in the manner of one looking upon good things.

And during all of his talk—from the first two minutes after old Charley's arrival, Ruth Warren knew that her father was not even going to answer her letter. He must have received it, or it would have been returned. Almost she wished that she had not been suspicious of Snively that morning five weeks ago. If she had not taken that second letter to the box herself, while Snively was off somewhere destroying the first, she could not blame the lack of an answer on to him and without losing caste with herself write another. But she would write no more letters. Her people were not interested in her; very well, she could take care of herself. Her pride told her that this was best—she would not have cared to have Old Charley, for example, know that she had cried for help.

When Old Charley and his son had gone, the girl boosted David onto Sanchez and led her own horse to the gate. She paused, as her hand touched the fastening bar, and looked for a time at the crudely lettered sign. She had just put on a light coat with deep pockets—the right-hand pocket sagged heavily with the weight of its contents. She thrilled with the comfort of this weight and pressed it against her side. It added greatly to her growing sense of power; she knew many worthwhile things about ranching, and she could shoot a revolver. Suddenly she dropped Brisket's reins, picked up a stone and hammered the sign off the gate.

"Just what kind of a situation is that, Dad?" Will was asking, as ancient Lena bore them over the hill to the south of the gate.

"Danged if I rightly know," replied Old Charley. "I'd like to ask her some things straight out—but oh, hell, she knows what she's up against and she ain't the kind that wants their private affairs nosed into."

"No, I can see that," replied Will thoughtfully.

"Cute kid," remarked Old Charley a moment later.

"I'll say so! How in the world she ever got out here—" Will paused abruptly. "He is a nice little fellow, all right, and what a kick he got out of that hat! He seems to be taking to the life—"

"Yeah," interrupted the father, "a very cute kid."

Ruth awaited the opportunity and finally cornered Snively late one afternoon by the door of the saddle shed.

"Mr. Snively. I mentioned at our last talk that I was going to write for capital to improve the ranch—I-it seems that there will be some delay."

Snively smiled sourly.

"But," continued the girl hastily, "I am sure that we can do a good deal without capital. First, I understand that the rains are expected about the end of June—less than a month away. You say that the big watering pond will carry us over,

but that all the feed will soon be gone in that neighborhood. If we do have rains won't the other ponds which are in down in the meadow lands be filled?"

"Maybe," he shrugged, "but they ain't deep enough to hold it long—"

"Then the thing to do is to have them deepened before the rain comes, don't you think so?"

"Where are you going to get the money for diggin' 'em out?"

"Well, that should be possible—let's say that we deepen the three lower ponds. You say there's one hundred and fifty-one dollars in the bank; we could get a couple of Mexicans from that little border town—Palo Verde—for about four dollars a day. And we have the plow and horses and Fresno. If the money won't be enough we could pay them off with an old cow or two—they'll do anything for fresh beef you know."

Snively shook his head. "Since you come we'll have to spend that money for more grub."

"Oh, I hardly think so. I've taken an inventory of what we have and I think it will last a long time—if we don't hold any banquets or celebrations," she smiled.

Snively looked at the girl curiously.

Ruth hardly paused for breath. "So let's get at the ponds right away. Now, then, as we're going to have plenty of water we should get some more stock. I should think it might be possible to get a few head—say about two hundred more cows and at least twenty young bulls by swinging some sort of a dicker with some other rancher—"

Snively did not speak for nearly a minute. At last he said slowly, "You're gittin' onto a heap of things ain't you?"

"I'm doing my best, Mr. Snively—this ranch is going to be a real ranch some day and we've got to think of everything and take advantage of everything which will help us."

"Well, while you're thinking of everything, suppose you think of what will happen if we don't get no rains this summer."

"Well, I once knew a man who had lived in this country for more than sixty years and he said that nobody can tell anything about the weather. So you can see we can't shape our course very clearly on experience. But we can go ahead as though things were going to be as they usually are. And of course we must have the ponds deepened anyway—even if we don't try to get more cattle just now."

Snively regarded the girl through half-closed eyes. "Say, jest what do you think you know about this country, anyways—do you figger you can tell me how to run this ranch? You don't know nothin'; you can't tell a waterin' trough from a rowboat. You been here a couple o' months an' you aim to tell me how to run a twenty-thousand acre cow ranch. If you think you can head me the way you want me to go, think again! I offered to buy you out fair an' square once, an' you didn't have sense enough to take me up. All right, I'm a mind to take back that there offer an' let you bump into a few things. Before a month's out you'll come beggin' me for train fare out of here. If you're so set on improvin' things, fly to it!"—he thrust his face forward—"but don't figger none on me; this ranch is like I want it now!"

Ruth was white, but she answered evenly as she turned to walk away, "very well, Mr. Snively. There's only one thing for me to do now."

Snively let her take perhaps a dozen steps, then, "What did you say? What's that you're aimin' to do?"

Ruth stopped and faced him, her heart pounding. "Mr. Snively, I am going to improve this ranch. You are my partner and it's one partner's duty to help the other. I don't pretend to know much about this work, but I know a great deal more than I did, and I do understand the general principle that to make improvements we have got to begin. If you feel that we should go on as you always have, then you and I do not agree and we shall have to ask for outside help to settle our difficulties. I have certain rights on this ranch and I shall go into town next mail day and consult a lawyer. I wanted to go in with you and get some legal advice in the first place—"

"Now, listen here, pardner—" Snively walked toward her. His attitude had changed. "I've already told you there's no legal advice needed. Your will is all straight an' I recognize it. That's all that's necessary—if you didn't have no right here"—his voice rose shrilly—"if you didn't—" He choked back his words and for a moment was silent, then—"Look here, we can't stand no fussin'. I'm a queer one all right, you probably think— and you're probably right, but I'm

your pardner and we've got to work together. The objections I had to your schemes awhile back was just because they didn't seem possible. But I see now that you're right in one thing. We got to get a start on improvement. All right, let's tackle them represas. I'll go to Palo Verde to-morrow and by next day I'll be back with a couple of cholos. And we can start in, Mrs. Warren, fix up the ranch—only it's got to be possible—it's just got to be possible."

In spite of Ruth's victory her knees could hardly support her on the way back to the adobe ruin. Somehow the fact that Snively had agreed to do as she wished made her fear him the more. He knew now that she was not going to be

easy to handle; what would he do next? She did not believe that he would mildly subside.

As David was outside earnestly endeavoring to rope a rooster with a miniature riata, Ruth unlocked her trunk and took a comforting peek at the ugly black revolver. She wished she could practice more with it. . . . After a time she relocked the trunk and moved her chair near the doorway where she could keep an eye on David, and watch the sunset shadows steal past her into the distant valley. The old oak tree spread its protecting arms—a faithful, gentle guardian. . . .

CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The crocodile lives to be about 100 years old.

Studies of certain Mexican cactus plants are being made to determine whether their drug properties can be exploited commercially.

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What the Indirect Lamp Means To Everyone

Every home needs an indirect portable lamp because there is no lighting equipment in the home, generally speaking, which is designed to provide illumination for SEEING. The indirect lamp provides those characteristics in illumination which unfortunately, are not usually found in present day home lighting. These characteristics are, an adequate QUANTITY of light which assist our eyes in the process of seeing, and high QUALITY illumination which is entirely without glare or high brightness.

This lamp will provide illumination for the entire room. No matter where a person may sit in the room, the illumination will be unobtrusive and pleasant. If your chair places you in a position so that you face the lamp, you will not experience any glare or brightness. Thus a group at one or more card tables will have plenty of light for all players. There is no more perfect light available for card playing.

This is also true for reading, sewing, studying or similar activities where the eyes are called upon to exert themselves for close work for either short or extended periods of time.

According to the Eyesight Conservation Council, 30% of the children of grammar school age have defective vision. Only 5% of the children of pre-school age have defective vision which is a strong indication that the eyes are overworked and abused during the school age. Poor home lighting is one of the greatest factors in causing this appalling condition.

Many may feel that the bulb used in this lamp is excessively large. In offices, factories and other places, lamps of 200, 300, 500-watt and larger are used in large numbers to provide a high level of illumination. To produce an adequate quantity of illumination large wattage lamps are necessary. Heretofore, we have not had available a lighting fixture or portable lamp for the home which could use 200 and 300-watt lamps. Small lamp bulbs are excellent for decorative fixtures and in small portable lamps which provide a decorative effect and illuminate a small area around the lamp. To provide light for easy, comfortable, and safe seeing, the indirect lamp admirably fills this need.

The indirect portable lamp is the greatest contribution to better seeing and safeguarding eyesight since the invention of the electric incandescent lamp.

This lamp is inexpensive to operate. It costs only one cent per hour on our Residential Schedule No. 1. Three hours of comfort for the eyes, greater enjoyment in reading and more efficient studying for the cost of mailing a letter!

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This is the least expensive and most effective insurance against defective vision that you can buy. It is infinitely less expensive than Doctor's bills or the price of a pair of glasses to say nothing of the headaches and other discomforts that are incident to eye-strain.

Don't prepare your children for a gift of a pair of glasses for their graduation present! An indirect lamp for their studying now will mean more to them than the most expensive gift you can buy for them at graduation. You can afford to buy one of these indirect lamps at the low price and easy terms we are offering, but you cannot afford to risk the precious eyes of yourself or family.

You can never buy another pair of eyes. Aren't they worth preserving for only one cent an hour while you are using them for close work.

Seeing is a partnership of lighting and vision. One is dependent upon the other. Most of us have been endowed with good eyes yet we hinder our seeing because of poor light. The indirect lamp will remedy this situation.

Leading optometrists and physicians enthusiastically recommend the indirect lamp for preserving good eyes and for saving and assisting poor eyes.

Southern Public Utilities Company

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