

# WHISPERING ROCK

by JOHN LEBAR

## SEVENTEENTH INSTALMENT

**SYNOPSIS:** Ruth Warren, living in the East, comes into possession of three-quarters interest in an Arizona ranch, left to her in the will of her only brother, reported to have died while on business in Mexico. With her ailing husband and small child she goes to Arizona to take possession, thinking the climate may prove beneficial to her husband's weak lungs. Arriving at the nearest town, she learns that the ranch, "Dead Lantern," is 85 miles across the desert. Old Charley Thane, rancher and rural mail carrier, agrees to take them to the "Dead Lantern" gate which was 5 miles from the ranch house. As they wearily walked past a huge overhanging boulder in a gulch in coming to the ranch house, a voice whispered, "Go back! Go back." Ruth's husband, caught in a rain shortly after their arrival, contracts pneumonia and passes away before medical aid can be brought. Ruth, penniless and without friends, attempts to carry on but is balked at almost every turn by the crafty and plotting Snaveley. Despite obstacles of all kinds Ruth gives her notes on her ranch interest to purchase cattle. She is assisted by Old Charley Thane and his son, Will Thane. A Mexican family has been hired to assist with the work. A peculiar sickness develops with the livestock. Snaveley calls it "liver fever" and says he has a powder for the water to cure the disease. Ruth's whole future is at stake on the development of the herd to meet her notes following the first round-up.

## NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," whined the voice, "but I just can't open it."

"Well, why can't you open it—your arm broke?"

"I'm taking a bath," said the voice sweetly.

This was too much. Old Charley planted the sole of his boot against the door with all the force in his body. The door flew inward and Will Thane stepped to the threshold. "Come right in, Dad—I know you'll tell some day."

Old Charley sat down slowly on the box, utterly heedless of the wash basin. After a time he murmured mournfully, "If you was only ten year old again for about half an hour!"

Later, after he had eaten Will's supper, the old man was somewhat mollified. "Will, you ornery pup, danged it this ain't the happiest day I've seen. And you've already been here a month. You son-of-a-gun, prove up on your homestead. And you've all through with real estate—Plumb through?"

"Plumb through, Dad. Turned everything I had into cash a month ago. Cash'll come in handy when we buy that section south of us here and pick up some more stock."

Old Charley nodded happily. "I always knew you'd be comin' back some of these days. But what have you been doing here the last month? Sleeping most of the day, I reckon. I never saw you so fat an' glossy."

Ruth slowly awoke and saw that it was still dark. She wondered idly why Ann was moving about in the kitchen so late, and was luxuriatingly slipping back to sleep when she heard the thump of boots, as Snaveley came from his room and walked across the house to the kitchen. Suddenly Ruth knew that it was morning—the long-awaited morning when the round-up was to begin. As she rose and struggled into her riding clothes, the great weight of anxiety which had lifted during her sleep settled back upon her. The round-up—would there be enough cattle?

In the two months since she had accidentally placed poison in the spring troughs no new horns had come to the cattle—but were they enough to meet her note? Her desire to find the answer to this question increased with each day, but she could not estimate the number of salable animals scattered over the ranch; she could not give an intelligent guess about weights and quality and price. She only knew that she had lost more than a tenth of the value of her note.

Then, too, if her deal with Parker was to do the ranch any good, only the poorest of the cattle could be sold—only the steers and the old cows. The rest of the stock and the fine bulls must remain for the improvement of the ranch. Ruth could not see much advantage in selling all the cattle to keep the man Witherspoon from foreclosing on the note—what good was there in three-quarters interest in a cattle ranch with no cattle—or, in a ranch which only brought in fifteen hundred dollars a year?

She left David sleeping and went into the dining room. She and Snaveley breakfasted silently by lamplight, then went to the corral.

It was just light enough at the corral to distinguish one horse from another. The six Mexican cowboys were waiting by the gate, each with

a cigarette in his mouth and a rope or bridle over his arm. Snaveley indicated to each of the men the horse he was to ride for the day. The Mexican entered the corral, caught his mount, and led it to the stable shed.

Ruth Snaveley and the Mexicans rode into the north pasture. About three miles from the ranch house Snaveley gave each man his orders, then rode away to the west. To Ruth he had said nothing, nor could she understand much of what Snaveley had told the Mexicans. She stayed where she was, on a hilltop. The men, she supposed, would ride west and distribute themselves along the line fence through the mountains. They would then all start eastward, driving the cattle before them.

She waited two hours on that hill-top before she saw the first cattle coming. Two miles to the north an antlike string moved over a ridge and disappeared into a ravine. A moment later, and much nearer, she saw a small bunch of cattle emerge from the underbrush followed by a man on horseback—Snaveley, she thought. By the time the first two bunches were opposite her, three more were in sight and she turned her own horse eastward. She soon came upon three cows, each with a calf, and drive them before her. Just where she was driving them she had no very clear idea, but she could see that the other riders were converging toward a common point and governed herself accordingly. This point proved to be a level piece of ground about half a mile from the eastern end of the pasture.

The nine small streams of cattle merged, flowed on, and were thrown into an eddying pool by the circling riders. Two of the men left at once, loping to a ravine where mesquite was plentiful. When they returned, dragging firewood at the end of their riata, the cattle were in a close-packed bunch, and the remaining riders sat their horses at intervals around the circle. Snaveley, Alfredo Don Francisco and one of the extra Mexicans, kicked off their chaps, and building a fire, laid on the branding irons. Ruth and three Mexicans kept the herd together, meanwhile.

When the irons were hot Snaveley motioned to the grizzled old Juan, who left Ruth's side of the herd and advanced into the center of the milling cattle, swinging his riata.

Ruth had her hands full. With only three riders to keep the herd in place many of the cattle decided to break away. Every ten seconds it seemed to Ruth, some animal on her side of the herd would belt. She had abandoned old Bisket for such active riding in favor of Boots, a springy young horse with an alert mind and a thorough knowledge of the cow business. He enjoyed running after animals that broke from the herd—Ruth rather suspected him of egging them on.

Such riding is exhilarating sport for half an hour—rather like the fastest moments of a fast polo game, but in three hours it can be wearing.

When all the calves had been branded the herd was driven to the holding pasture, a small enclosure of one thousand acres. As the cattle passed through the gate the counting began; one man counted calves; another yearlings, another grown steers, and a fourth, cows.

The count was over and the riders were returning to the home ranch when Ruth rode up beside Snaveley. "Well, how does it look?"

"How does what look?" replied Snaveley.

"I mean—do you think we're going to have enough? Weren't there a good many calves and young steers in that bunch?"

"Can't tell nothin' yet," said Snaveley gruffly. "I don't know if you're goin' to have enough or not. As a guess I'd say you ain't."

"I have it all figured out just how many we—"

"You figured, I reckon, that a quarter of the sale don't apply on that fool note, didn't you?"

Ruth drew herself straight in the saddle. "Certainly, Mr. Snaveley."

She rained in her horse and dropped back between Alfredo and old Don Francisco. The Mexicans pulled their horses aside to make room and with many smiles and chuckled began talking to her. They loved to hear her broken Spanish. By the time the company reached the stable shed, Ruth had learned that Don Francisco considered the cattle large and fat and the calves plentiful. He also succeeded in conveying to her the results of the count.

That evening Ruth studied these figures in connection with others she had gathered in her conversation with Old Charley and her studies of the cattle raisers' magazine. But she went to sleep as undecided as ever. The round-up would take four days and if on each of these days the count ran as high as on the first, and if on one of those days about one hundred extra animals should appear, Ruth knew that she could meet her note. Provided, of course, that Old Charley had guessed shrewdly about the prices the cattle buyers would be

paying. . . .

Ruth never knew how she got through the fourth and last day of the round-up. Twice, after the cattle had been gathered and the branding began, she left the herd and rode into the foothills. But neither time did she see a single overlooked cow or calf.

She stood biting her lower lip and pulling at her saddle strings as the counting began. There simply must be more than one hundred and twenty head, she kept telling herself—there just had to be!

As the last of her cattle passed through the gate, the counters drew together and Ruth rode up. She listened as each man gave his count to Snaveley and wrote the figures in her notebook with trembling fingers: 32, 15, 44. Twice she added the column before she was sure that the total was 151. Then with a slap she whirled her horse and galloped toward the ranch house. Her cheeks were wet and she sang a throaty chant to the pounding hoofs: "I've won! I've won!"

That evening after supper while David and Ann were making the chickens secure against skunks and coyotes, a futh put on a gown she had not worn for more than a year and did her hair three times.

When David came in he asked, "Why are you dressed up so beautiful, Mama?"

"Oh, just because," Ruth did not quite know herself, but she was convinced it was the thing to do. "I think we ought to celebrate once in awhile, don't you, David?"

"Like a party?"

"Rather, yes."

"Mama! Let's go down to the barn—they've got a nice fire there and Alfredo's playing music. Shall we? Come on!"

Ruth grasped the boy's arm and led him guiltily out of the house by way of the back porch. Snaveley was in the sitting room.

The Mexicans sat around their fire, talking, laughing and singing, as the mood and the ever-active strings of Alfredo's guitar persuaded them. When they saw Ruth, wonder shone from their faces, their admiration and pleasure. They all sprang to their feet, but Don Alfredo was first.

Ruth smiled, went to the fire and spread her hands. "It is cold," she said in matter-of-fact Spanish. Immediately Francisco bowed her welcome and hurried to the barn for one of his rawhide chairs. But when he returned Ruth had seated herself on the ground next to Magda. She was not going to be the only one of the group who sat on a chair, gown or no gown.

Gradually, it became apparent to the Mexicans that the Senora Ruth and her son had merely come to the fire for warmth and company. Delightedly, they assured each other of this by smiles and nods. Little Magda sat closer to Ruth, and made her own importance felt among her companions by speaking exclusively in English, thereafter.

Suddenly Ruth had an inspiration, and with many pauses and appeals to Magda for the right word she made a speech: "My friends, we have worked and gathered many cattle. The round-up has been good. I think we will have a celebration—una fiesta grande. Some of you have friends in Palo Verde—bring them and the mothers and children. On Saturday we will cook a cow."

(CONTINUED NEXT WEEK)

## CAMPUS CHATTER FROM A. S. T. C.

By TRAUTS NOMRAC  
Both the freshmen and varsity football teams chalked up another victory each for this season. Tuscum was mercilessly beaten by a margin of 20 to 3.

Mr. Harris, former appraiser for the Federal Land Bank, spoke to the student body recently on his experiences in Africa. He used the question and answer method with much success. When he asked the student body to write and give to the ushers any question they particularly wanted answered, he soon found enough questions to keep him busy for an hour or more. Time did not permit his answering all, however.

This quarter closes with a top registration mark of 865. If the number of new faces we see is any basis for a guess, we feel sure that the one thousand mark will be reached this winter.

The number of teachers expected to return after Christmas will be far less than formerly, because of the new eight-months school law.

Do women live longer than men? Get the answer in an absorbing article in the Baltimore Sunday American, issue of November 26. Buy your copy from your favorite newsboy or newsdealer.

## Wins at Last



McAlister Coleman, of Radburn, N. J., author, who for years has run for offices of U. S. senator, state senator, congressman, alderman, state legislator and council, always on the Socialist ticket, was "written in" and made Justice of the Peace. He says he will serve.

## FILLER IN FERTILIZERS COSTLY TO STATE FARMERS

Filler material used largely in low grade fertilizers and consisting principally of sand and other inert material is costing North Carolina farmers about one million dollars a year.

This startling statement was made recently by Dr. Oswald Schreiner of the United States Department of Agriculture in urging before manufacturers the use of a smaller number of grades and a minimum plant food content of at least 16 per cent. In asking that filler material be eliminated, Dr. Schreiner said estimates by the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils indicate that in normal years 900,000 tons of filler are used in mixed fertilizers, involving in North Carolina alone an additional cost of \$1,000,000 to farmers.

In contrast to some other states where the minimum plant food content is 24 per cent., North Carolina has for more than 20 years used fertilizers with an average of only 14 per cent. of actual plant food and the use of worthless filler is increasing.

It is felt by extension workers of State College that not only should North Carolina farmers plan to improve their soils this fall by the use of legumes and by terracing and other good farm management practices, but they should at the same time, begin to give serious consideration to their plant food problems. Not always is the cheapest fertilizer the best or the most economical fertilizer. The use of sand as a filler should especially be protested against.

Progressive growers in some sections have lately begun to demand limestone as a filler. This acts as a supplement to the other plant food and has a beneficial effect on the soil, where the dolomitic form of limestone is used, it has no detrimental effect on the fertilizer mixture.

## PLAN YOUR POULTRY WORK FOR THE COMING YEAR

The rising costs of poultry feed and the rapidly widening spread between the price of eggs and chickens as compared with the price of this feed, does not permit or any laxity in the management and planning in 1934.

In addition to the rising costs of all poultry feed, the grower is confronted with heavy storage holdings in both poultry and eggs.

"There is no certainty that the prices of poultry products are going to increase sufficiently to compensate the grower for the increased price he must pay for feed, therefore, he must make a careful study of all factors entering into his production," says Roy S. Dearnstyne, of the poultry department at State College.

In the first place, Dearnstyne points out that chickens inherit the capacity to lay eggs therefore the grower wants to select his breeding birds from those which lay the greatest

number of eggs in a year. If production does not exist, it cannot be put into the birds by heavy feeding or excellent care, as important as these are. Where a grower does not have birds which produce eggs profitably, he should buy some baby chicks this winter from flocks which do produce profitably.

In the second place, dole feeding never paid any poultryman, Dearnstyne says. If best results are to be secured the birds must be well fed with the proper elements. Home grown feeds should be used if available.

Constant and careful culling will aid in keeping the flock profitable. Disease prevention is also important. Finally, the local market should be thoroughly canvassed for underdeveloped outlets. Graded eggs sold to the first class boarding houses or hotels will pay more than ungraded and dirty eggs, Dearnstyne says.

## IDAHO RESIDENT PROUD OF NORTH CAROLINA

Editor Democrat:  
Three cheers for North Carolina I received with much pleasure news of the great odds by which the people of my old home state saw fit to vote against the proposed repeal of the

18th amendment to the Constitution of the United States.

No doubt that there will be a great upward trend in business in North Carolina from now on as many of the good people of the nation will cast their lot with you. The action taken was a real advertisement for your State. The eyes of the people are upon you.

Enclosed you will find check for renewal of my subscription to the Watauga Democrat. Keep it coming. —B. O. GREER.

Rupert, Idaho.

Silage stored in a trench silo by T. T. Foster of Caswell County is in excellent condition and is keeping just as well as that stored in a vertical silo.

## THREE MINUTES TO RELIEVE INDIGESTION

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