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THE LOWER RANCH.

BY HATTIE HORNER LOUTHAN.

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ASON GRANT sat in his light spring wagon, waiting to go with his wife and her friends to the Lower Ranch. She was really going, although she had vowed that she never would. But they were not ready yet, and he bowed his head on his hands and allowed his mind to wander over the almost twenty years of their married life.

No one would ever accuse Jason Grant of sentimentality; yet in this retrospection his thoughts dwelt with singular persistence upon a certain morning in a haying season long ago, when pretty Mary Moore had come to help his mother cook for the hay hands. He recalled the jealous pang with which he saw the young minister drive Mary to the door—for Jason Grant, hard-working, close-handed, grasping, was never given to sentiment. But twenty years made a difference; and he had been at that time what most of the other farmer boys were—even though every one thought him wrapped up in land-getting and money-making.

How well he remembered that day! He had made numerous trips, necessary and unnecessary, from hay field to house, just for a word with Mary Moore, or for a glimpse of her plump form and blooming face. The picture that rose oftenest before him was that of Mary, framed by the doorway, smiling upon him as he turned away with the hammer for which he had made one of those unnecessary trips. That smile had made his heart beat like a hammer of another sort—foolish fellow!

Ah, me! he could see it all in detail—the yellow farmhouse with green shutters, the "lean-to" for tools, the bench, the grindstone, the scythe, the garden rake, the wood-pile with the axe in the old stump, the well-sweep, beyond the stretch of orchard fence, the barn, swallow-circled, and the fast-multiplying stacks of emerald hay.

Jason, the only son, had inherited the Grant homestead; and Mary Moore had been wise, from the worldly point of view, in accepting his hand, grasping though it was, rather than that of the young minister, which had been offered her on that very morning's drive.

It was more the spirit of innate coquetry that prompted her to inform the reticent young farmer of the honor proffered her by the minister; though Jason Grant, during the sober second thought following the arduous insistence of his own proposal, came to the conclusion that the information had been vouched him in order to bring him to the point.

His father had for some time had his business eye upon a rich bottom-land ranch, an entire section, six hundred and forty goodly acres, wooded, watered and gently sloping, and lying in the inevitable path of the much-talked-of branch road from seat to seat of the adjoining counties. When old Ranchman Grant came to his last illness, shortly before his son's wedding, he confided to the prospective bridegroom that the coveted ranch could be had upon a small payment, and by assuming the heavy, though long-time mortgage held by eastern parties; and that the acquisition of it was worth even the postponement of the wedding.

But love is love; his blundering proposal was made, and the marriage celebrated shortly after the old father had been laid to rest. It was not until the wedding day that the young ranchman told his bride of the proposed purchase of the Lower Ranch, that it would require all his ready money for the first payment, and that they would have to defer their intended wedding tour to the State capital. Instead, she might accompany him to the county-seat, where he must go to fix up the transfer of the mortgage.

So Mrs. Jason Grant—how proud she was of the new name—informed her friends and the minister—who had the grace to hide his disappointment and officiate at the wedding—that for the present "my husband and me" would journey to the county-seat and stop at the best hotel till "my husband's" business was settled, that of

buying six hundred and forty acres of the richest bottom-land in the country; that later they would build a fine house on their new ranch, and move there; and that they would go on their wedding trip in the fall.

Needless to say, that wedding tour was never taken. So this was the first of a long series of credits to Mary Grant in her account with the Lower Ranch. That fall her health was not the best; by spring, baby Ruben came, and the multiplication of household cares tied her to the home ranch. But Mary was young and strong, and like any other loving woman, centred her heart in her husband, home and baby, sang about her work, and laughed down any mention of a wedding tour. There were so many other things she wanted more; a baby-carriage, some new clothes, and an ingrain carpet for the best room. But her mother-in-law said she had raised one son and six daughters without a baby carriage; that the wedding clothes could be made over, and that rag-carpet ought to be good enough for farmers' wives.

When Mary appealed to her husband, he said gravely that he feared she'd have to wait awhile, as the semi-annual payment on the Lower Ranch was about due, and he hardly knew how he was to meet it without sacrificing some hogs on the then low market. Then Mary, in a burst of generosity, said he must do nothing of the sort. He should have her butter and egg income, which was no little. So she continued to carry her heavy baby, made over her meagre wedding outfit, and spent the evenings tearing and sewing carpet-rags.

That fall the old mother died, and the funeral expenses consumed much of the money saved toward the winter payment on the Lower Ranch. New winter clothes were not to be thought of; the butter and egg income continued to flow into the Lower Ranch fund, and by spring Mary was asking a quarter at a time for thread and other necessities. Still she was proud of her husband as a land owner, and kept saying that she would go with him some day to see the Lower Ranch. But it was ten miles distant, a long ride for her and baby in the heavy wagon, and she was always so busy.

That season the crops were almost a failure through drought, and the hogs had to go, market or no market. In the spring another baby added to Mary's cares and she made Ruben's infant clothes do for the tiny girl. How could she ask for new things when barns must be painted, hired hands paid, and that semi-annual payment always staring them in the face?

A hired girl had been the dream of her honeymoon days, and the necessity for house help grew as the passing years increased the work, and slipped babe after babe into her reluctant arms. But she was told, impatiently, I fear, that she could see that three hired men couldn't put in and cultivate and gather all the crops of the homestead and Lower Ranch and the rented land; he must have more help. When once the Lower Ranch was paid for, she could have a hired girl and welcome.

It was the fifth year when the mortgage was due that a diplomatic trip had to be made to the county-seat. The last payment was overdue, with only part of the interest paid. But the agent was wise. He had learned upon inquiry that Jason Grant was honest, hard-working and ambitious; that he always paid, as he demanded to be paid—to the last penny. So there was no trouble about the extension of the mortgage; and the ranchman returned home radiant. His wife was not as sympathetic as he had expected. Every year of the extension of that mortgage meant another year without help in the house.

The second five years proved harder than the first five. Mary's superb health yielded more and more to the strain. The rosy face and arms grew brown and leathery from exposure at the washtub, in the garden and in the barnyard. She took less pride in herself and children now, went less frequently to church, though the minister, still unmarried, called to protest. She

grew more and more silent, unfriendly and self-contained, as she "trod her eternal circle" of cooking, dish-washing, sweeping and mending, washing, milking cows and rocking babies. During these years of meeting payments, she seldom expressed a want of a need—shoes or school books for the children, a bottle of medicine, or small donations for the parsonage—but she was confronted by the Lower Ranch and its next payment.

At length the mortgage was lifted, the last payment met; but the sign of pardonable relief was quenched by the announcement that the "fine house" would now be built—for renting purposes. The projected Branch Road from county seat to county seat was enjoying its biennial boom, the Lower Ranch was on its surveyed route, and as all the adjoining ranches were making improvements, it was just pure business to keep up with the neighbors and be ready for what might happen.

The "fine house" was begun and finished, and Ranchman Grant urged his wife to go with him and see it. Mary smiled one of her grim little smiles, and said she was too busy and too tired; the children might go—Ruben, Mandy and Jason. She really never had been to the Lower Ranch near as it was. The longing of earlier years to visit had changed, first into indifference, and by-and-by into a positive aversion, quite unaccountable to her husband.

The years that followed were full of prosperity for Jason Grant. He "bought more land to raise more corn to feed more hogs"—his eternal circle. His possessions increased—fields, barns, stock, family. He would have hired a girl for his wife, he told her one day about here; but country help was high-priced, and besides, Mandy and Mag were quite old enough to take responsibilities. To this Mary did not respond. She was growing to be almost as silent as he.

More years, more prosperity, more improvements on all the ranches and now of the state of affairs at the old ranch house, just a glimpse.

Ranchman Grant sits inside the fly-screen of the west kitchen door. Mrs. Grant has "done" the supper dishes and strained the milk and set the yeast and picked the chickens and put the baby to sleep and heard Mag's and Willie's Sunday-school lessons, and now she draws her mending basket near the lamp, and approaches her husband on the matter of their share of the minister's salary. The Joneses give ten dollars besides most keeping the minister and his sister in meat. The Turners give ten dollars and never go to town without taking a bushel of turnips to the parsonage. And didn't he mind, they had set down four dollars and one-half last revival time, and only fifty cents of it was paid, besides the half bushel of potatoes and what butter she had spared?

Emboldened by his silence, she goes on to remind him that Ruben needs a new pair of boots, since he and the team have been promised a week in Turner's timber. And Mandy ought to have a new calico dress if she takes the little ones to Sunday-school. And she, herself, would like to get another bottle of that iron tonic just to carry her over haying season; the other bottle had sort o' braced her up. She hated to go to Dr. Dean again, when he wasn't paid yet for tending on Willie and the baby.

Jason Grant is astonished. Doesn't he let her have half the butter and egg money, and oughtn't a woman to keep herself in little things with all that? Don't all the stores where she trades carry calico? And Ruben's boots will last another two months at least; he noticed them only last Sunday. As to the parson, doesn't he, Jason Grant, give each of the children a penny every Sunday for the collection? She doesn't stop to calculate how much that amounts to in a year; women are nothing at figures anyhow. Well, he'll see the parson some of these days and see about that four dollars. Maybe he'll take some more potatoes. He settles back to his paper without a mention of the medicine. But his wife persists, though half frightened at her own temerity. Can she have just enough to get the tonic? She can't sell butter and eggs at the drug store. If she can only be carried over till cool weather. She isn't feeling right smart, and baby pulls her down and—

Her husband breaks in impatiently. How much does a bottle cost? Thirty-five cents. He counts out the exact change into her extended hand, muttering that he doesn't see how he is ever to improve the Lower Ranch if she keeps on. Nearly a whole half dollar

for a bottle of patent medicine that won't do any good either. Women are always sick or think they are. If they'd only take care of themselves! He is never sick. Always money! Does she think his breeches pockets are chuck full all the time? A man can struggle along all his days and work like a slave and never get ahead. And to see his money, good straight silver, cash, mind you, worse than thrown away on such fool things as patent bitters! It is downright outrageous! And two new sickles broken and a new sulky rake to buy, and a stock-well to dig on the Lower Ranch, and won't that ranch be hers when he is dead?

After several such interviews, Mary Grant's aversion to the Lower Ranch grew into a sort of mania. Not only did she refuse to see it, but she began to tell her neighbors in a boastful way that she had never seen the big piece of land, bought when she was a bride, now more than eighteen years ago, and what was more, she never would go near it. It was the one subject upon which she was talkative. The habit grew upon her. She would tell the same story to every one, even to chance acquaintances. She went so far as to repeat her vow to the minister in the presence of her husband—a vow which the minister never forgot and which the husband never forgave.

But one day, after a week's absence at the county-seat, Jason Grant returned home too jubilant to remember petty wrongs. The Branch Road was to be built, in fact, was being built. The survey was completed, construction begun, and oh! what a fortune, a station was located right in the southwest corner of his section. A town, rejoicing in the name of Grantville, was to be laid out, and he would be the Town Company, with the price of lots to be fixed at his discretion. Now she must go to see their town on their ranch.

She heard him through with her little mouthless smile, but shook her head. She could not go; she was always too tired.

And she clung to her resolution. The road was completed, the town laid out, lots sold and houses erected by the magic of all Western booms. Grantville flourished that summer and fall. There were the smell of new lumber and fresh paint and the sound of saw and hammer. A quarry was opened within two miles of the town. The new cemetery, with its two fresh graves, was laid out in the northeast corner of Jason Grant's ranch, and even there was a boom in lots.

But the Town Company's wife never saw the town. She kept her vow with the dogged persistence of her class, though the town was their nearest market. She remained at home altogether on Sundays after the services were transferred from the country schoolhouse to the new church in town. And the neighbors whispered that Mary Grant wasn't the housekeeper she used to be. She hadn't entered butter nor preserves nor patchwork quilts at the county fair for three years. Her marigolds and hollyhocks died from want of attention, and Mandy took the entire care of the last baby. Even the minister's sister had to acknowledge that Mrs. Grant "didn't seem to take any interest."

Jason Grant sat in his light spring wagon waiting to go with his wife and her friends to the Lower Ranch. She was really going, although she had vowed that she never would. But they were not ready yet, and he bowed his head on his hands and allowed his mind to wander over all the years of their married life.

Presently the minister came out of the house, and spoke a word to his sister who had charge of the children. Then he came to the side of the spring wagon and touched the arm of the dreaming man. If the minister had been a woman, he might have said something bitter, since he had never forgotten Mary's vow. As it was, he climbed to the wagon-seat in silence, took the reins from Jason Grant's hand and gave the sign for the procession to start.—Waverley Magazine.

How to Test Eggs.

"There are many ways to test eggs," said a local grocer the other day, "but the one I have found best is as follows: Immerse the egg in water; if fresh it will sink and lie horizontally on the bottom of the vessel; when from three to five days old it will rest at a slight angle—the large end uppermost; if eight days old it will assume an angle of about seventy degrees, and after four weeks it will stand upright on its small end. If bad, it will float."—New York Times.

THE PAPER-CLAD MAN.

German Inventor Offers a Novel Reform in Dress.

Philosophy must needs pause in gentle contemplation of this latest news from Germany. The Paper-Clad Man is on the way, and he who is of an earnest and receptive nature and well-grounded in philosophy will await the issue with a serene mind, believing that all things are for good, and that humanity is, as Mr. Carnegie has observed, tending toward higher ground.

It seems that some German genius has discovered a way of making paper clothes. No more shall man be slave to the cocoon of the silk worm, or the wool which grows upon the sheep's back. In pulp he shall have found a friend in need, and one to be depended upon in fine weather or foul. No more shall he be clothed in purple or fine linen, but in the product of the paper mills shall he meet the demands of decency and comfort. It is very interesting news. There is so much opportunity in paper.

The mind's eye can see the man of the future entering a shop and asking for a new suit of paper clothes. In a trice his measure will be taken. The wheels will turn; the mullage, paste, pins, string, or whatever it is to hold the various parts of his garment together, will be cunningly applied, and presently he will sally forth arrayed in chaste white or black, or in gay colors, resembling those of the Sunday "comics."

In the happy days to come a man need never wear the same raiment twice, for the paper clothing must, of course, be inexpensive. In the summer time he will find need of fabrics so like gassamer that a dozen suits will scarcely fill one side of his portfolio, and a bathing suit will weigh the fractional portion of an ounce. In winter clothing light but impervious to the weather will be supplied. Many of us know by experience how much warmth there is in an old newspaper worn between the upper and the nether coat. In fact, it seems as if the German inventor had struck the long-felt want. If he has, the phrase, "Made in Germany," must no more be used as a term of opprobrium and reproach.

American Sharpshooters.

The score of 1570 made by the American team in the Palma Trophy match at Bisley, England, is announced as the "best on record" since 1878, but while that is technically correct in a restricted sense it is misleading. In 1878 there was no competition, but an American team shot a "walk-over" at Creedmore and scored 1600 points. Compared with the achievements of long-range marksmen prior to 1878, the shooting of the last three years is nothing to brag about. Improved small-calibre rifles and smokeless powder are supposed to give the long-range marksmen of to-day great advantages over the riflemen of a quarter of a century ago, yet the winning score at Bisley was ninety-seven points less than the score for the same number of shots made by the Americans at Creedmore in 1878. It will take practice to produce worthy successors to the old Creedmore sharpshooters.—Philadelphia North American.

Traveled 4000 Miles to a Dentist.

It is told in all seriousness that the Rev. W. W. Waddell, who had part of a tooth extracted in Brooklyn, traveled 4000 miles to have the job done. He has been living in Brazil for a long time, and when his jaw swelled to an enormous size he thought he had cancer, and came to New York for treatment or to die as it might happen. When his old physician looked at him he growled: "You have an ulcerated tooth; that's all." A dentist attended to the matter with a pair of forceps, and now Mr. Waddell will travel 4000 miles back to Brazil to tell the doctors what he thinks of them.—Pittsburg Dispatch.

Save Your Eyes.

Looking into the fire is very injurious to the eye, particularly a coal fire. The stimulus of light and heat united soon destroys the eyes. Looking at molten iron will soon destroy the sight. Reading in the twilight is injurious to the eyes, as they are obliged to make great exertion. Reading or sewing with a side light injures the eyes, as both eyes should be exposed to an equal force of light. Those who wish to preserve their sight should preserve their general health by correct habits of living, and give their eyes just work enough, with a due degree of light.

The fellow who owes you money usually feels insulted if you ask him for it.