

HESPER

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about Ann. She has money, is handsome, and yet her she is quite disengaged. If we except her affair with Peabody, which Adney writes is quite as tepid as any of Ann's other affairs.

Well, now, I'll tell you. She's come to the right place to have men ride up and demand attention. If she doesn't have at least an offer a week it will not be my fault. I'm going to invite all the young fellows home to dinner while she's here. Now water a mining broker, was, in fact, president of the polo club, secretary of the Sage Grass Golf association—in short, financial nurse to every collection of amiable sports in the town. He knew all "the best fellows" in the state and now became more popular than ever.

My Dear Rob—I'm sending you a new hand and a vision of life. They are cousins and I'm sending him down to you to get a job with Ann and cowboys and is a jet of wild animals and cowboys and is a very clever artist. He'll want to have you pose for him.

Raymond came over and seized the stove lid as if to break Baker's head. "We're to cook and purvey like boarding house keepers and doctor like a nurse at a health resort, and in addition we're to pose for a delicate youth who thinks we're material." That settles me. I'm going up to sky and take a shy at mining.

Baker broke forth into a slow drawl. "Hadn't you better strike a few attitudes so's to be in practice when the boys come?" Raymond throtted him half in earnest. "I've a mind to wailing your neck," he said through his teeth.

CHAPTER III. BARNETT'S ranch, one of his chief amusements, lay at the head of a valley surrounded by a spring which was the source of Wildcat creek. The buildings stood just where the ravine opened out upon a grassy meadow. It was a comfortable place, shielded from the desert winds by the low hills to the north, while a small artificial pond, graveled and rimmed with cottonwoods and willows, gave it enviable distinction among the bleak and barren farmsteads. It was known as the "Goldfish ranch," for the reason that at one time Barnett had filled the pond with ornamental fish.

At about 5 o'clock of a hot and windless July day a horseman galloped swiftly up the valley into the yard and was met at the door of the house by a tall, composed young fellow in broad hat and spurs. "Hello, Perry!" he said quietly. "You made good time." Perry, a young Mexican, showed a score of his white teeth in a grin. "Here is letter. Some people coming to ranch tonight."

Baker, who was gaining self control, turned to Ann. "We have to humor our cooks out here. They're scarce and mighty uncertain in their minds—stop and shy at nothing, like a loaded steer."

Louis nodded his hands. "Oh, isn't the talk good, Ann? And these chairs—aren't they fine?" "Cook made 'em," said Baker. "He's handy as a bootjack with tools."

Ann ignored the chairs, but studied the cook, whose curiosity absorbed, sullen yet deft movements interested her. He appeared to be about thirty years of age, and his lean, powerful figure dignified the rough and dust stained clothes he wore.

Raymond, on his part, was fairly abashed by the grace and youthful charm of his visitor. She reminded

him, as she stood there calmly looking about the grimy walls, of the stories he had read of princesses visiting the huts of their peasantry. She was of good height, but the proud lift of her head, and the cut of her gown, the color of her gloves and hat, told of good taste and the services of the best tailors and milliners.

"Great Scott!" he said to himself. "She's an up to date beauty. What'll it do to feed her? And, imperturbable as he looked, his heart sank within him, and if he could have fled honorably he would have done so instantly."

Raymond took no pains to be noiseless or dainty in his work, but every moment told. He sloshed out the coffee and sliced the bacon and stirred up the fire, all with a grace and quiet dignity which opened Ann's eyes in an effort to understand his work. His hands were noticeably fine, and the poise of his head expressed strength and pride.

Once, when he passed out of hearing, she turned to Baker suddenly and asked: "Why does your cook wear spurs? An affectation, I suppose." Baker flushed and stammered. "Well, no; he has to help with the cattle once in awhile."

Raymond called to Perry, who was seated on the doorstep. "Perry, jump your horse and round up a dry cottonwood snag. This brush is of no sort of use. I want a hot fire."

Louis beamed on Ann. "He's talking just like Walter Owen's heroes." Ann silenced him. "Hush! He'll hear you." Baker, quite ready to take a fall out of Raymond, interposed: "He's a little hard at first, but reel sociable when you git him started. He's shy as a rabbit when they're any company round."

Raymond uttered a cough which made Baker start. "I guess I'll go out and see what that driver has done with his horses."

Louis sprang up. "I'll go, too, if you don't mind, sis." As Ann looked round the low celled room in which the files buzzed her eyes fell upon a little case of books in the corner. For lack of something better to do, she rose to inspect them. She was surprised to find them mainly essays, and wondered who of these men read Emerson and Burroughs. One of them was a book of verse. Raymond's name was on the fly leaf.

"How handsome the cook is!" was her inward exclamation as she returned to her seat. She was not one of those who sit in silence when they wish information, and, lifting her voice a little, she said: "I understood Mr. Barnett to say that you had a woman to cook for you?" Raymond shifted a stove lid. "We did."

"Where is she?" "Gone—a week ago." "Isn't there any woman about the place?" He peered into the coffee pot. "No one but you."

Ann sat in silence for a moment. "I didn't understand, Mr. Barnett said," Raymond straightened and looked at her somberly. "If Barnett paid a little more attention to his ranch and less to polo—I wrote him, more than a week ago, that Jonesy was potting his freight." He returned to his cooking.

announced gravely. "Of course, you're both having fun with us because we're from the east, and I don't think it quite nice in you."

Baker began to look distressed. "Oh, see here, miss, you mustn't think—you're all wrong! Why, we're delighted—were you see?"

Ann turned to Louis. "Louis, you are living out one of Owen's stories this very minute. I want you to stay here until you can meet these people on their own ground. She faced Baker again. "Tell me more about this cook. He's a college man, and there's some hidden mystery, as the story books say. What brought him to this pass? Is he a fugitive from justice?"

Baker took a seat and appeared to ponder. "Well, now, I don't like to say. You see, it ain't safe to tell tales on Cook. If you'll swear not to breathe a word—"

"Hold up your hands, Louis, and we swear!" cried Ann. "Of course we won't tell."

Baker settled into his chair. "You mustn't blame him till you hear the full story, but he killed a feller back east somewhere in Illinois."

Ann started melodramatically. "Really?" Baker, pleased with his success, added, "Two of 'em, in fact."

Louis, wide eyed with interest, "What did he do it for?" Baker, glowing with pleasure in the work of his own imagination, cut loose from his moorings. "It was this way: He was courting a girl—the daughter of a rich farmer—and her family was hot because Rob was poor, and her dad put another fellow on to tell lies about Rob's drinkin' and all that, and Rob met up with this feller and just naturally plied him full of soft nose bullets. That led him to seek higher altitudes, as the newspapers say. Now, that's the plain truth of the whole business, as I hear it."

Louis pursued the inquiry. "Who was the other man he killed?" "The deputy sheriff. Had to do that to get away."

Ann looked about. "You say he reads these books?" "When he has time. He dotes on 'em."

"Do you read them?" "Great Scott, no! I'd go to sleep over such things. 'The Boy's Own' is about my size."

Ann's tone was reflective. "That's queer. Mr. Barnett said you were a great reader." Baker paled, then got red. He walked into a clever little trap. He wriggled in his chair. "Did he say that? Well—I used to, but lately—"

Ann looked at him keenly and said calmly: "You also are an impostor. Your name isn't Raymond—you're not the foreman. You are all bandits and have stolen my cousin's ranch and are running it to suit yourselves. I believe you killed poor old Mr. Jones and his wife."

Louis sprang to his feet. "Ann, what do you mean?" Baker threw up both hands. "Hold on! Don't shoot! I'll come down. I knew I couldn't keep the game going. He rose, and in his manner changed. He now listened. I'll tell you the square toed truth. It was my turn to cook, and Raymond—that's our boss—when he heard you was comin', knowin' I couldn't cook our bran mash, says: 'Baker, you'll have to play boss while the company's here. I've got to toss up the bacon and prunes. Now that's the fact, lady.'

Ann, with conviction, turned to Louis: "Now I believe he's telling the truth. What is your name?" "John Edwin Baker—Jack, the boys call me. I never had any other name. I'm sorry to say, and I came here from Kansas. I never killed anything bigger'n a coyote. I'm just a plain cow puncher at twenty-six per month."

Raymond, reappearing at the door, put them all into guilty confusion. His eyes were too keen to be withheld, and Ann's lashes fell for a moment as he offered the dipper. "Like a cool drink, lady?" She recovered herself instantly. "Thank you, if you will be so kind." Raymond threw a glance at Baker that propelled him through the door way as palpably as a kick, then turned to Louis. "How does the grub go, youngster?"



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What's up? Raymond pointed at the letter. "Read that. Nice thing the old man works on us." His indignation and disgust deepened into a growl. "This settles it. We solve to grill out."

To Cure a Cold in One Day. Take laxative Bromo Quinine Tablets. Seven M. Ann says sold in past 12 months. The signature, Dr. J. C. Ayer, Boston, Mass.