

Cavanagh, Forest Ranger

The Great Conservation
Novel

By HAMLIN GARLAND

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CHAPTER XIII.

THE OLD SHEEP HERDER.

THE ranger was awakened in the first faint dawn by the passing of the girl's light feet as she went across the hall to her mother's room, and a moment later he heard the low murmur of her voice. Throwing off his blankets and making such scant toilet as he needed, he stepped into the hall and waited for her to return.

Soon she came toward him, a smile of confidence and pleasure on her lips. "How is she?" he asked. "Quite comfortable."

"And you?" His voice was very tender.

"I am a little tired," she acknowledged. "I didn't sleep very well."

"You didn't sleep at all," he declared regretfully.

"Oh, yes, I did," she replied brightly.

These two ardent souls confronted each other in absorbed silence with keener perception, with new daring, with new intimacy, till he recalled himself with effort. "You must let me help you if there's anything I can do. Remember, I'm your big brother."

"I remember," she answered smilingly, "and I'm going out to see what my big brother is to have for breakfast."

Cavanagh found the street empty, silent and utterly commonplace. He went forth to his duties with a deepened conviction of the essential lawlessness of the state and of America in general, for in this spirit of mob law was to be found in some form throughout the land. He was disgusted, but not beaten. His resolution to carry out the terms of his contract with the government remained unshaken.

He carried with him also a final disturbing glimpse of Eliza Wetherford's girl that did indeed threaten his peace of mind. There was an involuntary appeal, a wistful depth, to her glance which awakened in him an indignant pity and also blew into flame something not so creditable—something which smoldered beneath his conscious will. She had not escaped her heritage of passion, and her glances, innocent as they were, roused even in him something lawless.

His pony plodded slowly, and the afternoon was half spent before he came in sight of the long, low log cabin which was the only home he possessed in all America. For the first time since he built it the station seemed lonely and disheartening. "Would any woman for love of me come to such a hearthstone?" he asked himself. "And if she consented to do so could I be so selfish as to exact such sacrifice? No; the forest ranger in these altitudes must be young and heart free; otherwise his life would be miserably solitary."

He was just dishing out his rude supper when the feet of a horse on the log bridge announced a visitor.

With a feeling of pleasure as well as relief he rose to greet the stranger. "Any visitor is welcome this night," he said.

The horseman proved to be his former prisoner, the old man Edwards, who slipped from his saddle with the never failing grace of the cow man and came slowly toward the cabin. He smiled wearily as he said: "I'm on your trail, Mr. Ranger, but I bear no malice. You were doing your duty. Can you tell me how far it is to Ambro's camp?"

There was something forlorn in the man's attitude, and Cavanagh's heart softened. "Turn your horse into the corral and come to supper," he commanded with western bluntness. "We'll talk about all that later."

Edwards accepted his hospitality without hesitation. "I'm going up to take Ambro's place," he began after a few minutes of silent eating. "Know where his camp is?"

"I do," replied Ross, to whom the stranger now appeared in pathetic guise. "Any man of his age consenting to herd sheep is surely hard hit by the rough hand of the world," he reasoned, and the closer he studied his visitor the plainer he felt his ungoverned past.

"I suppose Gregg paid your fine?" he said.

"Yes."

"In any other town in the state you'd have gone down the line."

He roused himself. "See here, Mr. Ranger, you've no warrant to believe me, but I told you the truth. Young Gregg got me to ride into the range and show him the trail. I didn't intend to get mixed up with a game warden. I've had all the confinement I need."

"Well, it's a closed incident now," interposed Ross. "We won't reopen it. Make yourself at home."

The stranger, hungry as he was, ate with unexpected gentility, and as the hot coffee sent its cheerful glow through his body he asked, with livelier interest, a good many questions

about the ranger and the forest service. "You fellows have to be all round men. The cowboys think you have a snap, but I guess you earn your money."

"A man that builds trails, lays bridges, burns brush, fights fire, rides the roundup and covers seventy-five miles of trail every week on \$80 per month and feeds himself and his horses isn't what I would call enjoying a soft snap."

"What do you do it for?"

"God knows! I've been asking myself that question all day today."

"This playing game warden has some outs too. That was a wild crowd last night. The town is the same old hole it was when I knew it years ago. Fine girl of Lize Wetherford's. Lize has changed terribly. I didn't expect to see her have such a skin of allik as that girl. She sure looks the queen to me."

Cavanagh did not greatly relish this line of conversation, but the pause enabled him to say: "Miss Wetherford is not much western; she got her training in the east. She's been with an aunt ever since her father's death."

"He's dead, is he?"

"So far as anybody knows, he is."

"Well, he's no loss. I knew him too. He was all kinds of a fool. He got on the wrong side of the rustler line-up. Them Wetherford women think a whole lot of you. Pears like they'd both fight for you. Are you sweet on the girl?"

"Now, see here, old man," Ross retorted sharply, "you want to do a lot of thinking before you comment on Miss Wetherford. I won't stand for any nasty clack."

Edwards meekly answered: "I wasn't going to say anything out of the way. I was fixing for to praise her."

"All the same, I don't intend to discuss her with you," was Cavanagh's curt answer.

The herder fell back into silence while the ranger prepared his bunk for the night. The fact that he transferred some of the blankets from his own bed to that of his visitor did not escape Edwards' keen eyes, and with grateful intent he said:

"I can give you a tip, Mr. Ranger," said he, breaking out of a silence. "The triangle outfit is holding more cattle on the forest than their permits call for."

"How do you know?"

"I heard one of the boys bragging about it."

"Much obliged," responded Ross. "I'll look into it."

Edwards went on: "Furthermore, they're fixing for another sheep kill over there too. All the sheepsman are armed. That's why I left the country. I don't want to run any more chances of being shot up. I've had enough of trouble. I can't afford to be hobnobbing with judges and juries. I'm just a broken down old cowpuncher herding sheep in order to keep clear of the liquor belt."

This seemed reasonable, and the ranger remarked by way of dropping the subject: "I've nothing to say further than this—obey the rules of the forest and you won't get into any further trouble with me. And as for being shot up by the cowmen, you'll not be disturbed on any national forest. There never has been a single herder shot nor a sheep destroyed on this forest."

"I'm mighty glad to hear that," replied Edwards, with sincere relief. "I've had my share of shooting up and shooting down. All I ask now is quiet and the society of sheep. I take a kind of pleasure in protecting the fool brutes. It's about all I'm good for."

He did indeed look like a man in the final year of life as he spoke. "Better turn in," Cavanagh said in kinder tone. "I'm an early riser."

The old fellow rose stiffly and, laying aside his boots and trousers, rolled into his bunk and was asleep in three minutes.

Cavanagh himself was very tired and went to bed soon after to sleep dreamlessly till daylight. He sprang from his bed and after a plunge in the stream set about breakfast, while Edwards rose from his bunk groaning and sighing and went forth to wrangle the horses, rubbing his hands and shivering as he met the keen edge of the mountain wind. When he returned breakfast was ready, and again he expressed his gratitude.

"Haven't you any slicker?" asked Cavanagh. "It looks like rain."

"No; I'm run down pretty low," he replied. "The truth is, Mr. Ranger, I blew in all my wages at roulette last week."

Ross brought out a canvas coat, well worn, but serviceable. "Take this along with you. It's likely to storm before we reach the sheep camp. And you can't look very strong. You must take care of yourself."

Edwards was visibly moved by this kindness. "Sure you can spare it?"

"Certain sure; I've another," returned the ranger curtly.

It was hardly more than sunrise as they mounted their ponies and started on their trail, which led sharply upward after they left the canyon. The wind was strong and stinging cold.

Taking pity on Edwards, who was shivering, Cavanagh turned off the trail into a sheltered nook behind some pine trees.

"How do you happen to be reduced to herding sheep?" he asked. "You look like a man who has seen better days."

Edwards, chafing his thin fingers to warm them, made reluctant answer. "It's a long story, Mr. Ranger, and it concerns a whole set of other people—some of them decent folks—so I'd rather not go into it."

"John Barleycorn was involved, I reckon."

"Sure thing. He's generally always in it."

"You'd better take my gloves. It's likely to snow in half an hour. Go ahead. I'm a younger man than you are."

The other made a decent show of resistance, but finally accepted the offer, saying: "You certainly are white to me. I want to apologize for making that attempt to sneak away that night. I had a powerful good reason for not staying any longer."

Ross smiled a little. "You showed bad judgment—as it turned out."

"I sure did. That girl can shoot. Her gun was steady as a doorknob. She filled the door. Where did she learn to hold a gun like that?"

"Her father taught her, so she said."

"She wouldn't remember me—an old cuss like me—but I've seen her with Wetherford when she was a kidlet. I never thought she'd grow up into such a queen. She's a wonder. Lize looked sick to me. She ought to send her girl away or get out. As you say, the Fork is no kind of a place for such a girl."

He spoke with a good deal of feeling, and the ranger studied him with deepening interest. He had taken on dignity in the heat of his protest, and in his eyes blazed something that was both manly and admirable.

"You're just the kind of a figure to catch a girl's eye. She likes you. I could see that, but you've got a good opinion of yourself. You're an educated man. Do you intend to marry her?"

"See here, Mr. Sheep Herder, you better ride on up to your camp." And Ross turned to mount his horse.

"Wait a minute," called the other man, and his voice surprised the ranger with a note of authority. "I was terribly taken with that girl, and I owe you a whole lot, but I've got to know one thing. I can see you're full of her and jealous as a bear of any other sutor. Now, I want to know whether you intend to marry her or whether you're just playing with her."

Ross was angry now. "What I intend to do is none of your business."

The other man was suddenly ablaze with passion. His form had lost its

prove to her I'm still a man—it might do to tell her, but I'm a branded man now and an old man, and there's no hope for me. I worked in one of the machine shops down there, and it took the life out of me. Then, too, I left a bad name here in the Fork. I know that. Those big cattlemen fooled me into taking their side of the war. I staked everything I had on them, and then they railroaded me out of the county. So, you see, I'm double crossed, no matter where I turn."

Every word he uttered made more apparent to Cavanagh that Lee Virginia would derive nothing but pain and disheartenment from a knowledge that her father lived. "She must be spared this added burden of shameful inheritance," he decided.

The other man seemed to understand something of the ranger's indignant pity, for he repeated: "I want you to swear not to let Lee know I'm alive, no matter what comes. She must not be saddled with my record. Let her go on thinking well of me. Give me your word." He held out an insistent palm.

Ross yielded his hand, and in spite of himself his tenderness for the broken man deepened. The sky was darkening in the west, and with a glance upward, he said, "I reckon we'd better make your camp soon or you'll be chilled to the bone."

They mounted hastily and rode away, each feeling that his relationship to the other had completely changed. Wetherford marveled over the evident culture and refinement of the ranger. "He's none too good for her, no matter who he is," he said.

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Dr. L. D. Coffman of the Teachers' college of Columbia university has been making a long and exhaustive study of the conditions surrounding the teachers in our common schools. They are American born with the exception of 9 per cent. The statistics show that the teachers nearly all come from large families and 69 per cent of the men and 45 per cent of the women teachers are children of farmers and only 7 per cent are children of the professional class. The families from which they come are large, but the incomes of their parents are very meager. In families where the income was \$500 they gave the future teacher four years of training and in families where the income was \$250 they gave two years of training. What sacrifices must these fathers and mothers have made to give their children an education sufficient to enter the teaching profession? It makes one sad to think of it, especially when he reflects upon the millions wasted by the idle rich in trying to entertain themselves. These husbands and fathers are the ones who make this country great and not the magnates of swollen fortunes.

Then what return is there for all these years of sacrifice by parents and teachers? The average annual salary paid to teachers was, for men, \$489, and for women, \$450. Ten per cent of the women receive \$250, and 13 per cent of the men as low as \$350. There is one thing certain. The men and the women who make the nation are forced to live lives of sacrifice and self-denial and the men who exploit it, spend millions in wasteful living. But the conditions are not all hopeless.

The masses are beginning to protest and demand reforms and the power of this protest is growing every day.

Recovered Stolen Tobacco.

Deputy Sheriff Roy Fisher, while talking to one of the prisoners in the county jail yesterday was informed by him that Raymond Myers, the youth who was sent to the reform school for robbing Johnson Brothers' grocery store three times, confessed that he robbed the cars that were broken into on the Missouri Pacific and Burlington railways, while the youth was out awaiting his final hearing. He confessed that the tobacco taken from the Missouri Pacific cars was hidden under the platform at the Missouri Pacific depot. Mr. Fisher went there and recovered the stolen property.—Nebraska City News.

There is one medicine that every family should be provided with and especially during the summer months; viz, Chamberlain's Colic, Cholera and Diarrhoea Remedy. It is almost certain to be needed. It costs but a quarter. Can you afford to be without it? For sale by F. G. Fricke & Co.

Material Shipped Soon.

Mr. J. J. Cox of Lincoln, general freight agent of the Burlington, was in the city yesterday to make arrangements to route the twenty-five cars of material for the new wagon bridge to be built over the Platte river north of the city. Arrangements will probably be made to drop the cars on either bank of the river for the convenience of both the company and the contractor.

The uniform success that has attended the use of Chamberlain's Colic, Cholera and Diarrhoea Remedy has made it a favorite everywhere. It can always be depended upon. For sale by F. G. Fricke & Co.

(To Be Continued.)

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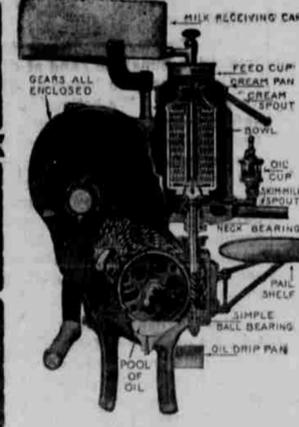
In County Court.

The case of the State vs. Rose, which was to have had an airing in Judge Beeson's court today, was, by consent of the parties, continued until July 11th.

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