

WHISPERING ROCK

by JOHN LEBAR



THIRTEENTH INSTALMENT
SYNOPSIS: Ruth Warren, who lived in the East is willed three-fourth interest in the "Dead Lantern" ranch in Arizona by her only brother who is reported to have met his death while on business in Mexico. Arriving in Arizona with her husband who has ailing lungs and their small child, they learn that the ranch is located 85 miles from the nearest railroad. Old Charley Thane, rancher and rural mail carrier agrees to take them to the "Dead Lantern" gate, 5 miles from the ranch house. As they trudge wearily through a gulch approaching the ranch house, a voice whispers "Go back! . . . Go back!" At the ranch house they are greeted suspiciously by the gaunt rancher partner, Snavelly, and Indian Ann, a herculean woman of mixed negro and indian blood. Snavelly is difficult to understand but regardless, Ruth takes up the task of trying to adjust their three lives to the ranch and its development. Kenneth, Ruth's husband, caught in chilling rain contracts pneumonia and passes away before a doctor arrives. Ruth tries to carry on. She is not encouraged by Snavelly in plans to try and stock the ranch or improve it. She writes to her father in the East asking a loan with which to buy cattle. She receives no reply. Will Thane comes home to visit his father and Ruth meets him. A rancher nearly decides to retire and offers to sell Ruth and Snavelly his livestock on credit. Snavelly tries to balk the deal but Ruth buys to the limit of her three-quarter interest in Dead Lantern ranch.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

The day came when Ruth, Ann and David set out to obtain some Mexicans. She had told Snavelly that she wanted to go, herself, because she had never seen the town of Palo Verde. This was partly true, but she felt that he knew her real reason; she wanted to be sure to get some Mexicans. He refused to go with her and she commandeered Ann for an interpreter. She hoped David could stand the ride—it would be twenty miles there and back. They would have to spend the night—Heaven only knew how and where.

They had reached the highway and were perhaps a mile south of the gate when they met a covered wagon, accompanied by a horseman. A lean old Mexican with white mustachios and a wispy goatee, drove the team. Be-

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side him sat a girl of eighteen, whose beautiful fawn-like eyes left the figure of the young horseman, as Ruth and Ann came nearer.

Ann spoke quietly to Ruth, "I think we better ask them people."

"Yes, do."

"Buenos dias, Senor," Ann addressed the old man. He promptly pulled up the horses, arose, and shifting the reins to his left hand swept off his large hat in a courteous bow.

"Buenos dias, Senoras," he replied in a voice which was mellowed graciousness.

Ann turned to Ruth. "They will be good—they come from far in Mexico—'round th' border they doan speak so."

She replied to the old man and continued to talk for some time. The young horseman caressed his tender young mustache and drew a little closer to the girl's side of the wagon. The girl caught her black mantilla about her throat with a dainty ivory hand, her large eyes lowered to the small tips of her toes which rested on the footboard under a voluminous blue skirt.

Ann talked steadily and with surprising animation for several minutes; her gestures and expression were much like those of the old man. Ruth saw that she spoke Spanish more naturally than English. Finally, she nodded toward Ruth and swept out her arm to indicate the western mountains. The old man was silent for a time after she had finished. He spoke a short sentence to the young horseman. The young man smiled, shrugged his shoulders and said a word or two, his eyes on the girl.

The old man seemed undecided. He asked a few questions of Ann, and after her replies fell into another silence.

The conversation was resumed and continued pleasantly. Suddenly Ann turned to Ruth. "They'll come. We pay them fifty dollars a month, an' give them fresh beef when we butcher. The other things they eat they will buy from us. We can fix up a place in the barn fer 'em."

Apparently everything was settled. She spoke to Ann. "What have you learned about these people?"

"I doan' know th' country they come from—a ranch ten days over the line. Don Francisco was the major domo—boss—of the ranch but there was a death an' a changin' amongst the owners that he didn't like, so he left an' come to th' U. S. Alfredo was workin' at the ranch an' come along on account of the girl. They ought to know cattle work."

They were entering the foothills four miles beyond the ranch gate when the old man drew his horses to a stop. Ruth had noticed for some time that he was intently studying the mountains before him. He turned to Ann and asked in his soft, polite Spanish, "Are these low mountains not named with the name of the wolf?"

"I have heard that once they were called so," replied Ann.

"Ah!"

Ann waited a moment but he did not continue. Thoughtfully, his eyes scanned the mountains. "Why should n't they be named for a wolf?" she asked.

"Ah—these mountains, but have I not heard tales of these mountains?" The old man paused again, and there was an undercurrent of anxiety in his voice as he continued. "Do I mistake myself, or is there not one small canon where it is said a rock speaks



"Buenos dias, Senoras," he replied in a voice which was mellowed graciousness.

with a voice of evil. There is a tale of travelers which I remember to have heard in my boyhood—is it not true?"

Ann spoke quickly to Ruth. "He's heard about th' voice. I doan think he'll go on."

"Oh, Ann! Think of something to tell him. I want these people—I like them. Now, Ann, I'm going to order you to tell the old man what I told you to tell him; if it's wrong to lie about the voice the blame is on me, not you. And I'm going to ask you never to go through that gulch—we'll build the road around it—and no one will ever go through there again!"

Ann's face was a study. "Well—now—" she said slowly. A moment more of thought and the Indian woman's face brightened with relief. "Why, I don't see but maybe that'll work—Gawd, Miss Ruth, I wisht you'd thought of that before!" She turned to the old man and after a few minutes' talk he smiled and gathered up the reins.

"Ann, we can't let them go through! Here, you lead David's horse and give Don Francisco mine. Tell him and Alfredo that you want to show them where we are going to build a road soon—see? Take them around the gulch. I'll drive the team through and take David and the girl. I think I can handle her even if—even if she does think she hears something. Those are my orders, Ann!"

The Indian woman spoke at length to the old man. He did not seem very eager to relinquish his seat on the wagon, but already Don Francisco had placed himself under Ruth's authority. It was strange and rather unseemly to be employed by a woman, thought the old man, a beautiful American woman, who was so fragile and yet had such great strength in her eyes. Ah, these Americans! What wonders their cities must be—still, it was best to come into this country by way of work with which one was familiar.

Ruth drove the wagon with David and Magda seated beside her. She had never in her life driven a team, but it was not necessary to do other than hold the reins; the horses were content to follow the road. As they neared the brown boulder, Ruth began talking animatedly to Magda, her smiling lips close to the Mexican girl's ear. Yet she need not have done so; there was no whispering voice in the vicinity of the rock.

Snavelly was not in sight when Ruth arrived at the barn where Ann and the two Mexicans were waiting. But ten minutes later, as Ruth and her son were on their way to the ranch house ((Ann stayed with the new arrivals to help them establish themselves)) Snavelly rode toward Ruth. She stopped to wait for him.

"Thinkin' of startin' a town on the Dead Lantern?" he asked without smiling.

Ruth laughed. "No, we only brought three. We found them on the main road—they've come from Mexico. I think they'll be good workers—they know cattle."

"What's the woman for?"

"The girl? Oh, she's the older man's daughter—I suppose she'll just keep house for them."

Snavelly looked at Ruth for a long moment in silence, his slits of eyes glinting jerkily. Suddenly he left her and rode toward the barn, dismounting at the saddle shed.

When she reached the porch of the ranch house Ruth paused with her hand on the door, and, changing her mind, seated herself on the rawhide cot.

When next her eyes sought the barn Ann was nearly at the house. The giantess went to the rear and entered the kitchen without noticing Ruth. Ruth had risen to join Ann when she saw the distant figure of Alfredo come out of the barn with a rolled mattress on his shoulder, walk to the wagon and toss it in. Immediately behind him came Magda, an olla on her head and a half-filled sack in her hand. She also placed her load in the wagon and returned to the barn. By the time Don Francisco emerged with two chairs and an armful of smaller things, Ruth was well on her way.

"Why are you putting your things in the wagon?" she called to Alfredo who came out of the barn carrying a copper tub as she approached.

The young man placed the tub in the wagon, regarded Ruth with a shrug and remained silent, his fingers smoothing his mustache.

Snavelly was standing just inside the door.

"What did you say to them?" demanded Ruth.

"Well, I fired them, that's what I did! Do you think I'm goin' to have

a lyin', undependable bunch of trash like that on this place? They tell me they won't work an' are fixin' to leave; then you come down here an' they let on they will work—what can you do with people like that?"

Ruth did not reply, but she went to Magda and taking her arm pointed to the ranch house. "Come, Magda."

The Mexican girl's eyes questioned her. Ruth smiled and led Magda toward the house. The three men followed.

At the kitchen door, Ruth turned and addressed Snavelly. "You men will have to stay out here," she smiled. "I want to talk to Magda with Ann's help—it's going to be a purely feminine conversation. Excuse us, please."

Snavelly took a step forward, then stopped.

"Ann," said Ruth when she had led Magda into the kitchen, "ask her is it not true that she loves Alfredo. Don't embarrass her—make it just between us girls."

But Magda was very much embarrassed. She drew her mantilla about her face and twisted one foot. But she nodded.

"Good! Now, Ann, you tell her that if she and her people stay and are good workmen, that I'll help her and Alfredo build a little house, and that I'll give them ten acres of land which is not included in the partnership but is part of some that I own. Tell her that she and Alfredo and her father can have this land forever. And tell her that they are working for me, not for Mr. Snavelly."

Magda was transfixed with joy and embarrassment when Ann ceased to speak. The girl took an uncertain step toward Ruth. Suddenly, she curtsied almost to the floor and kissed her hand, as though she were a great queen.

"Well," said Ann, "I can't tell you what she said 'cause I doan know th' fancy words in English—anyhow she thanks you's pow'ful good. But she says she can't tell Alfredo nothin' 'cause he ain't asked her to marry him yet. But says that she'll see to it that they stay here forever an' work much."



"Ask her is it not true that she loves Alfredo."

"Ask her why they were going to leave."

Before the Mexican girl had ceased to reply, sudden fear filled Ann's face. The Indian woman did not translate Magda's words; she left the kitchen, crossed the back porch and entered her room.

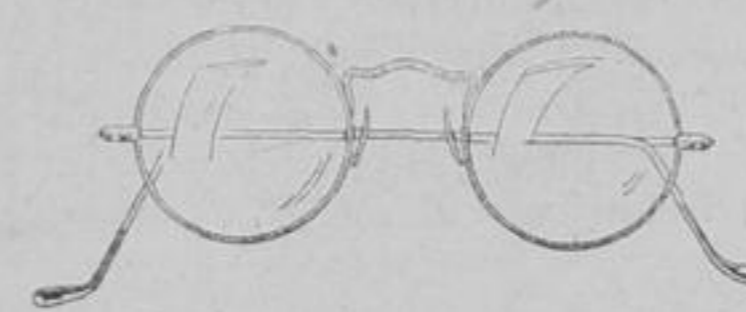
Magda looked at Ruth, puzzled. "The man say we go."

Ruth smiled and shook her head. "No go, Magda."

"No, no, no—ah, mil, mil gracias, Senora!"

There is a tradition in southern Arizona and northwestern Mexico that the summer rains begin on the Day of San Juan—the twenty-fourth of June. Especially is this tradition strong in the San Jorge Valley, for it is here that the venerable Ambrosio Vega is said to have kept rain records for six and forty years. The discerning still say they can make out his records scratched in the adobe—just left of the altar niche—in the ruin which was once his home.

Continued Next Week



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Apple Crop Report

The quality of the apple crop in Ontario is superior to that of last year. Some damage was sustained due to early frosts on October 24th and 25th. The last estimate of apple yield in September indicated a commercial crop of 1,069,000 barrels which will be reduced by the cause just mentioned. The output in 1932 was 918,500 barrels. Exports have been exceptionally heavy and up to November 7th this season 238,000 barrels had been shipped from Ontario as compared with a total of 132,900 barrels up to November 25th last season. The high rates prevailing for sterling are proving a very favourable factor—the present rate of sterling is \$5.25 as compared with \$3.77 a year ago.

Wintering the Brood Sow

The brood sow deserves her fair share of winter accommodation. A pen that is well bedded, dry and free from draughts is essential. Place the feed trough some distance away so that she is forced to exercise outdoors daily. Eradicate lice and round worms; there is no market for them. Feed a mixture of grains to maintain the sow in fair flesh, but use barley sparingly unless the sow is very thin. Provide clover or alfalfa hay to be eaten at will. Be kind to the sow, but not "too kind," or weak, unthrifty pigs will result.

Storing Vegetables for Winter

Select well-grown, disease-free unblemished material and handle it carefully to avoid mechanical injuries. An earth floor basement under a dwelling house or a regular root cellar may be used. Proper ventilation is very important and a temperature of 34 degrees Fahrenheit should be maintained. The beet, cabbage, carrot, celery, parsnip, potato and turnip require dark, slightly moist storage space, while onions do best under dry, cold, dark conditions.

New Grades For Eggs

Imported amendments whereby further protection is afforded to both producers and consumers, have been made in the egg regulations by Order-in-Council. The new grades consist of 'A-1', 'A', 'B' and 'C' in place of "Specials," "Extras," "Firsts" and "Seconds." The words "New laid" may be applied only to grade A-1, and the word "fresh," or any other equivalent of that word, to grades A-1 and A.

"C" grade consists of all eggs below A and B grades, but which are (24 ounces) and Medium (22 to 24 ounces).

Grades A-1 and A are divided respectively into three classes. Large, Medium and Pullet and all eggs possessing the quality of Grade A may be sold in that grade irrespective of size, but the eggs of different sizes must be packed separately, with the size indicated on the container. As grade A-1 is a super grade, the packing of eggs of this grade may be done only by producers authorized by the Dominion Department of Agriculture. Storage eggs are not permitted to be sold in a higher grade than B.

"B" grade consists of reasonably clean eggs, sound in shell, and eggs weighing less than the rate of 22 ounces to the dozen shall not be graded in B. There are two classes, Large fit for human consumption.

Official Crop Report

The latest official crop bulletin shows that with the exception of sugar beets, the yield per acre of all field crops in Ontario this year is below last year. A severe period of drought and intense heat during July reduced the yield of spring grains and hay and clover crops. During August and September more favourable growing weather prevailed and the yield of late crops turned out much better than mid-summer prospects indicated. The volume of production of all field crops for 1933 is about 8 per cent below 1932. But farm prices show considerable improvement over last year and are 15.6% higher. As a result the value of these crops is estimated to be \$121,553,000, compared with \$114,150,500 in 1932, or an increase of \$7,403,000 in spite of the smaller output.

Fall plowing got away to a good start, but was made difficult by dry weather and later by heavy snowfalls. Farmers planned to sow a much larger acreage to fall wheat, but owing to lack of soil moisture, many fields that were already prepared, were not seeded. The sown acreage of fall wheat is estimated at 630,700 acres compared with 595,000 in 1932, an increase of 6 per cent. The condition of fall wheat at the end of October was 96% of the long-time average and fall rye 95%.

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