



**WHISPERING ROCK**

by JOHN LEBAR  
AUTOCASTER SERVICE N.Y.

**TWENTY-FIRST 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, Snavely, 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 Snavely. 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. Snavely calls it "liver fever" . . . and says he has a powder for the water to cure the disease. Ruth discovers trickery in Snavely's tactics of poisoning her cattle, but says nothing, waiting for additional evidence. Drought is overcome by sinking a well in a ravine, getting water for the perishing stock. At the round-up Ruth has enough stock to sell to meet her notes.

**NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY**

Ruth entered the gully which ran eastward a few yards south of the house, and followed it. At last she stopped beneath an ash tree which had a low branch. With the paring knife she cut the potato in half and made numerous little cuts in the white surface. Into this surface she rubbed a pinch of powder from the liver fever box. She placed the piece of potato on the branch of the tree and, walking a short distance away, seated herself in the shade to wait, her eyes on the potato.

She waited more than an hour and was about to give up when a little gray bird flew down from the top of the ash tree and alighted on the

branch. After a moment the bird hopped to the potato, looked it over, and took a speculative peck.

Ruth watched so intently that her eyes burned. The little bird had taken several bites when it ceased and moved away from the potato. It stood upon a small twig and jerked its head as though trying to shake something from its mouth or throat. Then the little wings drooped, the bird toppled, hung by a single claw for a moment, and dropped to the ground.

Ruth buried the bird and the piece of potato, then walked slowly back to the house. Her face was pale and her knees felt uncertain. In her room again, she unlocked her trunk, and after screwing up her courage, tasted the powder labeled Cyanide.

It was common salt.

The girl shuddered. How could any one deliberately poison cattle? But she knew that to Snavely cattle were only a crop. He would not have killed a horse; but if by causing the cattle crop to fail he could gain possession of the ranch, that was another matter.

Snavely had not foreseen that she would lock both boxes in her trunk and so had no opportunity to rechange the contents. Later, Ann had "poisoned" the barbecue meat with dirty salt, and to-day the girl had killed a bird with the "fever medicine." Ruth grew weak with fear; if the man would do such things in an effort to rid himself of her, what might he not do? . . . That night when the drunken giants had been goaded to kill her by the voice. Ruth was certain that in some way Snavely controlled that voice.

She now feared him as never before; yet, she must not let him suspect it. If she could only hold out this week, until Old Charley and Will came. . . .

The next afternoon Ruth and David rode through the arroyo north of the barn. When they met the old road, the girl turned toward the gulch, dismounted at the fence and tied the horses.

She went first to the brown boulder and seated herself. Ruth waited half an hour, while David played about, but she heard no voice. Then, systematically, she began to explore. She looked into every depression, behind every boulder, and among the scant piles of driftwood and leaves in the bed of the gulch.

She returned to the rock and seated herself wearily—it was hard walking through the sand. David sprawled on his stomach before the rock, ticking the sand on the edge of a doodle bug cone.

"Mama, what are we doing?"

"Just thinking."

Presently David asked, "Do you hear that funny little bird?"

"Oh, David!" For the first time Ruth turned her whole mind on her son. Just then she heard the twitter of a bird. She had heard it off and on for some time, but only as one hears a sound while thinking hard upon something else. The twitter came again and Ruth started, then rose quickly to her feet. There was something strange about the sound of that bird—it was too close, as though the bird was sitting not ten feet away, perhaps even nearer. But there was not a bird in sight. "David!" Ruth was suddenly excited. "Get up on top of the rock and see if you can see the bird—we must find it, son!"

"Isn't it close, Mama?" David held his hand out before him. "I think he's sitting on my finger, but when I look he's gone!"

Slowly, Ruth moved away from the

rock, trying, from the infrequent sounds of the bird, to go toward it.

She soon discovered that if she went a few feet to right or left she could not hear the bird at all, although David, behind her on the boulder said, "Hear it!" at regular intervals.

The sound seemed to come from the south in a narrow band. As though she were following an invisible beam of light the girl walked slowly toward the cliff. It was weird: the voice of the bird grew only slightly louder—always, it seemed but a few feet before her face. Ten yards from the cliff a bird flew out of a waist-high bush and darted up the gulch. Ruth ran to the bush. It was a very ordinary bush, rather sparse, differing in no way from any other bush. A foot or so behind it rose the wall of sandstone. To left and right, ran other bushes, growing as close to the wall as they could find earth, none of them tall. Then Ruth saw something which her eyes would have missed six months before—in the bush was a dry stick about two feet tall with a forked top. This stick did not belong to the bush; it had been stuck into the sand like a stake.

She stepped through an opening on the right and came between the bush and the wall. Just behind the bush was a smooth depression in the sandstone about four feet across and perhaps a foot or more in depth. It was as though some one had pressed a giant basin into the wall when the rock was soft. The lower third of this basin was beneath the surface of the sand. It was a perfectly natural hollow such as are to be found in great numbers, scoured out by wind and water, in the sandstone banks of ravines. But Ruth saw something else; a small flat-topped rock like a footstool lay on the ground a little inside the basin, and before this stone were the marks of boot heels. Some one had recently sat upon this stone. She experimented and found that when seated upon the stone her head came opposite the deepest point of the basin behind her. She called to David to go back to the boulder and climb on top.

When the boy was in position she spoke, in a normal tone. "Hello, David."

"Hello, Mama!" His small voice reached her across the intervening distance.

Ruth lowered her voice to an excited whisper. "Can you hear Mama now?"

David did not reply.

Then she saw that the forked stick which she had already discovered was so placed that by sitting straighter she could just see the boy on the boulder through the notch. It was like a gun sight. Again she whispered, "Come here, David."

It was uncanny; the boy slid from the rock and plodded toward her through the sand.

As they returned to the house Ruth thought over her discovery. The depression in the rock was a reflector, and by sitting on the stone and sighting through the forked stick, one's mouth was placed at its focus. The sound of the voice was then conserved and directed in a narrow beam to the brown boulder, as light is reflected from a headlight. That was the secret of the old Indian medicine men. And Snavely had learned of it. He had seen Ruth, Kenneth and David that first day—had watched them struggling along the road toward the ranch. Then he had slipped into the gorge by way of the fissure and had spoken to them. Afterward, he had gone to the corral, told Ann that he would finish milking and that she should go and see who was coming through the gulch.

She was tremendously thrilled over her discovery. She told herself that now she had Snavely where she wanted him.

Ruth lay awake late that night, planning how she should prove the origin of the voice to Ann. She came to the conclusion that she would do nothing until Sunday. With Will and Old Charley helping, she could get Ann to come for a ride in the machine on some pretext or other. They would take her to the gulch and show her what the voice was. Then, without returning to the ranch they would all go into town and place the whole thing in Martin's hands.

On Saturday Ruth and David arrived at the mail box later than usual. The girl stayed on her horse while David dismounted and, crawling through the fence, went to the box. He returned with the roll of papers and magazines. "There's a letter here too, Mama," he said, as he held up the roll.

Ruth worked the letter from under the string about the package and looked at it curiously. It was addressed to her old apartment in Philadelphia; the writing was unfamiliar, a child's writing. The original postmark was undecipherable, but as she opened the letter Ruth noticed that it bore a foreign stamp.

As her eyes met the first few words of the crudely written letter, Ruth's expression of mild curiosity was suddenly wiped out. She uttered a cry and her face went white. She sat on her horse like one entranced, lips parted breathlessly, eyes staring at the paper. Both David and Sanchez looked on with interest.

"Mama—?"

"David!" Ruth whirled about. "Uncle Harry—this letter—he's alive!"

Ruth turned to the home ranch in an ecstasy of happiness. The whole world had changed; for in that world Ruth Warren felt that all her troubles were vanishing. To be sure Harry was far away, sick, and in difficulties; but he was alive. Harry, her big brother—the one person she had really depended on all her life—was alive! She told herself that she never had been quite satisfied with the story of his death; it sounded plausible but somehow not like Harry. He wasn't dead—he'd soon be with her on the Dead Lantern ranch.

She felt incredibly young and light hearted. As she and David neared the barn, chattering and laughing, Ruth fell to thinking of Snavely. She pitied him. Poor, half-crazy, eccentric man—there was nothing to fear from him now. When Harry learned



Harry Gray was coming back to the Dead Lantern, Snavely was forever beaten.

of the things he had done, Snavely would have to go.

Just what she would do at present, Ruth had not decided. First, she would show Snavely the letter. Nothing he could say or do would frighten her now, and once he understood that Harry Gray was coming back to the Dead Lantern, Snavely was forever beaten.

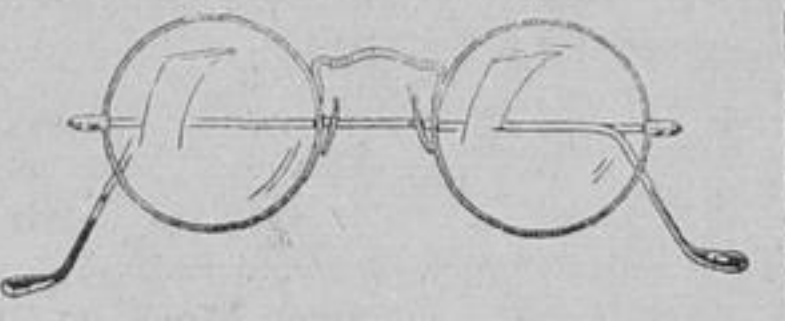
Again she read the letter which she still held in her hand. Harry had been captured by Mexican bandits, had been with them several months, had at last escaped, was badly hurt, and from then until the writing of the letter he had been cared for at the inaccessible Gutierrez Rancho six days west of Hermosillo. He said that he was dictating the letter to a traveller—the first person he had seen in many months who had any knowledge of English. Harry was unable to write because of a wound, and was still in bed. But his hurts were mending and before long he expected to write his partner, Snavely, of the situation and ask him to go to Hermosillo.

Ruth galloped to the ranch house for she saw Snavely's horse standing by the little mesquite near the back porch.

She entered the front of the house and went through to the rear.

(Continued Next Week)

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**Good Eyesight**

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**NEWS AND INFORMATION FOR THE BUSY FARMER**

Of the three elements of plant food contained in complete fertilizer, mixtures the proportion of nitrogen commencing at 9 a.m. in the fertilizer should be given special attention. If previous crops have shown too great a growth of leaf and stem with a poor grain, root, or fruit development, the proportion of nitrogen in the fertilizer mixture should be materially reduced or eliminated entirely; if the growth has been lacking in vigour and the plants pale in colour, the soil has probably been low in available nitrogen and a liberal supply of this element will probably be required for normal development.

**Hay Shortage Expected**

A hay shortage is probable in the St. Lawrence counties and the Ottawa valley before spring, and this is being intensified by the early winter and extreme cold which has required heavier feeding than usual. Some farmers are reducing their herds since they are not in financial position to buy hay and regard the outlook as poor for satisfactory prices for cattle. In the eastern part of central Ontario the hay crop was light also and farmers there realize that careful conservation of supply is necessary. Farther west, toward Toronto, the hay crop was good with plenty of alfalfa and red clover, so that on the whole there may be sufficient hay in central Ontario to meet requirements until spring. In northern Ontario the hay market at present is quiet, the best demand being from the mining towns. The supply of hay in the agricultural sections of northern Ontario is believed to be sufficient for local needs.

Current prices being paid growers are: in the St. Lawrence counties, for timothy and clover mixed, \$12 to \$15 per ton; in central Ontario, timothy and clover mixed, \$11, in the upper and lower Ottawa valleys, mixed hay, \$8 to \$9 and in Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury and New Liskeard localities of northern Ontario, \$12 to \$12.50 per ton.

**Time to Mate the Breeding Pen**

In choosing the occupants of the poultry breeding pen select only strong and vigorous breeders. Use females that have either made good egg laying records, or that show by their handling quality, clean cut heads and bright prominent alert eyes that they are of heavy laying type.

Choose males that have vigour, size and breed type, the sons of heavy laying dams and sires similarly bred.

Give the breeding pen roomy quarters. Don't use forcing feeds but feed generously, remembering sunlight, exercise, and that a supply of alfalfa and cod liver oil will help give good hatches.

**February Meetings**

J. A. Carroll, Superintendent of Agricultural Societies in the Ontario Department of Agriculture, announces the following dates for meetings, all of which will be held in the King Edward Hotel, Toronto.

Ontario Vegetable Growers' Association—Annual meeting, Thursday,

Ontario Ploughmen's Association—Annual meeting, Wednesday, February 7th, commencing at 10:30 a.m.

Ontario Field Crop and Seed Growers' Association—Annual meeting, Thursday, February 8th, commencing at 9 a.m.

Ontario Association of Fairs and Exhibitions—Annual convention, Thursday and Friday, February 8th and 9th, commencing at 1:30 p.m.

Ontario Horticultural Association—Annual convention, Thursday and Friday, February 15th and 16th, commencing at 9 a.m.

**Bill of Lading Required**

Every trucker transporting livestock for hire is required, under his P.C.V. license to furnish a bill of lading to the shipper, reports the Ontario Marketing Board in a recent statement. Unregulated livestock trucking has resulted in huge losses to the Ontario farmer and with the purpose of abolishing such a condition the Government has adopted this regulation.

Prior to the advent of the truck, when livestock was generally moved by rail, the shipper's interests were protected by a bill of lading. More recently, however, with a great part of livestock shipping being effected by truck, the shipper had to depend in many cases on the integrity of the trucker. Too often this resulted in dispute, with the shipper sustaining a serious loss.

With the bill of lading now compulsory, the shipper may designate to whom his livestock will be sold. He will receive from the commission house, or packer, a description of weights and prices paid. The issuing of a master check is now a thing of the past. The buyer, under the new regulation, is now obliged to make out a check, less trucking charges, payable to each shipper. Such checks are guaranteed by a bonding house which still further protects the shipper.

In a word, the Regulation 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. In cases where the farmer transports his own livestock, or where a drover purchases outright from the farmer, a bill of lading is not compulsory. The value of the Regulation is unquestioned. However, to be of great value to the shipper, he must be thoroughly familiar with the terms of the bill of lading and insist that it be used at all times.

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**Application To Parliament**

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Village of Woodbridge will apply to the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Ontario at its next session for an Act to ratify and validate the settlement of an action in the Supreme Court of Ontario, wherein Samuel Plunkett and others are plaintiffs and W. Robinson and Son Converters Limited and the Village of Woodbridge are defendants, and an action in the said Court wherein W. Robinson and Son Limited is plaintiff and the Village of Woodbridge is defendant, which settlement is fully set forth in Minutes of Settlement dated the 26th day of December, 1933, and filed in the said Court, and to enable the Village to enter into an Agreement in accordance with the terms thereof.

DATED at the Village of Woodbridge in the County of York this 27th day of December, 1933. SKEANS, HOOPER & HOWELL, Solicitors for the Corporation of the Village of Woodbridge.

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She looked into every depression, behind every boulder.