

Ferdie Deering
1226 N.W. 18th
Oklahoma City

REGULAR RATES
Approx. 1100 Words

H O T T E R ' N B L U E B L A Z E S

By Ferdie Deering

"It's a durn shame one o' them fat hens didn't get caught in that fire so's we coulda had a little roasted chicken fer our trouble!"

Huckaby Marlow, proud of his 85 years and the fact that he had "fit with Teddy Roosevelt" in the Spanish-American war, pulled up his nail keg seat to resume his grim, battle-to-the-death checker game with Honest Bill Smith.

The championship match of the Sons of Rest Checker and Whittling club had been interrupted when Hank Wilson's oldest boy drove by to say there was a fire at Jud Holsinger's place. The fire, it turned out, was in the henhouse. Jud had it under control when the Sons of Rest got there and for that reason probably saved him property from more disastrous consequences.

"You needn't be awishin' fer no chicken," Honest Bill

retorted to Huckaby's lament. "You couldn't chew it with them mail order plates o' yourn ef'n you had it."

He opened a dime can of Rooster snuff and, holding his lower lip open with one hand, poured in a generous mouthful.

"'Twas a lot o' bother fer nothin' though," he went on in spite of this handicap. "Sorta puts me in mind o' the time Old Man Jim Burleyson come home drunk and set fire to a pile o' newspapers his wife had been asavin' to paper th' house with. Didn't 'pear to amount to nothin' but it durn near kilt Old Jim's wife. Took her 'most a year to save up another batch."

Huckaby jumped three of Honest Bill's men, landing right in the king row.

"Heh, Heh, you better git yore mind on whut you're adoing," giggled Deacon Johnson. "But it's th' truth. You can't never tell when a little fire'll turn into a big 'un. Now, I rec'llect we had a fire at our house wunst when I wuzn't nuthin' but a little old red headed, freckle faced kid."

"You aint improved much in looks since then, hev

you, Deacon?" interrupted Storekeeper Snodgrass. His sarcastic remarks gave him much pleasure---about the only remuneration he received for the crackers and bulk dried apples the Sons of Rest filched from his barrels while the tournament was in session.

"Wal, we jest had a two-room log cabin," the Deacon continued, scowling at his slanderer. "In th' kitchen we had a lot o' shelves built around the walls and ginerrally kept a couple o' big bucketsful o' water underneath 'em.

"This day th' fire happened, it wuz Saturday. We all quit work in th' fields 'bout dinnertime and went to town. It wuz nearly dark afore we got our bunch all rounded up at the wagonyard ag'in to start home.

"But when we got back home, we didn't have no home to git back to. It had ketched fire and burned right smack bedab up. They wuzn't nothin' left but a mess o' burnt logs, an iron bedstid and iron pots and th' like.

"Wal, we couldn't do nothin' about it, so we jest bedded down in th' wagon and th' barn and waited tell mornin'. When we got up, us kids got to pokin' around in the ashes and whut do you think we found? Now, sir, a basket o' eggs that

had been a settin' on that shelf had fell off into a bucket o' water. The fire had cooked 'em and there we had as nice a batch o' boiled eggs as I ever et. They wuz aboutnall we had fer breakfast that mornin'."

"If you'd go spread that stuff on yore tater patch you and the taters both 'ud do better," snorted the cynical Snodgrass.

"Aw, whut he says mighta happened," chimed in Honest Bill, not because he actually believed the story but he wanted at least one appreciative listener for the story he obviously had on the end of his tongue. He spat in the general direction of the cuspidor with correspondingly general results.

"Now, I remember back about nineteen and eight, the summer it got so hot, the sun baked taters right in the ground on the old Jones place whar we wuz alivin' about seven miles northwest o' town."

"You're agoin' to be in a hotter place 'n' that if you don't keep yore mind on this checker game," Huckaby Marlow growled. He was losing and was trying to rush his opponent.

"Gentlemen, now I remember one summer it got hot down

hum, so dadgummed hot it looked like we wuzn't gonna hafta die to gât whut wuz acomin' to us," squeaked Cid Perkins, his tobacco juice-stained beard waving up and down like a Jersey ^{cow's} ~~cow's~~ tail switching flies.

"Into th' cellars, everybody, here comes th' big blow!" shouted Snodgrass. Cid Perkins was recognized as the champion liar of Coconino county and, although he had talked in that high-pitched, uncertain tone of voice as far back as anybody claimed to remember, rumor had it that one of his big yarns had got stuck in his throat and it choked him when another one tried to get past it.

"Wal, gentlemen," Perkins went on. A lifetime of embellishment had calloused him against such insinuating and disparaging remarks. "It had been awful hot and dry thet summer. We had some heavy spring rains and then all at oncet it quit rainin'. By the middle o' June everything wuz as dry as a bone and it kept agittin' dryer and hotter.

"'Most ever'body had some hay put up, though. They jest piled it in big ricks out in the fields. It wuz so dry and brittle it wuzn't much good but it wuz 'bout all the feed we

had fer our stock. The weather wuz jest so dadblamed hot, the wells 'ud set and steam all day long. Tom Adams's boy, the laziest one, figgered out a contraption that used the steam from their well to pump water for the cows.

"Anyhow, the Fourth o' July come along jest about the same time it did last year and some o' the town folks got inn some firecrackers from Jay-pan. Thet night they wuz a-cettin' off some skyrockets and Roman candles and one o' th' skyrockets lit in Uncle Tom Price's biggest hay rick.

"Wal, it flared up fer a minute and you'd think that'd be about all a hay rick that dry 'ud last. But dadgumme if it didn't jest simmer down to a glow. We didn't have no water around to put on it, so thet fire jest kept asimmerin' there. It made a right purty sight, a sorta cherry red glow thar in the dark, kinda lika horsehoe when ya first take it outen the fire. When word got 'round, about two-thirds o' the town folk and everybody in the neighborhood come out to see it. It wuz a lot purtjer'n the firecrackers, anyhow, but a durn sight more expensive.

"Thet fire jest kept asmolderin' and asimmerin' all

that night and next mornin'. When the sun riz and it got hotter, that fire begun dying down. The hotter the sun shone, the less that fire burned. And along about noon, it got so hot that when a hog laid down in the sun, all he had to do wuz turn over and he'd be ham fried on both sides. Right then, you know whut happened? Wal, I'll tell you.

"Nothin' atall happened, except that fire went clean out. It jest sputtered a couple o' times and a thin wisp o' smoke shot up and that wuz all. That haystack wuzn't more'n a fourth burnt up and hadn't a drop o' water teched it. Whut happened wuz that the weather wuz so hot that it justcouldn't git anuff air to burn good th' night it started and when th' sun come out, th' fire couldn't git no air atall and th' heat jest smothered it clean out."

"Wal, Bill, I see you finally got old Marlow cornered and I guess it's up to me to beat you," Perkins concluded. He pulled out a big chunk of Star Navy and bit off a big chew.

"Boys, watch me," he said, settling himself at the checker board, "I feel lucky today."

THE END