

WHISPERING ROCK

by JOHN LEBAR

FIRST INSTALLMENT

Old Charley Thane snapped off the ignition with a thick, square finger. Cautiously, the decrepit car rolled forward into the only vacant space on the street and stopped, its front tires snugly against the curb. The curb was painted a faded red; and across the sidewalk was the entrance of the post office. Leaning his big forearms on the wheel, the old man gazed disinterestedly at the sidewalk glaring in the morning light of the Arizona sun. Behind him clattered the street traffic, its progress occasionally interrupted by the loose-jointed ringing of the semaphore suspended above the intersection half a block away.

A pair of legs clad in khaki serge trousers wandered casually to the front of the car. Old Charley's gaze awoke. "Morning, Chief," he said moodily, lifting his eyes to the other's face.

"Howdy, Chet," replied the policeman in a soft drawl. He glanced speculatively at the car and inquired, "How's coughin' Lena a-feelin' her oats these days?"

Old Charley sighed. Leaving the car in gear, for the emergency brake had long ago retired from active service, he eased his unwieldy body to a standing position on the pavement and vindictively slammed the door. "Not so good, Buck. Not so good. Top half of the windshield fell out on the way in."

"A body'd think," remarked the

necessary to shake hands with Old Charley and this man stopped him with, "Hello, Sheriff!" Whereupon an elderly couple at the money order window exchanged a significant glance, and an old-timer—who never lost opportunity to lament the passing of the good old times—opined to a neighbor that, when Charley Thane was sheriff of this here county, sheriffs had a heap more to do with posess than foreclosure sales.

When Old Charley returned to the street, carrying a large government mail sack weighted with two letters and a post card, a young couple and a five-year-old boy were standing uncertainly in the strip of shade close to his car. Discomfort and bewilderment enveloped the three as one person. The little boy was tightly moored to his mother's forefinger and the hand of the husband was very near that of his wife. Old Charley's lower lip bunched slightly with his thought of "Pshaw, now!" as he noted the face of the slender young man; he had seen many such faces new to Arizona.

"Are you Ol—Mr.—Mr.—" the young man paused and looked toward the girl at his side.

"Thane," she supplied, "are you Mr. Thane?"

Old Charley smiled, his eyes on the girl. He observed to himself that she was pretty, high toned, and mighty warm. "Yes," he said aloud, "I am Old Charley Thane."

A tension relaxed. "We were told by a police officer," said the young man hesitatingly, as though expecting his word to be cut short at any moment by a cough, "that you were going to a place called San Jorge, carrying the mail. We were told that you occasionally carry passengers."

Old Charley nodded. "Yes, I can take you out that way. Where 'bout are you going? San Jorge is a pretty big valley."

The husband laughed shortly. "We are trying to get to a farm and the post office address is San Jorge."

"A ranch, dear, not a farm," said the girl, "a cow ranch—the Dead Lantern ranch."

The eyes of Old Charley narrowed incredulously. He hesitated for a moment. "Ar you real certain it's the Dead Lantern you want to go to?"

The young man glanced inquiringly at his wife, then at Old Charley. "Why, yes—there is such a ranch, isn't there?"

"Yes, there's a Dead Lantern all right."

"The ranch we want to visit is called the Dead Lantern and the address was San Jorge," spoke the girl; "it was formerly owned by Mr. Harry Grey and a Mr. Snavely. Mr. Grey died recently. Do you know of the place and can you take us there?"

"I go by the front gate, Ma'am."

"Excelent. Perhaps if we start soon we shall be in time for luncheon? We can send in for our luggage later this afternoon, I suppose."

Old Charley did not miss the tone in which this was spoken. Also, he

did not miss the fact that she regarded him as a taxi driver. "If you want to go," he supplied, "I'd be glad to take you, but it's eighty-five miles to the Dead Lantern and the road's nothin' to brag on. You can get them to put up a lunch for you in that ice cream parlor over there. And if we can get your baggage on this car we'd better do it. There's no machine on the Dead Lantern and I only make one trip a week."

"Eighty-five miles?" The girl caught her breath. "Surely there must be a train—Isn't there a town nearer than this?"

"No'm. There's a spur track from Mexico that runs about thirty miles from the ranch but they only use it at cattle shippin' time."

The young woman looked from her husband to Old Charley. "Do you mean that this ranch is eighty-five miles out in the wilderness and there isn't even a machine on the place?" Her voice was tremulous.

"That's about the size of it, Ma'am."

"But how do they get to town?"

"They don't come in so very often."

"Kenneth—" The girl appealed to her husband with questioning eyes. For a long moment the two young people faced each other.

Then with a shrug of helplessness the husband turned to Old Charley. "We didn't understand



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policeman, nodding toward the yellowish stencil on the side of the car, "that so long as Uncle Sam's got his U. S. Mail brand on her he could afford to give the old girl a truss or somethin'."

Old Charley grunted assent and stepped upon the sidewalk. "Seem's like Congress, just don't have the time to get 'round to anything important."

The two men remained motionless on the curb. At last the officer slightly shifted his position, then asked, "Anything new over your way?"

Old Charley considered carefully. "Things are mighty dry," he admitted.

His friend of fifty years nodded. "Grass got a bad deal last winter—bad as the year I lost out."

"Bad," corroborated Old Charley. "Dry spring so far, too. Come a dry summer, and us cattlemen'll do well by the buzzards." This burst of conversation had apparently exhausted the two of further talk.

"What do you hear from the boy?" asked the officer suddenly.

Old Charley brightened. "Found a letter when I got in last night. Will's doin' fine, he tells me. Los Angeles real estate's as good a way to make money as any, I reckon. He'll be comin' home in a month or two for quite a spell—thinks he can maybe stay over to help me work the cattle in the fall."

"He's goin' to forget to go back some of these days."

Old Charley's eyes shone, but he said cautiously, "Things might work out that way, sure enough."

The policeman looked into his friend's face. "That sign still up at the Dead Lantern?"

"Still up."

The two regarded each other for perhaps a minute. "Well," said the policeman, "this single word expressed admirably that the policeman had been very much pleased to see his old friend; also, that he had enjoyed the conversation and hoped to see Thane again soon. Old Charley made complete reciprocation with a nod, and left the glaring sidewalk for the somber light of the post office.

The place was crowded. Seven of the crowd had been in Arizona for more than ten years and each of these greeted the old man before he had disappeared behind the door which led through the rear wall of post boxes. One person thought it

There's something about all this I like though," said Kenneth.

how it would be. I expect we'd better do as you suggest. We only have a small trunk and some bags—they're still at the station."

Old Charley nodded cheerfully. "Fine. If you'll give me the checks I can be getting the stuff loaded while you folks see about your lunches. I'm sorry I can't take you any nearer the ranch house than the gate, though. Arent they expecting you?"

"Oh, yes. We wrote Mr. Snavely some time ago that we intended to arrive today. It can't be so very far from the gate to the house, can it?"

"About five miles, I should judge."



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"Good Lord!" The young man glanced curiously at the people on the sidewalk. "Well, then, I suppose we'd better telephone Mr. Snavely and make sure that he will meet us. We've already tried to find his name in the directory."

Old Charley shook his head. "The line stops about two miles after you leave town."

"No telephone?" The young man's brows puckered. "No—telephone—" he spoke slowly; the idea was quite new to him. "But how do people—" he paused and became more thoughtful. "Well, but say, Snavely knows all this. Does he know that you are the only means of transportation and that—do you have a regular day for making this trip?"

"Every Saturday."

"Well, then," he continued, pleased with his deductions. "Mr. Snavely knows that we're coming on the same day you bring the mail and I'm sure he'll meet us. We're rather important visitors, you know," he finished with a half-embarrassed smile.

By the time Old Charley had returned with a small steamer trunk lashed on the rack and three bags and a guitar case on the floor of the car, the little family was waiting.

The family rode in the back seat crowded together in recognition of the strangeness of their surroundings. Shortly after the outskirts of the town had been passed, Old Charley heard the young man's voice raised with forced cheerfulness. "Were you ever on an unpaved road before Ruth? I don't believe I ever was." For a long time this scrap of conversation lingered in the mind of the old man.

As the miles crawled by, Old Charley settled into a physical and spiritual comfort. Although he never thought about it he always felt so, after the town had ebbed away and the desert flowed in.

By now all trace of man-made things had vanished. Only the road was left, lying straight to the southwest like a thin wedge, its point in the range of distant mountains which looked as though they had been recently thrown along the horizon by a plow. On either side the desert lay—a sky-bound ocean of gray-green and weathered brown. Far to the right jutted a single butte—craggy, barren, utterly alone. The air, thin, unbelievably clear, was a thing of blinding light and quivering heat—a parched thing which drew moisture from the lips and made the skin like dry paper.

A fence of three strands of barbed wire joined the road from the direction of the butte and followed mile after mile. Then came a gate, and fastened to a post near-by a wooden box with a tin can on top. Old Charley turned from the road and stopped within easy reaching distance of the box. From the mail sack he transferred the post card.

A few miles farther on Old Charley turned to the side of the road and stopped the engine. "Hungry?" he asked, facing around.

"Do you want to eat here?" asked the girl, as she glanced about with eyes narrowed to slits against the brilliant light. "Can't we go on until we come to a stream or a tree—anywhere out of this awful heat?"

"I'm mighty sorry," replied the old man, conscious of a certain quivering under the pettishness of her voice, "but I'm afraid this is the best we can do. There ain't no trees on this road—ceptin' a mesquite or two—and a stream's plumb impossible. If we kept on in this direction the first water we'd

Also, No Taxes

Otto H. Kahn, senior partner of Kuhn, Loeb & Co., whose testimony before the Senate Investigating Committee revealed that no income taxes were paid by him for the years 1930, '31 and '32.

strike would be the Gulf of California."

The girl shrank back in the seat; her eyes darted over the desolate landscape as though imploring it to produce a tree, a house, an animal—anything familiar. She said nothing.

"Well, I can stand a little food," remarked the young man cheerfully, "and Dave, here, has already started on the lunch." He spoke to his wife, as Old Charley busied himself with a package of sandwiches. "We're finding things a great deal different than we expected, aren't we, Ruth? There's something about all this I like though—" he swept his arm toward the skyline; then opening the door, stepped out and stood beside the car. He faced the distant butte, now slightly behind them. "You know, this air is positively wonderful!" He tried to take a deep breath into his ruined lungs, but choked, and it was a full minute before he could speak again. "Anyway," he grinned weakly, "this air was certainly made to breathe."

CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

stranglehold on her best lands. But the cards were stacked against him! Many of his people opposed the idea of kingship. Samuel broke with him. He became the victim of nervous storms, driving him, at times, into temporary mania. So Saul lived a failure.

Bruce Barton

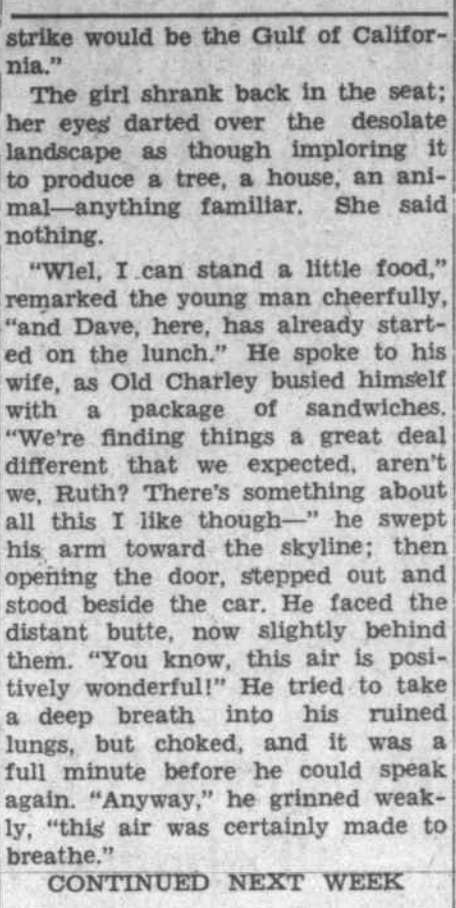
THESE MEN AT THE TOP

Where will a man ever get, you ask, if he delivers twice as much as he is paid to deliver? The answer is that unless he's a fool he will probably get to and stay at the top. I remember once traveling from Chicago to New York on the Twentieth Century Limited. We were due in the Grand Central Station at nine-forty, a nice leisurely hour, and three of us who were traveling together decided to make a comfortable morning of it. We got out of our berth at a quarter after eight, shaved and dressed and half an hour later were making our way back to the dining-car.

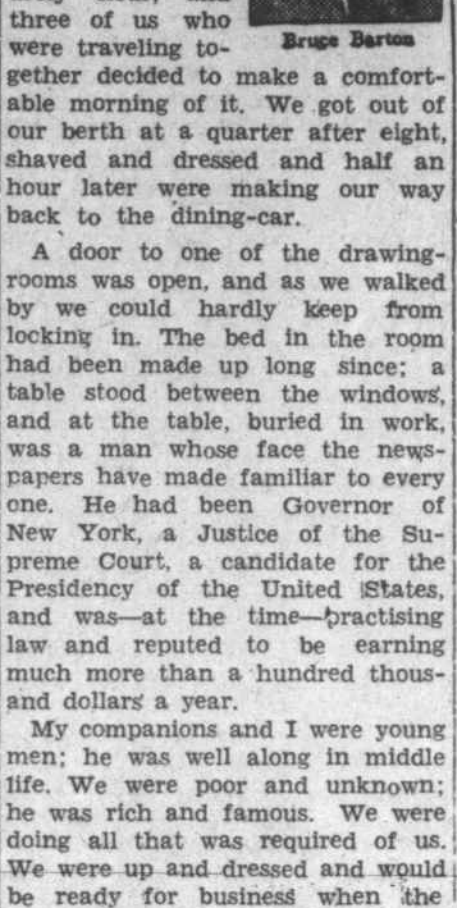
A door to one of the drawing-rooms was open, and as we walked by we could hardly keep from locking in. The bed in the room had been made up long since; a table stood between the windows, and at the table, buried in work, was a man whose face the newspapers have made familiar to every one. He had been Governor of New York, a Justice of the Supreme Court, a candidate for the Presidency of the United States, and was—at the time—practising law and reputed to be earning much more than a hundred thousand dollars a year.

My companions and I were young men; he was well along in middle life. We were poor and unknown; he was rich and famous. We were doing all that was required of us. We were up and dressed and would be ready for business when the train pulled in at a little before ten. But this man of whom nothing was actually required, was doing far more. I thought to myself as we passed on to our leisurely breakfast, "That explains him; now I understand Hughes."

I have several times been in the offices of J. P. Morgan and Com-



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Our Thinking Lags

William de Cock Buning, of The Hague, Holland, economist, in the Rotarian Magazine.

If it took centuries for mankind to appreciate the desirability of organizing into carefully bordered countries, certainly it will take many years before there can be general realization of the fact that prosperity depends upon the weal of neighbors and that national existence can be safeguarded better by friendship and cooperation than strife and power.

Science has quietly gone ahead and before our very eyes has melted down old barriers to intercourse, as witness the cable, the radio, the talking motion pictures, and ocean transportation. The world has become an economic unit, with the ups and down of crop and industrial production in one country affecting prices in every other land. In short, national isolation has become obsolete. Man's thinking must keep pace with material progress.

It is proposed to shift the franchise of the St. Louis Browns to Montreal.

Rain falling upon the earth averages about 16,000,000 tons a second.

Sunday School Lesson

SAUL

Lesson for August 13th. I Samuel 8-11, 15

Golden Text: I Samuel 15:22

What a splendid beginning Saul made! A huge, shy cowboy, simple and wholesome in his habits, conscious of his unworthiness, and wholly unambitious, he is very attractive. Most appealing and romantic is the story of how he stumbled, as if by chance, on the kingship. He was searching for his father's strayed asses, and was about to abandon the hunt, when his servant suggested a conference with Samuel, who met them as he was journeying to the high to sacrifice. At once the seer knew Saul, for the Lord assured him that this man was to reign over His flock. And we read, with breathless interest, of how Samuel told the young man that the asses were found, informed him, greatly to his surprise, that he was to be kind, and anointed him to that royal office.

The early days of his kingship, too, heighten this favorable impression. But all too soon the clouds gather thickly, and Saul, his dreams shattered, his hopes crushed, falls in dreadful ruin. He is the most tragic figure in the Old Testament, whom doom follows relentlessly. Human and divine forces are marshaled against him with such invincible power that a breakdown is inevitable. His suicide at Mount Gilboa seems the logical end for so beaten a man.

But bear in mind that he was a capable leader, in an entirely new office, demanding back-breaking pioneer effort in the fact of opposition both from within and without, for there was little real unity in Israel, and the Philistines had a



Rev. Chas. K. Doss

Down From His High Horse — By Albert T. Reid



Albert T. Reid

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