

Cavanagh, Forest Ranger

The Great Conservation
Novel

By HAMLIN GARLAND

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CHAPTER XVII.

CAVANAGH'S LAST VIGIL BEGINS.

On his solitary ride upward and homeward the ranger searched his heart and found it bitter and disloyal. Love had interfered with duty, and pride had checked and defeated love. His path, no longer clear and definite, looped away aimlessly, lost in vague, obscure wanderings. His world had suddenly grown gray. He had no trade, no bush-hoss, no special skill save in the ways of the mountaineer, and to return to his ancestral home in England at the moment seemed a woeful confession of failure.

It was again dusk as he rode up to his own hitching pole and slipped from the saddle. Wetherford came out, indicating by his manner that he had recovered his confidence once more. "How did you find things in the valley?" he inquired as they walked away toward the corral.

"Bad," responded the ranger. "In what way?" "The chief has been dismissed, and all the rascals are chucking with glee I've resigned from the service."

Wetherford was agitated. "What for?" "I will not serve under any other chief. The best thing for you to do is to go out when I do. I think by keeping on that uniform you can get to the train with me."

"Did you see Lize and my girl?" "No; I only remained in town a minute. It was too hot for me. I'm done with it. Wetherford, I'm going back to civilization. No more wild west for me." The bitterness of his voice touched the older man's heart, but he considered it merely a mood.

"Don't lose your nerve. Mebbe this ends the reign of terror." "Nothing will end the moral shiftlessness of this country but the death of the freebooter. That job was done by men who hated the dagoes—hated 'em because they were rival claimants for the range. It's nonsense to attempt to fasten it on men like Nell Ballard. The men who did that piece of work are well known stock owners."

"I reckon that's so." "Well, now, who's going to convict them? I can't do it. I'm going to pull out as soon as I can put my books in shape, and you'd better go too." They were standing at the gate of the corral, and the roar of the mountain stream enveloped them in a cloud of sound.

Wetherford spoke slowly: "I hate to lose my girl now that I've seen her, but I guess you're right. And Lize, poor old critter! It's a shame the way I've quarered her life, and I'd give my right arm to be where I was twelve years ago, but with a price on my head and old age coming on I don't see myself ever again getting up to par. It's a losing game for me now."

There was resignation as well as despair in his voice, and Cavanagh felt it, but he said: "There's one other question that may come up for decision. If that Basque died of smallpox you may possibly take it."

"I've figured on that, but it will take a day or two to show on me. I don't feel any ache in my bones yet. If I do come down you keep away from me. You've got to live and take care of Virginia."

"She should never have returned to this accursed country," Cavanagh harshly replied, starting back toward the cabin.

The constable, smoking his pipe beside the fireplace, did not present an anxious face. On the contrary, he seemed plumply content as he replied to the ranger's greeting. He represented very well the type of officer which these disorderly communities produce. Brave and tireless when working along the line of his prejudices, he could be most laxly inefficient when his duties cut across his own or his neighbor's interests. Being a cat-fancier by training, he was glad of the red herring which the Texas officer had trailed across the line of his pursuit.

This attitude still further inflamed Cavanagh's indignant hate of the country. The theory which the deputy developed was transparent folly. "It was just a case of plain robbery," he argued. "One of them dagoes had money, and Nell Ballard and that man Edwards just naturally followed him and killed the whole bunch and scooted that's my guess."

An hour later the sound of a horse's hoofs on the bridge gave warning of a visitor, and as Cavanagh went to the door Gregg rode up, seeking particulars as to the death of the herder and the whereabouts of the sheep.

The ranger was not in a mood to invite the sheepman in, and, besides, he perceived the danger to which Wetherford was exposed; therefore his answers were short. Gregg, on his part, did not appear anxious to enter.

"What happened to that old hobo sent up?" he asked. Cavanagh briefly retold his story, and at the end of it Gregg granted: "You say you burned the tent and all the bedding?" "Every thread of it. It wasn't safe to leave it."

"What ailed the man?" "I don't know, but it looked and smelled like smallpox." The deputy rose with a spring. "Smallpox! You didn't handle the cuss?" Cavanagh did not spare him. "Somebody had to lend a hand. I couldn't see him die there alone, and he had to be buried, so I did the job."

Gregg recoiled a step or two, but the deputy stood staring, the implication of all this sinking deep. "Were you wearing the same clothes you've got on?" "Yes, but I used a slicker while working around the body."

"Good king!" The sweat broke out on the man's face. "You ought to be arrested." Ross took a step toward him. "I'm at your service."

"Keep off!" shouted the sheriff. Ross smiled, then became very serious. "I took every precaution, Mr. Deputy. I destroyed everything that could possibly carry the disease. I burned every utensil, including the saddle—everything but the man's horse and his dog."

The officer caught up his hat and coat and started for the door. "It's me for the open air," said he. As the men withdrew Ross followed them and, standing in his door, delivered his final volley. "If this state does not punish those rascals every decent man should emigrate out of it, turning the land over to the wolves, the wildcats and other beasts of prey."

Gregg as he retreated called back: "That's all right, Mr. Ranger, but you'd better keep to the hills for a few weeks. The settlers down below won't enjoy having a man with smallpox chassaying around town. They might rope and tie you."

Wetherford came out of his hiding place with a grave face. "They're right about our staying clear of town," said Cavanagh. "They'll quarantine us sure."

Wetherford now that the danger of arrest was over was disposed to be grimly humorous. "There's no great loss without some small gain. I don't think we'll be troubled by any more visitors, not even by sheriffs or doctors. I reckon you and I are in for a couple of months of the quiet life—the kind we read about."

Cavanagh now that he was definitely out of the forest service perceived the weight of every objection which his friends and relatives had made against his going into it. It was a lonely life and must ever be so. It was all very well for a young unmarried man who loved the woods and hills beyond all things else and who could wait for advancement, but it was a sad place for one who desired a wife. The ranger's place was on the trail and in the hills, and to bring a woman into these high silences, into these lone reaches of forest and fell, would be cruel. To bring children into them would be criminal.

All the next day, while Wetherford pottered about the cabin or the yard, Cavanagh toiled at his papers, resolved to leave everything in the perfect order which he loved. Whenever he looked round upon his belongings, each and all so redolent of the wilderness, he found them very dear. His chairs, which he had ridged out of slabs; his guns, his robes, his saddles and his accoutrements—all meant much to him. "Some of them must go with me," he said, "and when I am settled down in the old home I'll have one room to myself which shall be so completely of the mountain America that when I am within it I can fancy myself back in the camp."

He thought of South Africa as a possibility and put it aside, knowing well that no other place could have the same indefinable charm that the Rocky mountains possessed for the reason that he had come to them at his most impressionable age. Then, too, the United States, for all its faults, seemed merely an extension of the English form of government.

Wetherford was also moving in deep thought and at last put his perplexity into a question. "What am I to do? I'm beginning to feel queer. I reckon the chances for my having smallpox are pretty fair. Maybe I'd better drop down to Sulphur and report to the authorities. I've got a day or two before the blossoms will begin to show on me."

Cavanagh studied him closely. "Now, don't get to thinking you've got it. I don't see how you could catch a germ. The high altitude and the winds up there ought to prevent infection. I'm not afraid for myself, but if you're able perhaps we'd better pull out tomorrow."

Later in the day Wetherford expressed deeper dejection. "I don't see anything ahead of me anyhow," he confessed. "If I go back to the pen I'll die of lung trouble, and I don't know how I'm going to earn a living in the city. Mebbe the best thing I could do would be to take the pox and go under. I'm afraid of big towns," he continued. "I always was, even when I had money. Now that I am old and broke I daren't go. No city for me."

Cavanagh's patience gave way. "But, man, you can't stay here! I'm packing up to leave. Your only chance of getting out of the country is to go when I go and in my company." His voice was harsh and keen, and the old man felt its edge, but he made no reply, and this sad silence moved Cavanagh to repentance. His irritability

warned him of something deeply changing in his own nature. Approaching the brooding felon, he spoke gently and sadly. "I'm sorry for you, Wetherford, I sure am, but it's up to you to get clear away so that Lee will never by any possible chance find out that you are alive. She has a romantic notion of you as a representative of the old time west, and it would be a dreadful shock to her if she knew you as you are. It's hard to leave her. I know, now that you've seen her, but that's the manly thing to do—the only thing to do."

"Oh, you're right—of course you're right. But I wish I could be of some use to her. I wish I could kind of keep watch over her. I'd be glad enough to play the scullion in her kitchen. But if you're going to take her—"

"But I'm not," protested Ross. "I'm going to leave her right here. I can't take her."

Wetherford looked at him with steady eyes, into which a keen light leaped. "Don't you intend to marry her?" Ross turned away. "No; I don't. I mean it's impossible."

"Why not? Don't tell me you're already married?" He said this with menacing tone. "No; I'm not married, but"— He stopped without making his meaning plain. "I'm going to leave the country and"—

Wetherford caught him up. "I reckon I understand what you mean. You consider Lize and me undesirable parents—not just the kind you'd cut out of the herd of your own free will. Well, that's all right. I don't blame you so far as I'm concerned. But you can forget me—consider me a dead one. I'll never bother her nor you."

Cavanagh threw out an impatient hand. "It's impossible," he protested. "It's better for her and better for me that I should do so. I'm going back to my own people."

Wetherford was thoroughly roused now. Some part of his old time fire seemed to return to him. He rose from his chair and approached the ranger firmly. "I've seen you act like a man, Ross Cavanagh. You've been a good partner these last few days—a son couldn't have treated me better—and I hate to think of you. But my girl loves you—I could see that. I could see her lean to you."

Ross said slowly: "It will be hard for you to understand when I tell you that I care a great deal for your daughter, but a man like me—an Englishman—cannot marry, or he ought not to marry—for himself alone. There are so many others to consider—his friends, his sisters—"

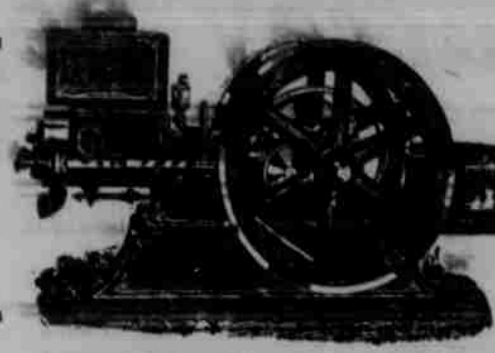
Wetherford dropped his hand. "I see." His tone was despairing. "When I was young we married the girls we loved in defiance of everything. But you are not that kind. You may be right. I'm nothing but a debilitated old cowpuncher branded by the state—a man who threw away his chance—but I can tell you straight I've learned that nothing but the love of a woman counts."

In the meantime Lee Virginia waited with increasing impatience for Ross Cavanagh's return, expecting each noon to see him appear at the door. But when three days passed without word or sign from him her uneasiness deepened into alarm. The whole town was profoundly excited over the murder, that she knew, and she began to fear that some of the ranger's enemies had worked their evil will upon him.

With this vague fear in her heart, she went forth into the street to inquire. One of the first men she met was Sifton, who was sitting, as usual, outside the livery barn door, smiling, inefficient, content. Of him she asked, "Have you seen Mr. Cavanagh?"

"Yes," he answered; "I saw him yesterday, just after dinner, down at the postoffice. He was writing a letter at the desk. Almost immediately afterward he mounted and rode away. He was much cut up over his chief's dismissal."

Waterloo Boy



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Plattsmouth, Nebraska.

THE HARDWARE MAN

and each day brought a deeper sense of loss, but her pride would not permit her to show her grief.

Young Gregg, without knowing in the least the cause of her troubled face, took this occasion to offer comfort. His manner toward her had changed since she no longer had a part in the management of the eating house, and for that reason she did not repulse him as sharply as she had been wont to do. He really bore Cavanagh no ill will and was, indeed, shrewd enough to understand that Lee admired the ranger and that his own courtship was rather hopeless. Nevertheless he persisted, his respect for her growing as he found her steadfast in her refusal to permit any familiarity.

"See here, Miss Virginia," he cried as she was passing him in the hall, "I can see you're worried about Lize—I mean your mother—and if I can be of any use I hope you'll call on me." As she thanked him without enthusiasm he added, "How is she tonight?" "I think she's better."

"Can I see her?" His tone was so earnest that the girl was moved to say, "I'll ask her." "I wish you would. I want to say something to her."

Lize's voice reached where they stood. "Come in, Joe; the door's open." He accepted her invitation rather awkwardly, but his face was impassive as he looked down upon her. "Well, how about it?" she asked. "What's doing in the town?"

"Not much of anything except talk. The whole country is buzzing over this dismissal of the chief forester." "They'd better be doing something about that murder." "They are. They're going up there in streams to see where the work was done. The coroner's inquest was held yesterday." He grinned. "Parties came to their death by persons unknown."

Lize scowled. "It's a wonder they don't charge it up to Ross Cavanagh or some other ranger." "That would be a little too raw, even for this country. They're all feeling gay over this change in the forestry head. But, see here, don't you want to get out for a ride? I've got my new machine out here. It rides like silk."

"I reckon a hearse is about my kind," she replied dully. "If you could take me up to Cavanagh's cabin I'd go," she added. "I want to see him." "I can take you part way," he instantly declared. "But you'd have to ride a horse the last ten miles."

"Couldn't do it, Joe," she sighed. "These last few days I've been about as boneless as an eel. Funny the way a fellow keeps going when he's got something to do that has to be done. I'll tell you what, if you want to take me and Lee up to Sulphur I'll go with you."

"Sure thing. What day?" "Not for a day or two. I'm not quite up to it just now, but by Saturday I'll be saddlewise again."

Joe turned joyously to Lee. "That will be great! Won't you come out for a spin this minute?" For a moment Lee was tempted. Anything to get away from this horrible little den and the people who infested it was her feeling, but she distrusted Gregg, and she knew that every eye in the town would be upon her if she went, and, besides, Ross might return while she was away. "No; not today," she replied finally, but her voice was gentler than it had ever been to him.

The young fellow was moved to explain his position to Lize. "You don't think much of me, and I don't blame you. I haven't been much use so far, but I'm going to reform. If I had a girl like Lee Virginia to live up to I'd make a great citizen. I don't lay my arrest up against Cavanagh. I'm ready to pass that by. And as for this other business—this free range war in which the old man is mixed up—I want you to know that I'm against it. Dad knows his day is short; that's what makes him so hot. But he's a bluff. Just a fuzzy old bluff. He knows he

has no more right to the government grass than anybody else, but he's going to get ahead of the cattlemen if he can."

"Does he know who burned them sheep herders?" "Of course he knows, but ain't going to say so. You see, that old Basque who was killed was a monopolist too. He went after that grass without asking anybody's leave. Moreover, he belonged to that Mexicana-dago outfit that everybody hates. The old man isn't crying over that job; it's money in his pocket. All the same, it's too good a chance to put the hooks into the cattlemen; hence his offering a reward, and it looks as if something would really be done this time. They say Nell Ballard was mixed up in it and that old guy that showed me the sheep. But I don't take much stock in that. Whoever did it was paid by the cattlemen, sure thing. The young fellow's tone and bearing made a favorable impression upon Lize. She had never seen this side of him, for the reason that he had hitherto treated her as a bartender. She was acute enough to understand that her social status had changed along with her release from the cash register, and she was slightly more reconciled, although she could not see her way to providing a living for herself and Lee. For all these reasons she was unwontedly civil to Joe and sent him away highly elated with the success of his interview.

"I'm going to let him take me up to Sulphur," she said to Lee. "I want to go to town."

Lee was silent, but a keen pang ran through her heart for she perceived in this remark by her mother a tacit acknowledgment of Ross Cavanagh's desertion of them both. His invitation to them to come and camp with him was only a polite momentary impulse. "I'm ready to go," she announced at last. "I'm tired of this place. Let us go tomorrow."

(To Be Continued.)

MURDOCK.

(Special Correspondence.)

Al Bauer took in the circus at Lincoln Monday. Harry Thomas was visiting his mother Sunday.

Emile Barry of Alvo was in town Sunday evening. Lona Rush is visiting with Dorris Parmeter of Elmwood.

Ed Thingan and wife entertained Emil Kuehn and wife at dinner Sunday. Mr. and Mrs. William Gehris and daughter, Ida, were in Omaha Monday.

Ernest Hart, from near South Bend, spent Sunday with Lacey McDonald. Miss Elsie Thomas of Lincoln is visiting her mother, Mrs. Sam Keiser, here.

Miss Kate Amgwert took supper with Miss Lyda Sorick on Sunday evening. Mrs. William Rush and daughter, Miss Verna, went to Elmwood Monday evening. Mrs. Brancle and Mrs. Borne-mier were passengers to Omaha last Thursday noon. Al Crum was confined to his bed several days last week, but is about again now. Miss Ellen Gakemier and little sister were passengers to Lincoln last Monday morning. David Thingan returned to his work at Omaha Thursday, after spending the Fourth at home. The infant daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Craig has been real sick, but it better at present. Herman Gakemier returned to Kansas City last Thursday, after visiting a few days with relatives here. George Mooney and wife took

dinner with his parents Sunday. W. O. Gillespie was at Lincoln Monday.

Peter Mockenhaupt and wife, from near Greenwood, visited with Oscar McDonald and family Sunday afternoon. Mrs. Rose Waite returned last Friday evening after visiting a few days with relatives and friends at Council Bluffs.

Mr. and Mrs. Fred Gorder and daughters, Dorothy, and Helen, of Weeping Water, spent Sunday at the E. T. Tool home here. Henry Tool has had a new porch built on the front of his house, which adds greatly to the beauty of his home. Depner did the work.

Andrew McNamara and daughter, Mrs. W. O. Gillespie, left Tuesday for Fairmont, Neb., where they will visit William McNamara and family. Mrs. Katie Amgwert and Lyda Sorick went to Lincoln on No. 17 Monday to take in the circus in the evening. They returned on No. 18 Tuesday.

Mr. and Mrs. Harry McDonald and children, Bryan and Irene, left Monday for Stratton, Neb., where they will visit Mrs. McDonald's parents. From there they will go to Palisade, Neb., to visit with Mrs. McDonald's sister. They expect to be absent from home a month.

Invitations have been received in our town announcing the coming marriage of Oscar Riekle, formerly of this vicinity, but now of Drummond, Oklahoma, to Miss Hazel Oliver, also of that place, which is to take place on Thursday, July 13. Oscar's many friends here wish him and his bride all kinds of good luck, also a long and happy wedded life.

Last Monday afternoon the little friends of Hazel Bauer went to her home and helped to celebrate her ninth birthday. The afternoon was spent in games and music. A lunch was served of oranges, bananas, cake and lemonade. Those present were: Mabel and Mary Rush, Ruth Jones, Mildred, Gladys and Ruth Sorick, Marguerite McDonald, Margeret Tool, Diller Utt, Richard Tool, Hazel and Gertrude Bauer.

Escaped With His Life. "Twenty-one years ago I faced an awful death," writes H. B. Martin, Port Harrelson, S. C. "Doctors said I had consumption and the dreadful cough I had looked it, sure enough. I tried everything I could hear of for my cough, and was under the treatment of the best doctor in Georgetown, S. C., for a year, but could get no relief. A friend advised me to try Dr. King's New Discovery. I did so, and was completely cured. I feel that I owe my life to this great throat and lung cure." It's positively guaranteed for coughs, colds and all bronchial affections. 50c and \$1.00. Trial bottle free at F. G. Fricke & Co.

Announcement. I hereby announce myself as a candidate on the republican ticket for the nomination for the office of county commissioner of the Second Commissioner district, subject to the decision of the voters at the coming primary election. C. E. Heebner.

For Sale. Brood sows and male hogs for sale or will trade for fresh cows. Fred Patterson. 7-6-31w.