

WHISPERING ROCK

by JOHN LEBAR



FOURTH INSTALMENT

SYNOPSIS . . . Ruth Warren, living in the East, comes into possession of three-quarter 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 weakened lungs. Arriving at the nearest town, she learns that the ranch, "Dead Lantern," is 85 miles across the desert. Charley Thane, old rancher and rural mail carrier, agrees to take them to "Dead Lantern" gate, which was 5 miles from the ranch house. As they wearily walked past a huge overshadowing boulder in a gulch in coming to the ranch house, a voice whispered "Go back! Go back!"

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY
Snavelly pursed his lips thoughtfully, then shook his head. "No—no use to see any more lawyers—they'll just gouge us, stir up somethin' so's they'd have to be hired to straighten it out ag'in. No use in that. You've see your lawyer an' you've got the will. The will's what counts—just as long as I recognize it as bein' what it says it is, there's no need messin' around with law." A queer light came into his eyes and his voice took on a curious hollow lift and fall.

"All right," said the girl quickly. She was glad to settle all conversation relative to the law.

"I'm mighty sorry I didn't know you was coming," remarked Snavelly. "Me an' Ann ain't exactly fixed for company. But I'll be seein' what I can do. Between now an' supper I'll just be fixin' up the place out back in the old house."

"That old ruin? But—it's falling to pieces!"

For an instant the man's body tensed, then he laughed—a thin, dry little laugh which had in it something of the sound of crumpled paper. "The old place has seen its best days, lady, but it's all we got. There's two rooms that's as good—just about—as they ever was. Your brother has slept there—it's plenty comfortable—just a little mite dirty right now."

"But it's full of great cracks—one of those walls might—"

"No, no. Nothing ever falls in this country without there's a rain or a big wind. When it storms, you can come in here in case anything wants to fall. Oth'wise, you'll be plenty safe. We don't have more'n a couple of storms a year anyways."

After supper the adobe itself was visited. Huge and dismal the great bulk towered above them in the night. Yet, once inside, the walls looked quite safe by the light of the oil lamp on the table. The adjoining rooms were certainly more spacious and conveniently arranged than anything in the ranch house. As Snavelly had said, the place was dirty. But the dirt was the dirt of earth—clean, dry dust. Ann, the giantess, had just finished arranging the bedclothes on three canvas cots.

Ann had picked up a lighted lantern, left the room and took the path which led to the barn, the lantern

swinging in long arcs from her arm. Back in the living room of the ranch house Snavelly remarked that he had sent Ann to the gate in the buckboard for the baggage.

"Oh, but that wasn't necessary," said the girl. "We could get along until to-morrow—it's such an awful trip in the dark."

Snavelly shrugged. "She'll be back in a couple of hours."

Snavelly sat near the fireplace, half facing the man and woman who were seated near the cot. His attitude was that of one who is waiting to be asked foolish questions—as though he were about to be quizzed by a pair of children. Ruth's first question changed this attitude.

"Who is Ann—is she your—"

"No, by God!" The man thrust his body forward and his hands gripped the arms of the chair as if he were about to spring to his feet. His pale eyes glittered. "She's nothin' to me! Do you get that? She's a nigger half breed I'm hirin' to take care of the house an' help on the place. Anybody says different is a— he paused.

"I was only going to ask what you have just told me, Mr. Snavelly." The girl's heart was in her throat.

Snavelly settled back in his chair and his fingers strayed to his forehead. After a moment he spoke casually. "Anns a queer creature. Strange. Her blood, I reckon. Her father was a heavyweight nigger prize fighter an' her mammy was an Apache squaw. 'Big' Jackson, her daddy, was born a slave. He was in the army durin' the Indian trouble in this country—stationed at San Carlos. I reckon Ann's the result of a raid on some Apache village. Mostly she's called 'Indian' Ann—you can see she favors her mammy's folks—straight hair an' that Indian face. Must have got her size an' color more from her daddy, though. Ann don't get along with towns—this here civilization. Down in Texas she run a dance hall an' saloon, but she got in trouble an' drifted out this way. I'd seen her before, an' when I runs onto her in town one day, she was broke an' lookin' for a job. That was just after your brother went to Mexico." Snavelly paused, his eyes on the girl's face.

"So—I hires her. Knowin' her like I did, I felt sorry for her. There's nothin' bad about Ann. She just can't stand bein' in town—spends most of her time in jail when she is in town. It ain't her fault—but folks give her liquor, you see, an' when she's drunk she's a God-a-mighty terror."

"How much do you suppose she weighs?" asked Warren.

"Close to three hundred, I reckon—solid as a rock. She's powerful. You'll look a long ways before you find a man as strong as what Ann is."

"I'll subscribe to that," said Warren. "What kind of trouble did she get into down in Texas—did she just prove too destructive to the city hall?"

"Well, no. She killed a man—beat him to death with a chair. But it was his fault." Snavelly paused. "He wasn't no small man, neither," he added as an interesting afterthought.

For quite some time the conversation hung fire. Snavelly sat as before



"I was only going to ask what you have just told us, Mr. Snavelly." The girl's heart was in her throat.

—waiting.

Ruth began by asking about the ranch. To all of her questions Snavelly returned prompt and pessimistic answers. It was soon evident that there would be no need of any one working out the exact value of three-quarters.

"But couldn't we get some new cattle if hat's what we need?" asked the girl.

"We could if we had the money. But it wouldn't be no use—not enough water for more stock. We've got some water, but it ain't close enough to where the feed is."

"How could we get more watering places?"

"Havin' it rain would help. In this country a waterin' place is a repesa, a dirt tank. You take an' dig a basin in the ground where a gully runs. When it rains the water comes down the gully an' fills the pond. We got plenty of them ponds but they're so silted up an' shallow they don't hold water long an' it don't rain anyways. It rained just enough last winter to fill the biggest pond on the place; that an' the well here, is all the water we got. There's four other ponds but they're powder dry. An' all the grass is sunburned an' wispy-like."

"Mr. Snavelly," asked Warren, "perhaps we should wait until to-morrow to see the books—but could you give an idea of the earnings?"

Snavelly observed the young man for a moment. "Yes, Mr. Warren, I can. There ain't any earnings. You can see the books, any time you want—they ain't complicated, neither. We sell twice a year, after the fall an' spring round-ups. An' we buy twice a year—stock up the commissary. Grey took his share of last fall's sale with him—an' some of mine too, if it comes to that. This spring I sold all I could an' got enough to a little more'n stock up the commissary. If you folks want to stay on I reckon I'll have to go to town again before fall."

Snavelly spoke as though nothing could be more distasteful than going to town.

"But, Mr. Snavelly," asked the girl, "isn't there any money?"

Snavelly stood up and took an old daybook from the mantel. Slowly he turned the pages, wetting his thumb at every page. He looked up. "There's a hundred an' fifty-one dollars an' eight cents of partnership money in the bank."

Closing the book with a snap, he returned it to the mantel, resettled himself and waited patiently for more questions.

"Mr. Snavelly," said Warren, "When we were coming along the road shortly before we saw the house, we heard a—well, we had a queer sensation, as if some one who was very close by spoke to us—"

"You did?" Snavelly leaned forward and watched Warren's face keenly. "Was it by a big rock down in the gulch?"

"Yes—yes, that's where it was. At least that's where we thought we heard the whisper—it was rather weird."

"Tell me about it—what did it say?"

"It's hard to describe. We stopped at the rock a moment, and when we were leaving, this voice told us to— to go back. The unaccountable thing about it was that the words seemed to have been spoken just a few inches from our ears. We were rather tired and a bit unstrung, though, perhaps our imaginations—"

Snavelly frowned and shook his head. "No—you heard it all right."

"But what is—who was it and how

in the world was it done? Why was it done?"

Snavelly thought a moment. "Oh, it's a superstition—I guess you'd call it."

"I wouldn't!" breathed the girl, with a shiver.

"But we heard something," said Warren.

Snavelly rose and entered his bedroom. In a moment he returned and gave the girl a sheet of paper in her brother's handwriting. "Your brother was always interested in legends an' things about this country. He used to try to find somebody who said they'd heard the voice, but he had poor luck. Then some Indians come up in this neighborhood to gather acorns an' your brother got one old bush-head, who'd had education, to come up to the house an' tell about the legend. I was right here when your brother took down what the old buck said."

The girl read aloud from the paper: "THE LEGEND OF THE VOICE".

"In the long ago days a tribe of good Indian live in the San Jorge Valley. They grow what they eat and kill nothing. They do never fight oth're Indians for so long they forget how it is.

"One time some bad Indian come quick from the north. These Indian kill what they eat and fight much. All the village and all the field of the good Indian is burn up. All the young men become dead. They do not know how it is to fight.

"But there is one very wise old man. He is medicine man. He take the women and the little children away. He lead them in these mountains when the young men try to fight. But very quick the bad Indian are on the trail. When the wise old man come to the big arroyo with the women and the little children he look back. He see the bad Indian follow. Where the trail leave the arroyo he stop. The wise old man say to the women and the little children. 'You must go on. Go in the still places of the mountains and wait. You must stay four days. Then go back into the valley and make again the village and the field.'

"The wise old medicine man go back to the arroyo and wait for the bad Indian by the big rock. He take a little breeze he find playing by the big rock. He make this little breeze

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NEWS AND INFORMATION FOR THE BUSY FARMER

A bright feature of the egg market is that this year promises to be the heaviest egg-exporting season since 1926.

Goods Bulls in Demand

Lately, a very definite increase in the demand for registered Holstein bulls, with creditable backing, has become apparent in all parts of Ontario.

The movement in this direction has been particularly noticeable since the new Premium Policy went into effect in June. As a result, prices have been strengthening and even higher values are likely to prevail this Fall, according to breeders.

Limited Ocean Space

"The volume of livestock export this year is considerably greater than that of last year," said Garnet H. Duncan of Richmond Hill, livestock investigator, Ontario Marketing Board "and a comparison of sales, in Great Britain discloses that top prices have been received for cattle of 1150 to 1300 pounds."

Mr. Duncan said that Ontario feeders still have a considerable number of cattle available for export, and lack of ocean space seems to be the only factor restraining even greater shipments.

For the present, prospective individual shippers should communicate with livestock agents in Montreal, with a view to securing any space which may be offered from time to time.

Higher Turnip Prices

Owing to exceptionally dry weather, according to J. H. Purvis, general manager, Blackwater Turnip Growers' Association, the turnip crop made an indifferent start. The crop is, on the average, about thirty days later than it would be under normal conditions.

He said that inspection of early sown turnips gives no indication of watercore or worm injury and, with sixty days of growing weather still available, fifty per cent of a normal yield may be expected. He estimates that prices for turnips will be higher owing to short feed and grain yields, and lowered vegetable production, with a probable maximum of twenty-five cents a bushel to the grower.

Grade Farm Products

Quality in farm products, rather than price, is the average consumer's first consideration. This was clearly demonstrated by the reception accorded all of the Department's displays at the Canadian National Exhibition. Attendees at the exhibits were called upon to answer many questions regarding graded farm products and where they may be purchased. Further evidence was forthcoming in the distribution each day of an average of 1,500 pieces of literature dealing with grades.

Value of Certified Seed

Commercial potato growers whose stock is infested with diseases or contains mixed varieties would find it decidedly advantageous to secure certified seed. It is not the chief purpose of the Department of Agriculture to encourage potato growers to use certified seed with a view to having their crops inspected for certification purposes, because every potato grower has not the necessary patience and time, or suitable location and equipment, for growing certified seed. The object of the Department rather is to have growers use the best seed obtainable for their commercial crop, and help to keep down to minimum destructive plant diseases, with their resultant serious effect on yields. The use of certified potato seed on many farms would double the yields now being obtained.

Farmers Must Produce

To the man in the street, any attempts to increase production in these days of depressing world surpluses seem a waste of time, or even worse. He forgets, says Mr. L. H. Newman, Dominion Cerealists, that the problem of the individual farmer differs vastly from that of the nation as a whole, in that the capacity of the farmer to carry on and pay his way is measured in no small degree by the yields he realizes per acre. To the farmer, the acre is his unit of production. If his average yields per acre, whether converted into milk, mutton or beef, or disposed of in their raw state, are not sufficiently high to enable him to meet his obligations he must either succumb entirely or be forced to adopt a standard of living which removes him as an important factor in the problem of keeping the wheels of commerce moving.

Current Crop Report

According to figures compiled by the Department, the yield per acre

of spring grains is considerably below the figures of last year. Threshing results have shown, however, returns better than the standard in the field indicated and the quality of grain generally is reported quite good. The aggregate yield of spring wheat, oats, barley and flay is placed at 79,367,300 bushels as compared with 1,340,400 bushels in 1932, and an annual average production of 117,501,100 bushels during the ten year period 1922-1931.

The weather has continued very dry and has retarded the seeding of fall wheat, for which a greatly increased acreage is being prepared. The bulk of the crop is just being sown. Dry weather has severely injured the root crop. Turnips are poor and in some districts water core is very prevalent. Potatoes are yielding very light and on many farms the output will approximate only half a normal crop. The production of beans will be considerably less than in 1932. In Kent and Elgin Counties the crop is extremely variable with a sample none too good in some cases. Yields will range from 3 to 20 bushels per acre. In Huron the prospects are more favourable and a yield only slightly below normal is reported. Sugar beets have withstood the dry season very well and the crop prospect is better than that of any other crops. The corn crop is extremely variable. Corn borer infestation has been slightly heavier than for several years.

Maybe it just seems easier to tune out other stations now because they all sound alike.

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