

HESPER

...BY...

HAMLIN GARLAND

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CHAPTER'S CONTINUED

He looked round the room, and his eyes fell on a little case of books in the corner. For lack of something better he rose to inspect them. She considered to find them mainly es- sential to her life. One of these was a book of verse. Raymond's was on the fly leaf.

"Handsome the cook is!" was her exclamation as she returned her seat. She was not one of those who sit in silence when they wish to speak, and, lifting her voice a little, she said:

"I expected Mr. Barnett to say that a woman to cook for you?"

"I don't know," said Ann, "but I don't think a stove is a very good thing."

"There are any woman about the house?"

"No, sir," said Ann, "I don't know of any."

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"No. What made you think it was?"

Raymond began to retreat. "Oh, I don't know. You seemed about that style. I mean to say, you carry your- self like a South college girl that came down here once with Mrs. Barnett."

He caught up the water bucket. "Ex- cept me a minute. I'll run down to the spring and get some water." His go- ing was equivalent to flight.

Ann smiled composedly as she sipped her coffee, which was very good in- deed.

Louis burst in at the door. "Sis, you ought to see the corral out here. They have ninety head of horses! Think of that! And I'm to ride all I want to."

Baker, who appeared just behind him, put in a drawing word: "Peared like he wanted to ride four to once, like a circus man. Are you gettin' somethin' to eat, miss?"

"Oh, yes, indeed."

Louis, throwing down his cap in imi- tation of Raymond, cried out, "I'm hungry!"

Ann turned to Baker. "Mr. Fore- man, isn't there something mysterious about your cook? Part of the time he speaks like a man of the world and part of the time like a rancher. I think he's playing a part, and playing it badly."

"What makes you think so?" asked Louis.

"They say he's a bully rider."

"They ain't none better, miss," re- plied Baker, who began to look a little uneasy.

Ann pursued her point. "I think he's one of those romantic cowboys who have seen better days—perhaps an English nobleman in disguise."

Baker was always ready when a chance to get even with Raymond offered itself. He puckered his plump face into a frown of deep concern. "I guess you're some right, miss, but he ain't no English lord, I don't think. We never inquire very close into a man's pedigree out here if he can ride a cayuse and flip a gun. But he's American, all right, and a good cook."

"Is Cook his real name?"

Baker became cautious. "Did he say his name was Cook? If he did, that goes. I'm not in the habit of disputing him."

"No, he didn't tell his name, but he intimated that I might call him Cook. Your name is Raymond, isn't it?"

Baker was again slow to answer. "Did he intimated that my name was Raymond?"

Ann after looking at him in silence remarked 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 deligh- ed—we 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 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. "Rea- ly?"

Baker, pleased with his success, ad- ded, "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 natu- rally piped 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 heard it."

Louis pursued the inquiry. "Who was the other man he killed?"

"The deppity sherrif. 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 had walked into a clever little trap. He wriggled in his chair. "Did he say that? Well—I-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 his manner changed. "Now listen. 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 sour 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, cut 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?"

"Bully!" replied the boy as he took up a spoonful of rice. His eyes follow- ed the little figure of the rancher with joy.

Ann cut in with a grave face, belied by something in her voice. "I didn't suppose a foreman would stoop to cook."

The young fellow frowned. "What's that?"

Ann went on. "I think it's nice of you, Mr. Raymond, to abase yourself to the rim of a kettle."

"Excuse me, lady, but—" He looked about for Baker.

Ann interposed. "That's twice you've called me 'lady.' No real cowboy ever does that, I'm told, so you must be an impostor."

Raymond's face flushed with anger. "See here! What has that fat jackass been saying to you about me?"

Ann, calmly smiling, made her charges specific. "You're not the cook. You're called Robert Raymond. You're the foreman and a graduate of Har- vard university, like all superior cow- boys, and you have gallantly volun- teered to cook in order that we might eat. Now, isn't that true?"

Raymond was stunned for a moment, but as she went on his head lifted, and into his eyes leaped a spark of red light. "Wait till I sight that scoundrel. You'll have a fine chance to study a cowboy in action. What else did he say?"

"He told us all about your fight with your rival. It was very thrilling. It's like being a character in a novel one- self. I'm quite excited by the thought."

Raymond's eyes ceased to glow, a faint smile quivered at the corners of his lips as he bowed gracefully. "Miss Rupert, permit me to atonish you still more. My name, though alternative, is my own. I have never killed a man—"

he looked toward the door—"that in- credible ass will be my first. I am not a graduate of Harvard, and I did not leave my native town between two days. Does this disappoint you?"

"Most deeply. Are there no mitiga- ting circumstances?"

"None whatever. I am hopelessly commonplace. I'm not even a cowboy. I'm foreman of a hay ranch."

"You destroy our dreams. But these books are yours?"

Raymond's eyes wavered. "Well, yes—some of them, but I don't care to pose as the student rancher. The boys respect me now because I can ride a horse and pitch hay. I make it a point not to air my other accomplishments."

He was interrupted by a series of swift trample of horses' hoofs could be heard. Louis sprang up, all excite- ment, his eyes glowing.

"What is that—Indians?"

Raymond smiled at Ann. "No, only a bunch of cowboys passing. He stepped to the door to study their ap- proach. 'It's a mob of Williams' men. I don't know what they're doing here.'"

The rush and trample of hoofs swept nearer, and a group of five drab col- ored horsemen drew up at the hitching pole with loud ooties, each man set- ting his pony on end with a wrench at the reins.

"Hello, Bob!" shouted the leader.

"Howdy, boys—howdy?" he replied coldly. It was plain he was not well pleased by their inopportune call.

"Got anything to eat?" asked one of them as he swaggered up.

"Sure thing. Tidy up and come in."

Raymond, turning to Ann, said gently: "Perhaps you and the boy had better step into the other room. This gang is coming in."

"They're not dangerous?"

"No, but some of them are not fit to eat in the presence of a lady."

"Louis will want to see your guests."

"Very well," replied Raymond and turned to meet his visitors, who ap- peared fresh from a hasty toilet.

"Come right in, boys. What's the best word from over the ridge?"

The man who entered first was a big, rawboned, wide mouthed, freckle faced fellow, who gaped in amazement as he caught sight of Ann. "Hello! What's all this?" he asked, hunching the man next him.

The insolent vulgarity of his tone brought a flush of anger to Raymond's face. "Shut up!" he commanded in a low voice. Then added in explanation, "Some of Barnett's folks visiting the ranch."

At the moment he hated them all with a sudden realization of their essential cheapness and their filthy manners.

As they took seats each man glanced

at Ann with furtive, devouring eyes, and she thrilled under the scrutiny as she would have done beneath the glare of a wolf. She had a sudden sense of danger. "I am getting close to the ele- mental man," she thought, and by con- trast Raymond assumed new interest.

Though his clothing was almost as rough as theirs, his face and voice be- trayed good blood and refinement. She wondered whether Wayne Peabody could stand between such a mob of ruffians and a woman. This man Ray- mond dominated them easily.

Louis sat as one entranced studying the groupings in the sunset light, which had begun to dim a little. To him these men were heroic. Their physical hardihood, their slouching grace, their rumpled hair, their tag ends of ker- chiefs and greasy belts and cuffs were all "bang up material." The avid glare under which Ann shivered was hidden from the eyes of the boy, but Raymond took note of every nuance, every wink that passed, and once or twice he fixed his eyes on the man they called Speck- le in a look which stayed a coarse jest upon his lawless lips.

They talked of the great, new mining camp on the side of Mogalyon, where to they were all bound. "They're striking it rich in the grass roots, and we're going up to take a hand in it. Why, last week they made three strikes on Pine mountain within fifteen feet of the sur- face. They say the placer is turning out \$10 a day. So we're riding up to turn a rock on our own account. The cattle business is done for. Gold chas- ing is the game now."

"Say, Raymond," called out a little man down by the stove, "you'd better bustle out your gang and meet that fire. It's coming right over the ridge this way and is getting worse every minute."

Raymond's face betrayed keen inter- est. "I've been trying to locate that fire all day. It's over about Round Top, isn't it?"

"Oh, no. It's away this side. Looks like it's sure to take Williams' hay if he don't watch out, and yours too."

"Why didn't you ride over and see just where it was?" asked Raymond.

"Too busy," Speckle replied loudly, and the others laughed. "I'm after gold now. I'm sick o' forkin' hay."

Raymond's voice grew sterner. "You didn't leave Williams short handed to fight that fire?"

"No matter whether we did or not; we've got done. Our time was up; we've got our pay. He can fight his own fire; we're not responsible." They all laughed as though this were a good joke.

Raymond's next words were as cold and calm as they were unexpected. "You got up and got out o' here, every man of you. I mean now." His anger broke out as they started. "I don't

admitted to herself. The other men paid very little direct attention to her beyond a moment's awkward pause and a lowering of their voices. They continued to discuss the fire and their day's work. It was plain that they were of different temper from the crowd Raymond had thrown from the door, and yet they were not prepossess- ing.

The liveryman, a short, dirty and very assertive man of small wit, was maintaining himself against one of the riders in an argument. "I punched cattle all over them hills," he was say- ing. "I know it's all another fake like that old Mount Horeb business in '70. It's nothin' but a cattle range—a lot o' smooth hills."

"But they've found the gold. They can't be no question about it now. I've got a brother up there, and he writes me."

"They told the same kind o' yarns about Horeb, and see how it turned out. They ain't an ounce o' gold in this whole Rampart range. It ain't the right kind of formation."

"Well, I'm gold' up there anyhow," said Baker, "as soon as Barnett can fill my place."

"So am I," said one of the other cow- boys, a dark, smileless fellow nearly forty years of age.

"They're talking about Sky camp," whispered Louis, "the new mining town."

The talk among the men shifted again to a discussion of the fire. "I hope Bob won't order us out to fight it to- night. I'm tired as a dog," said one of the men.

"The way I put it up is this," blen- ded the liveryman: "That fire started from somebody campin' over on Birch creek, and it's 'way beyond the ridge. It's got to cross that rocky wash be- fore it can do any damage."

"Well, we'll know when Rob gets back," replied Baker, and Ann in- ferred from this that Raymond had ridden away to locate the fire, and heartily hoped he would not be gone long.

The men shoved back one by one and with sly, curious glances at the girl, sitting so cold and white and still against the wall, went out to smoke and discuss her with the driver. Baker, mindful of his duties, remained. "Don't be uneasy, miss. One of us will stay here anyhow."

Louis was looking over his sketching material, his mind busy with plans for work, when a shout outside announced Raymond's return. The lad rushed to the door. "Oh, Ann, come quick!" he called a moment later. "Here he comes! Oh, can't he ride!"

Ann reached the door just as Ray- mond dashed up and swung from his saddle. His voice was not loud, but it was stirring. "Boys, the fire is climbing the ridge, and we've got to fight it. Gather up your blankets and gunny sacks. We'll find Williams over there with some water barrels. Hustle now! I'll be along a little later. Toin, you take charge till I come."

With groans and half jocular curses the weary men, loyal to their duty, scattered to rope fresh ponies and gather up such material as they had

for fighting flame, while Raymond came to the door and brusquely said to Ann: "I'll leave Baker to look after you, Miss Rupert. I hope you won't mind."

"Oh, certainly not," said Ann as firmly as she could.

"I'd like to go along!" cried Louis. "May I?"

"You're needed right here," Raymond sternly replied. "We're likely to be out all night, and your sister needs you."

"Conkin' Baker go in your place?" asked Ann very quietly.

"Jack isn't very energetic. No; it's my duty."

"That's why I'd rather you stayed," Ann said. "If we should be attacked by Indians or anything, Mr. Baker might be asleep."

He laughed. "Indians! There aren't any within 200 miles of here."

"But you said you'd take care of us, and Mr. Barnett has consigned us to your care."

He warmed beneath the allurement of her glance. "But how would it look for the boss to remain comfortably at home while a fire?"

"You're not the boss. You're only the cook."

His face lighted up. "True enough." After a moment's hesitation he added: "Very well, consider me your protector and cook, Baker is in for it." And he went away filled with a delicious sense of having suddenly been honored above his desert.

Ann was accustomed to men who flew to do her bidding, but this instant victory over the big rancher pleased her unaccountably, and she laughed softly, acknowledging a glow of con- fidence and relief in the promise of his presence.

Out by the corrals the trampling and snorting of excited ponies could be heard mingled with the muttered oaths of the men as they hurriedly roped and saddled. The sky was darkening rap- idly, and the pillar of smoke already glowed like a brazen tower. It rose straight into the air for hundreds of feet, then spread away into a long, level cloud, showing that the wind had not yet begun to fan the flame.

At last the men were all mounted and, with a final command from the boss, spurred away into the gloom, complaining, weary, but faithful. Ray- mond felt a little foolish as he faced the liveryman from Wallace.

"No, I'm not going—at least not until I get Barnett's people fixed for the night. You'll have to bunk in the tool shed, I reckon."

"That's all right. I'll curl down close to my team. I don't want to run any risks with a lot of toughs like that Williams gang cavortin' around. They had just liquor enough aboard to make 'em reckless. I'd advise you to look out for old Turkey Egg there. He has it in for you."

Raymond was unimpressed. "They're halfway to Wallace by this time, and, besides, Speckle is a big bluff anyway. We're rid of him forever."

"Well, all is, when you meet him next you pull first," the little man replied very seriously.

Raymond walked slowly toward the house, filled with a guilty joy. In- stead of a night of hard riding and la- borious wet bag swinging he had given himself the pleasure of sitting in conversation with a beautiful and cul- tured girl. "I haven't earned this," he admitted. "I don't deserve it. It's too good to be true, but Barnett will ap- prove. Anyhow, I'm going to enjoy it while I can."

Nevertheless, this sense of being a sneak and a cheat threw over him a gloomy and preoccupied air which vexed Ann, who began to question him very much as she would have done had she discovered unusual powers in her coachman. "How do you happen to be out here, Mr. Raymond?"

He replied bluntly: "I don't know. I came here six years ago because I hadn't any trade and the cattle busi- ness was attractive, and I've been here ever since."

"But you are wasting your time and talents."

For a moment he meditated a jocular reply, but at last gravely said: "I know it. I've felt like a dough boy for some time, and—well, I'm just about decided to try my luck up at the big camp. I wish you would take a letter to Barnett and be sure that he reads it. I want him to send another man down here to take my place. But, see here, you're both tired and want to go to bed." He rose and lighted a second lamp. "Mrs. Barnett's bed is in this room"—he opened a door on the side opposite—"I'll see if it is prepared."

Ann interposed. "Oh, no! I'm not so helpless as that. Let me take the light. I will do very well, never fear."

He yielded to her. "I'll get you some water, and I hope there are some clean towels. Let me know if there is any- thing else I can do."

"You are very thoughtful."

"We try to keep that room ready, so that when the folks come down it will be tolerable."

"I'm quite sure it will do," she said definitely and entered the room.

Raymond turned to Louis. "Young- ster, can you shoot?"

"Not very well."

"Learn. A man going round this country with a young woman wants to be prepared for war. He may never have any need of a gun, and then again, unexpected, he may. A gang of hoboes like that today is dangerous when they get to drinking, and it stands a man in hand"—He made a sign commanding silence.

Continued Next Week

It is safe to say that the girls of 1905 are sweeter and more beautiful than the girls of war times. The up- to-date girls all take Hollister's Rocky Mountain Tea, 35 cents, tea or tablets. Linn Drug Co.

We will make that old summer suit look like a new one at the Eugene Dye Works, 450 Willamette street.



He landed outside the door on all fours.