

WHISPERING ROCK

by JOHN LEBAR



TWENTIETH INSTALLMENT

Mr. Martin gazed thoughtfully at the ceiling above Ruth's head. Presently he asked, "Did this man know that you were the only beneficiary of your brother's will?"

"He didn't even know about me until I came to the ranch. I suppose after we'd talked he found out there was no one else—I told him my share was three-quarters. He read the will, too."

"Then I think we might attempt to solve the riddle in this manner: the man may have thought that since you were rather new to ranching he could perhaps encourage you to sell him your interest—" Ruth nodded confirmation, and Mr. Martin continued: "He could have given you a cash payment for your holdings, and you might have gone away, assuming that everything had come to a satisfactory conclusion."

Ruth hesitated. "Has my so-called partner committed any crime in not telling me that I had no right on the place?"

The lawyer pursed his lips. "No crime, exactly, but it should be plain to any one what his motives were."

"What ought I to do?" asked Ruth.

"I think, if I were you, I should tell him that you have consulted an attorney and that you intend to have the will probated. Once that has been adjusted, I do not believe anything further will be done; except of course, the selling of the ranch and the division of the proceeds according to both interests."

"Oh," Ruth smiled uncertainly as she stood up. "That's a relief. I think I'll be going now. I'll decide later just what I want to do. What do I owe you for your advice?"

Mr. Martin smiled slightly. "You owe me nothing—but here is my card. I rather feel that we shall meet again."

She found David and Will waiting at the machine. During the rest of the afternoon, which was spent at a moving picture show, and later at dinner, Ruth's mind was busy. It was maddening, that the first time she had been able to leave the ranch and enjoy herself, she could think of nothing but the ranch. She imagined that Will did not notice her preoccupied manner.

This thought was easy in the lighted restaurant, humming with the voices and laughter of many people. But twenty miles out of town—the roadster throbbing into a wall of blackness which never lifted—Ruth's part in her imaginary conversation with Snavelly became less aggressive.

By the time the car was entering the arroyo east of the barn, Ruth had grave doubts about saying anything, whatever, to Snavelly. His desire to have the ranch and to be by himself amounted to a mania—what would he do if she were to tell him that the ranch was to be sold? And she was eighty-five miles from help.

"How long did you say you and your father were going to be away?" asked Ruth, as Will drove past the barn.

About a week. We're leaving tomorrow morning and expect to be home again next Saturday evening."

As they were helping David, who was more than half asleep, out of the car, Ruth thanked Will for the trip. Then said hesitatingly, "I wish you and your father would come over soon—I can't promise you a very cheerful dinner; but—"

"Fine!" Will interrupted tactfully. "You set the day and we'll certainly raise the dust getting here."

"Well, how about coming over the day after you get back—Sunday?"

Will nodded. "That'll be all right. We'll show up about noon."

"I wonder—" Ruth paused.

"What?"

"I hate awfully to admit it, but I lost your father's revolver—it was buried when the old house fell. I wish you'd try to get me another

like it in Los Angeles. Could you? He's asked me once or twice why I didn't wear it when I went riding, but I didn't want to tell him."

"Good Lord! Is that all you've been worrying about? Well, forget it right now! Dad's lost more than one gun in his time—as a matter of fact, he was forced to give one or two of 'em away. Sure, I can get you one. But say, you should have said something about this before. Here—" Will drew a revolver from the pocket of the car—"keep this until I see you again."

Ruth took the gun without much urging. She stood watching while he turned the car about. He leaned from the seat, "We'll see you next week—good night."

As she answered, Ruth saw the slowly moving lights swing toward the gulch, and gasped; Snavelly was standing near the fence, partly concealed by a bush.

She ran back to the house. What had Snavelly been doing in the vicinity of the gulch? As she stood on the dark porch Ruth suddenly decided to find Ann.

She knocked on the giant's door.

After a moment Ann slowly opened it. A low-turned lamp burned in the room. She had taken off her shoes and shirt.

"Oh, are you up yet? I just thought I'd tell you that we've come back. Have you been reading, Ann?"

"No. I can't read."

"But why are you dressed? Have you been anywhere?"

The huge woman lowered her eyes and slowly nodded.

"Ann! Have you been down to the rock?"

"I got to go—down there—something." Her eyes darted fearfully in the direction of Snavelly's door and her voice dropped to a husky whisper. "Oh, Gawd, Miss Ruth—you take yo'r little boy an' go 'way from this place!" Ann stepped back and softly closed the door.

Snavelly eyed her cautiously when at breakfast, Ruth gave him the packet of notes which represented his share of the cattle sale. There was something oddly apologetic and inquisitive in his voice as he asked, "Didn't have no trouble in payin' off the note, did you?"

"Oh, no," answered Ruth, as she seated herself at the table. She was thinking of the money she had just given Snavelly—it had not been earned through any effort of his.

"Nice sort of feller, that Witherspoon," he remarked, guardedly.

"He seemed pleasant," said Ruth. That morning Snavelly did not ride; he stayed in the neighborhood of the corrals. More than once Ruth saw him watching her.

After the noon meal, Ruth went to the corrals and caught up Brisket and Sanchez. To her surprise, Snavelly came from the blacksmith shop and helped her saddle the horses.

"Goin' for a ride, eh?" he asked with a strained smile.

"Yes; the mail. Today's Saturday."

"I was jest gettin' set to go down that-way, myself. I'll be startin' directly."

"Perhaps David and I will see you then," replied Ruth.

Snavelly did not speak for a moment; then said casually, "No use in you goin'—without you're set on it. I can bring the mail."

Ruth ignored this suggestion and helped David to mount.

As she and David rode along the faintly marked road, the girl's mind was busy. The situation on the Dead Lantern was drawing to a climax; it seemed to her as though the very air was tensely charged.

Since the evening before, Ruth had definitely connected Snavelly with the voice in the gulch; he had been standing there by the fence when she and Will came home, and Ann had heard the voice that same evening. She tried to recall Snavelly's whereabouts on the occasions when the voice had spoken. At first she told herself that the man had two or three perfect alibis—yet, were they? Did she know positively that he had gone to Palo Verde on the night of the storm? One thing certain, he had not brought back any Mexicans. And that evening when she and Kenneth and David had first come through the gulch, Snavelly had apparently been milking at the barn—yet, Ruth had never known of his milking since. True, he always avoided going through the gulch as though he were afraid of it. But that did not prove that he had nothing to do with the voice. Perhaps he went around, merely to give her the idea that he was afraid. She began to feel that the only thing which definitely mitigated against Snavelly being responsible for the voice was that the legend of the whispering rock was very old—there was no getting around that. Every one knew of

the legend; even Don Francisco had heard of it as a boy. She determined to explore the gulch.

But Ruth did not explore the gulch that day. In the mail was a letter addressed to J. B. Snavelly. In the upper left-hand corner of the envelope was the business head of the broker, Witherspoon.

Snavelly had evidently changed his mind about fixing the gate. He was near the saddle shed when Ruth and David returned. Ruth nodded to him but made no other answer to his questioning eyes, until she and David had turned out their horses. Then Ruth walked up to Snavelly, the letter in her hand.

"Well, here it is," she said, looking him full in the eyes.

For an instant, Ruth thought he was going to pretend surprise, but he suddenly began to laugh. It was a desperate laugh, somehow horrible; yet the laugh was meant to convey that he was greatly tickled, as though he had a tremendous joke on Ruth—a friendly joke in which he expected to be joined. Ruth did smile.

"Dogged if this ain't th' beat-in'st!" Snavelly exclaimed. "You see why I done it, don't you, pardner?"

Ruth had not been wholly sure of what Snavelly had done or why he was receiving a letter from Witherspoon, up to the time he began to laugh. Now she said very soberly, "I hope I know why you did it, Mr. Snavelly."

Snavelly swallowed twice before he spoke. "Well, I was aimin' to tell you jest as soon as it was settled. Last month when you did get enough cattle money an' met the note, I jest figured I'd let you go ahead an' pay it anyways, an' then surprise you." His lips smiled.

"If I had not been able to meet

my note, Mr. Snavelly, is it not true that you would have had my entire interest in the ranch?" asked Ruth quietly.

Snavelly spoke glibly. "Not at all, Mrs. Warren. Such a thing ain't possible because we're pardners. Parker or anybody else could have took your interest away from you if you couldn't pay the note. But not me; I'm your pardner."

It was a moment before Ruth could reply. She saw the deadliness behind the man's eyes. . . . if she could only keep him good-natured until next week. "It was very thoughtful of you," she smiled; "it's nice to know I was safeguarded all the time. Well," she turned, "it's all over now; the note is paid and the ranch has been improved."

"It sure has," replied Snavelly. He watched the girl as she walked toward the ranch house his pale eyes fastened on the retreating figure, suspicion and hatred mingled on his face.

The next morning after breakfast Ruth entered her room. She sat for a time looking at her trunk, thinking. Suddenly she rose, unlocked the trunk, and took out the

Quaker Oats box on which was scrawled, "for liver fever." Going into the kitchen, she asked Ann to keep an eye on David for an hour, and taking up a potato and a paring knife, left by the front door. Sugarfoot greeted her and for a moment the girl looked down at the little dog. Once more, she asked the question which had never been answered, "Sugarfoot, why didn't you die when you ate the meat Ann poisoned?" Sugarfoot wagged himself knowingly.

CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

SAYS FARMERS FEEL BETTER
J. Frank Porter, of Columbia, Tenn., a director of the American Farm Bureau Federation, said today he found hope had replaced despair among American farmers.

Porter, at Chicago for the convention of the federation, attributed the new spirit to belief that the administration's farm program would succeed.

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The Home of Good Pictures

Today and Friday—

"Shanghai Madness"

— with —
SPENCER TRACY

Universal News Adm. 10c-25c

Friday and Saturday—

"The 3 Little Pigs"

This feature film will be shown with both the Friday and Saturday Shows.

NEXT WEEK

Monday-Tuesday—

NICE WORK
if YOU CAN GET IT!

He has the best job in town, and makes the most of it!



"HER BODYGUARD"

Jealous Broadway Romeos hire him to protect their girl-friend... from each other... the longer the hours, the more he loves his job!

A Paramount Picture with
EDMUND LOWE
WYNNE GIBSON EDWARD ARNOLD
a B. P. SCHULBERG PRODUCTION

News — Comedy — Cartoon
Admission 10c-30c

Saturday—

He thought his own home an enduring structure—only to find it made of glass and love a shattered illusion!

Jack HOLT.

The WRECKER

with GENEVIEVE TOBIN
Sidney Blackmer
George E. Stone

Directed by Albert Rogell
A COLUMBIA PICTURE

Also "THE THREE LITTLE PIGS"

Serial — Comedy Admission 10c-30c

NEXT WEEK—Wednesday—

FAMILY SHOW

Admission Only 10c

SPECIAL—CHRISTMAS DAY—

ROOMERS AND RUMORS FOLLOWED HER ALL OVER PARIS!

GIRL WITHOUT A ROOM

A Paramount Picture with
CHARLES FARRELL
AND **CHARLIE RUGGLES**
MARGUERITE CHURCHILL
GREGORY RATOFF • WALTER WOOLY
Directed by Ralph Murphy • Chas. E. Rogell Producer

Coming Tuesday, December 26th—
ONE DAY ONLY

"THE GOLDEN HARVEST"

Coming Thurs.-Fri., Dec. 28-29—
THE 4 MARX BROTHERS in
"DUCK SOUP"

COMING IN 1934
Jan. 1-2—
"TAKE A CHANCE"

Jan. 4-5—
Eddie Cantor in
"WHOOPEE"

Beware the Cough or Cold that Hangs On

Persistent coughs and colds lead to serious trouble. You can stop them now with Creomulsion, an emulsified creosote that is pleasant to take. Creomulsion is a new medical discovery with two-fold action; it soothes and heals the inflamed membranes and inhibits germ growth.

Of all known drugs, creosote is recognized by high medical authorities as one of the greatest healing agencies for persistent coughs and colds and other forms of throat troubles. Creomulsion contains, in addition to creosote, other healing elements which soothe and heal the inflamed membranes and stop the irritation and inflammation, while the creosote goes on to the stomach, is absorbed into the blood and attacks the seat of the trouble.

Creomulsion is guaranteed satisfactory in the treatment of persistent coughs and colds, bronchial asthma, bronchitis, and is excellent for building up the system after cold or flu. Your own druggist is authorized to refund your money on the spot if your cough or cold is not relieved by Creomulsion. (adv.)