

WHISPERING ROCK

by JOHN LEBAR



TWENTY-THIRD INSTALLMENT

Ann groaned and the joints of her entwined fingers cracked but she shook her head. "I jest can't go fer doin' nothin' 'gains' Mr. Snavelly. You doan understand how 'tis with me an' him."

Slowly the giantess walked to Ruth's room. The girl followed. "These here ready!" asked Ann, pointing to two suitcases. Ruth nodded, and the big woman left the room with them.

Dully, Ruth continued the packing. She would try again after Ann was off the ranch and on the main road. But Ruth felt certain that Ann would do exactly as Snavelly had ordered. . . . The voice, then, was not his only hold on Ann; there was a bigger thing.

In a short time the packing was finished and the buckboard loaded. Ruth looked about for David; he was not in sight, nor did he answer her call. She suddenly realized that she had not seen him since returning from the mail box. Ordinarily, she would have been only mildly disturbed—the snakes were gone this time of year.

Then Ruth's heart stopped; a few feet from the board fence around the old well lay a box. It lay as though it had been placed on end against the fence; in imagination, Ruth saw her son standing on tip-toe, leaning over the fence, hitching himself farther over to see better, losing his balance, the box falling away as his feet left its top. With a cry of anguish she ran to the box, stood it up, and mounting, leaning over the fence—"David!"

The name rang hollowly and died away. "Da-vid—" With a moan, Ruth slipped from the box. . . . The next instant, it seemed to her, Ann was helping her to her feet.

"Ann! Ropes! bring ropes quick!" Ruth struggled to free herself from the giantess' arms. "Let me go! Oh! God, don't let David be in there—"

"Now wait, Miss Ruth—wait—you doan know he fell in, does you?"

"No—no—but where else is he—where else—" Ruth was dizzy; she fought to keep her senses. "Ann—" Ann left her and ran into the house. Ruth climbed upon the box again, but she could not look down.

The giantess lifted her from the box. "You stand down, I'll look with this—you couldn't see nothin' with no lantern on a rope."

Ann held a mirror in her hands. She caught the light of the sun and turned it into the well. Ruth saw her smile broadly. "There. I done tol' you he warn't down there!"

Snatching the mirror from the ground where the giantess had dropped it, she climbed upon the box just as the lower limb of the sun touched the western mountain range. The light from the mirror struck downward, wavered, and came to rest on the cloth hanging from a nail part way down the well. Ruth stared at the cloth as the light slowly faded. Before it was entirely gone she knew what that cloth was. Once she had sent Harry, her brother, a present—a red silk handkerchief with an odd design of large white horseshoes.

David just then came trudging up from the gulch. He couldn't understand all the concern about his absence.

Ruth stepped from the box, took David by the hand and led him into her room. After locking the door, she took Will's revolver from the trunk and sat down on the bed beside her son.

The handkerchief. . . . Harry always wore it, Old Charley had said. If her brother was alive, how did it get half-way down the well on the Dead Lantern ranch? If he were not, then, according to the Mexican who had reported his death, the handkerchief was buried two hundred miles below the Mexican line. The Mexican had actually mentioned the handkerchief. As Ruth sat on the bed, holding the small hand of her silent, wondering son, her mind raced; that first night when Snavelly had thrown a bundle into the old well. He had not been expecting any one to come on the ranch and had left things about which must be got rid of. . . . the bundle opened as it fell and the light silk handkerchief floated alone, and came to rest on a nail in the timber, where it stayed. . . . Snavelly's feverish desire that she should not ask questions about the well, that she should not go near it. . . . The well haunted him; was not he always looking toward it?

Without any cut and dried reasoning, without weighing, rejecting and sorting evidence, Ruth found herself with a clear, convincing picture of the whole plot. She knew as plainly as though a hundred investigators had compiled proofs for a hundred days that the letter was a lie; that it was Snavelly's final effort to get rid of her. And Harry—Harry was dead. His body lay under a pile of rubbish at the bot-

tom of the well. . . . that was why Snavelly's pale eyes strayed there so often.

She heard Snavelly's voice shouting angrily for Ann, then the thump of his boots as he entered the house. "David," whispered Ruth. "Mama's going to trust you to do as she says; stay on the bed and don't be afraid—Mama'll be back pretty soon."

With the revolver in her hand she stepped to the door, silently unlocked it, and stood with her left hand on the knob.

In the kitchen Snavelly abruptly ceased to upbraid Ann, and the boots thumped across the porch. "By God, I'll show her who's—"

As quickly as she could move Ruth flung open the door and stepped out, the revolver, fully cocked, pointing at Snavelly's breast. He stopped and his hands went up. Ruth quietly closed the door behind her.

"Ann!" Ruth's voice was sharp, metallic. "Go into the living room."

She waited until she heard Ann's footsteps. "Now you march in!"

Snavelly turned without a word and walked before her.

"Sit down—you too, Ann." The girl nodded toward the chairs by the table.

The huge woman and the pale-eyed man seated themselves. Snavelly gradually lowered his arms.

"I've got nothing against you, Ann—far from it. But if you won't help me you'll have to go with this murderer."

"Wha—what's that—" Snavelly gasped and his eyes stared wildly.

Ruth spoke to Ann, without turning her head: "Ann, will you help me now. This man murdered Harry Grey, his partner. You must help me tie him so that we can take him to the authorities. . . . Well? Are you on my side or his?"

Ann's face was a study. For a moment she regarded Snavelly, then Ruth. No one spoke.

"Well, Ann!" "Fore Gawd, Miss Ruth—I doan know—I doan know—" Ann wrung her hands and rose to her feet. "Please, Miss Ruth—I can't help you 'gains' him." Ann walked to the door, hesitated, returned a few steps then went back and stood near the window in an agony of indecision.

"All right, Ann, think it over." Ruth stepped close to the man in the chair. Her voice was clear and sharp. "You murderer!"

Snavelly shrunk back in his chair. "Say it!" demanded Ruth. —tell Ann what you are!"

Snavelly's lips moved silently. "Louder!" she cried, thrusting the muzzle of the gun almost against his face.

"I—done—it— My God! let me be—quit lookin' at me! I had to do it, I tell you!"

"Don't move! Now tell us why you did it." Ruth stood, right foot forward, her smooth young face set rigidly. "Begin!"

"I—I shot him." "Why?" "Because I hated him!" "Why?"

"I don't know—he come here. He bought his interest from the man who owned it an' he come here. He wanted to be pardners—I signed. I couldn't help it—damn him!"

"What did he do to you?" "I don't know—let me be, can't you? He come here an' I wasn't by myself no more—I couldn't git him to go."

"You didn't have to murder him!"

"I hated him, I tell you! He done what all people do—I hated him like I hate all the rest. I got to be by myself. I been alone since I was born. Every man I ever knowed tried to git somethin' off me. Every storekeeper tried to cheat me. Every rancher tried to fence off part of my land—every time I got a good thing somebody tried to get it away for his own self. That's all humans do! Their whole lives is just spent trying to get something somebody else has got!"

"Well?" demanded Ruth.

"When I come here there was twenty thousand acres of this ranch an' the house was in the middle of it. I couldn't see no fence which-ever a-way I looked. I bought this ranch. I could stay here. I had my horses an' I had enough cattle to keep me busy an' to feed me. I bought this ranch fair an' square. Then a man comes with a paper an' says he owns three-quarters of it. But he didn't want to stay here—he didn't want nothin' but money. So he went away an' I scraped enough together each selling time an' sent it to him. That was all right. Then your brother bought that man out an' come here. He come to stay. He aimed to improve the ranch. Good God a'mighty!"

"I am going to take you over the mountains," said Ruth evenly. "Stand up."

Snavelly slowly rose and Ruth

backed away. At that moment his eyes looked past her shoulder and his head nodded ever so slightly. Before Ruth could move great arms were holding her in a vise, a big hand took possession of the gun Ann's voice muttered close to her ear, "I'se sorry."

"Give me that gun!" Snavelly darted toward Ann as the giantess released the girl. Ann backed away shaking her head. Snavelly stopped.

Ann spoke swiftly to Ruth. "Git yo're little boy and ride away quick—hurry, Miss Ruth, fore he makes me give him the gun."

"Ann, help me—you have the gun, help me to take him over to Thanes' place," begged Ruth.

The giantess roared at her. "My Gawd, git away like I tol' you!" Neither Snavelly nor Ann moved until the sounds of Ruth's horse and David's questioning voice had died away.

Snavelly, white with rage, spoke scathingly. "Now give me that gun, you black—!"

The gun in Ann's hand wavered uncertainly. "Jes' a minute," she faltered.

"Give it here!" Ann cringed, turned the revolver butt forward and held it out.

Snavelly snatched the weapon, and raised the muzzle to Ann's face. Then he paused, and lowered the gun. "Git my horses, damn you! They'll come back—the Thanes'll come and git me! They'll coop me up! Hurry along—git Buck an' throw a pack saddle on him. Run damn your black hide!"

STOMACH GAS RUINS HEALTH AND BEAUTY

Stomach gas that causes loss of sleep and rest ruins your health and your beauty! Even people who have suffered for years from stomach troubles caused by acid stomach are getting relief from Bisma-Rex, a new, delicious-tasting ant-acid powder. Bisma-Rex brings lasting relief, too! Get it today at Abernethy's Drug Store.

Ann ran out of the house. Snavelly hurried into the kitchen and began feverishly filling a gunny sack with provisions. Five minutes later his outfit was piled by the kitchen door; three sacks, his bed roll, a frying pan, and, leaning against the house, a 30-30 rifle in a saddle sheath with four cartons of cartridges beside the butt. Ann was coming from the barn,

loading the buckskin horse with a pack saddle on his back.

CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

20 KILLED, 100 HURT

A radical anti-government revolt in Rosario and Sante Fe, northern Argentina, resulted Friday in at least 20 deaths, injuries to 100 and the arrests of nearly 500 people.

BABY DOING WELL

Dr. Walter D. Dandy, noted surgeon, Friday night reported the probable success of the delicate brain operation he performed Friday morning on five-months-old Sue Trammell, flown 1,300 miles from Houston, Texas, to Baltimore, in what her parents believed to be a race with death.



HOW WOULD Your Boy Like

A FREE VACATION WITH

BABE RUTH

At the Babe's Training Camp?

Imagine being Babe's personal guest, staying at his hotel, eating at his training table, meeting all the big league players, practicing with them at the park, being photographed with them, and wearing a special big-league sweater and cap!!!

THIS DREAM WILL COME TRUE FOR 50 BOYS . . . BABE HIMSELF WILL TELL HOW OVER

WBT, 5:45 P. M.

Every Mon., Wed., Fri.

3900 OTHER PRIZES AND LOADS OF ENTERTAINMENT IN

"BABE RUTH BOYS CLUB"

A New  Program

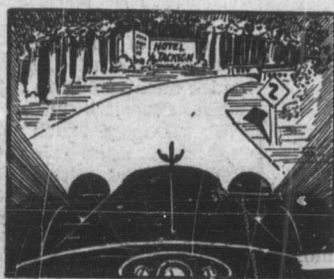
WHY

is my electric bill more this month?

SUMMER



7 P. M. Daylight lasts longer.



More time is spent outdoors



Lighter meals are served.

WINTER



7 P. M. Darkness falls earlier.



More time is spent indoors



Heavier meals are served.

THIS question often comes to mind in the fall and winter months. Days become shorter so gradually that one does not realize that lights are being turned on earlier in the evening as winter approaches.

MORE light, more cooking, and greater use of all appliances is experienced in the fall and winter, consequently more electricity is used and the bill is correspondingly higher.

NO other commodity in the household budget does as much and is as inexpensive as electricity. Never in history has the housewife been able to buy with so little money the services which electricity gives.

Electricity is Inexpensive—Use it Freely

SOUTHERN PUBLIC UTILITIES CO.