

WHISPERING ROCK

by JOHN LEBAR



SEVENTEENTH INSTALMENT
 SYNOPSIS: Ruth Warren, born and raised in an Eastern city, is willed three-fourth interest in the Dead Lantern ranch in Arizona. With her youthful husband, who is in poor health, and their small son, David, they come to Arizona to take up where Ruth's brother, reported killed in Mexico, had left off. They reach Dead Lantern, 85 miles from the nearest railroad, with the help of Old Charley Thane, neighboring rancher who also carries the rural mail. At the ranch they find the partner, Snavelly, and a huge woman, Indian Ann, who greet them suspiciously. As they trudge the 5 miles from ranch gate to the house they pass a huge rock in a gulch where a voice whispers, "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 Snavelly. Despite obstacles of all kind, Ruth gives 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. Snavelly 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 roundup.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

"Oh, I'm so sorry," whined the voice, "but I jest 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 knew you'd call 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 years old again for about half an hour! . . ."
 Later, after he had eaten Will's supper, the old man was somewhat mollified. "Will, you orney pup, danged if this ain't the happiest day I've seen! And you've already been here a month. You son-of-a-gun—provin' up on your homestead. And

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you're 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 luxuriously slipping back to sleep when she heard the thump of boots, as Snavelly 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 acidentally placed poison in the spring troughs no new harm 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 Snavelly breakfasted silently by lamplight, then went to the corrals.
 It was not light enough at the corrals 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. Snavelly 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 saddle shed.

Ruth, Snavelly and the Mexicans rode into the north pasture. About three miles from the ranch house Snavelly gave each man his orders, then rode away to the west. To Ruth he had said nothing, nor could she understand much of what Snavelly 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 as it wound through the mountains. They would then all start eastward driving the cattle before them.
 She waited two hours on that hilltop before she saw the first cattle coming. Two miles to the north an ant-like string moved over a ridge and disappeared into a ravine. A moment later, and much nearer, she saw a small bunch of animals emerge from the underbrush followed by a



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man on horseback—Snavelly, 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 drove 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 riatas, the cattle were in a close-packed bunch, and the remaining riders sat their horses at intervals around the circle. Snavelly, Alfredo, Don Francisco and one of the extra Mexicans dismounted, kicked off their chaps, and building a fire, laid on the branding irons; Ruth and three Mexicans keeping the herd together, mean while.
 When the irons were hot Snavelly motioned to the grizzled old Juan, who left Ruth's side of the herd and advanced into the centre 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 bolt. She had abandoned old Brisket 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 the 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 Snavelly. "Well, how does it look?"
 "How does what look?" replied Snavelly.
 "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 Snavelly 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. Snavelly."
 She reined 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 chuckles began talking to her. They loved to hear her broken Spanish. By the time the company reached the saddle 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 begun, 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 Snavelly 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 snap 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! I've won!"

That evening after supper while David and Ann were making the chickens secure against skunks and coyotes, Ruth 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. Snavelly 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, then admiration and pleasure. They all sprang to their



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feet, but Don Francisco 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

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NEWS AND INFORMATION FOR THE BUSY FARMER

Winter Feeding of Market Hogs
 Winter fed hogs require a dry, reasonably warm bed. Exercise is necessary in the early stages of growth. Include in the feed mixture a variety of grains such as oats, barley and shorts or middlings. Skim-milk or buttermilk should be included and must be always fed uniformly sweet or sour. Tankage may replace the milk. Do not attempt to finish too quickly or crippling may result.

Turnips For Sheep
 In Canada many successful sheep raisers feed turnips to their sheep. The excellence of many pure-bred flocks in which international prize winners are reared is in great measure due to the liberal use of succulent foods, and no other green crop is so generally used as turnips in the winter season. Apart from their food constituents, turnips have a wonderful effect in maintaining a vigorous condition of the digestive organs and general system. Young lambs born in the winter or early spring are greatly benefited by liberal feedings of finely sliced turnips until grass arrives. Previous to lambing, ewes should not be heavily fed upon turnips or other roots, from 4 to 5 pounds per day being very beneficial; a larger quantity is liable to cause abnormally large, soft lambs, deficient in vitality.

Breeding Essential for High Egg Production
 The average production of all the birds in the laying contest held at Harrow for the past three years is about 180 eggs per hen. It is roughly estimated that it costs about 80 to 100 eggs to feed a hen for one year. The hen which lays about 180 eggs in a year produces eight times as much profit as a 110-egg hen, less the small extra cost of feed required to produce the larger number of eggs. The moral of this story is that breeding is one great factor which governs profits, and that if the farmer has not the inclination or is unable to carry on his own selective breeding program to save his own flock from deterioration he must depend on the poultryman who makes this a practice. Indiscriminate use of untested males means reversion; and it should be borne in mind that the yield of the jungle fowl, from which our high-record "egg machine" of to-day originated, was probably about two dozen eggs in a year.

Health of Poultry Flock
 Normal health is essential in a poultry flock because illness lowers egg production and reduces weight gains.

Disease, particularly when of a communicable nature, is preventable. Medical treatment of a sick flock costs money with little assurance of profitable results.

Constant vigilance is necessary to prevent the spread of contagious disease in the flock.

Crop Facts
 Although the volume of field crop production in Ontario this year was

less than in 1932 owing to drought and intense heat during the growing season, the value of production shows an increase of nine millions of dollars or 8 per cent over last year.

Ontario's export of apples to the United Kingdom for this season up to November 15th was 240,000 barrels. This figure exceeds the total shipments for the entire season during each of the three previous years, which were as follows: 1930—135,000 barrels; 1931—136,000 barrels; 1932—209,000 barrels. Apple exports this year promise to set a record as on Nov. 15th 220,000 barrels of apples were still on hand in cold storage.

Greatly increased cold storage facilities, erected in the last few years, now permit our growers to hold their apples and market them in the Old Country when prices are at their best.

Ontario tobacco continues to secure an increasing share of the British market, with exports for 1933 totaling over 15,000,000 lbs., or 50 per cent more than in 1932.

Loans to farmers on farm property during the past year by the Ontario Agricultural Development Board totalled \$6,700,000 as compared with \$8,500,000 last year.

The Canada-United Kingdom Trade Agreement that went into effect on Nov. 15th, 1932, has resulted in numerous gains in Canadian exports in a wide range of farm commodities.

Bill of Lading Required
 All truckers handling livestock are required by Government regulations, under which their licenses are issued, to furnish farmers with bills of lading on livestock shipments. Many farmers are not aware of this regulation or the protection it affords them and many cases come to light where livestock shippers have suffered loss through not insisting on a bill of lading from the trucker who hauls his stock to market.

Under the Highways Act, every trucker transporting livestock for hire is required under his P. C. V. license to furnish a bill of lading to the shipper. The Regulation affords the producer an opportunity of determining to whom his livestock is sold. In any case it assures the shipper that he will get his money and a full and correct statement from the purchaser to whom the trucker delivers his load.

These regulations do not apply to farmers transporting their own livestock nor to drovers who purchase outright from the farmer and transport their purchases to market. But if the farmer fails to insist on a bill of lading from the trucker who hauls his cattle he can have no assurance of where his livestock is sold or to whom, or at what prices and moreover, he has to accept the trucker's responsibility for returning his money.

With a bill of lading from the trucker the farmer can make sure that his cattle are not sold direct to a Packer by whom the trucker may be employed, if he desires the open competition of the Stock Yards.

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