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GAVANAGH, FOREST RANGER

The Great Conversation Novel

By HAMLIN GARLAND

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Gregg was somewhat cooled by this dash of reason, but replied: "I don't know what relation he is, but these are facts. He's concealing an escaped convict, and he knows it."

Dalton put in a quiet word. "What is the use of shouting a judgment against a man like Cavanaugh before you know the facts? He's one of the best and ablest rangers on this forest. I don't know why he has resigned, but I'm sure—"

"Has he resigned?" asked Gregg eagerly.

"He has."

"A good job for him. I was about to circulate a petition to have him removed."

"If all the stockmen in the valley had signed a petition against him it wouldn't have done any good," replied Dalton. "We know a good man when we see him. I'm here to offer him promotion, not to punish him."

Lee, looking about at the faces of these men and seeing disappointment in their faces, lost the keen sting of her own humiliation. "In the midst of such a fight as this how can I give time or thought to me? Painful as the admission was, she was forced to admit that she was a very humble factor in a very large campaign. "But suppose he falls ill?" Her face grew white and set and her lips bitter. "That would be the final tragic touch," she thought, "to have him come down of a plague from nursing one of Sam Gregg's sheep herders." Aloud she said: "His resignation comes just in time, doesn't it? He can now be sick without loss to the service."

Dalton answered her. "The supervisor has not accepted his resignation. On the contrary, I shall offer him a higher position. His career as a forester is only beginning. He would be

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roolish to give up the work now, when the avenues of promotion are just opening. I can offer him very soon the supervision of a forest."

As they talked Lee felt herself sinking while her lover rose. It was all true. The forester was right. Lize was capable of any work they might demand of him. He was too skilled, too intelligent, too manly, to remain in the forest, heroic as its duties seemed.

Upon this discussion Lize, hobbling painfully, appeared. With a cry of surprise Lee rose to meet her.

"Mother, you must not do this!" She waved her away. "I'm all right," she said, "barring the big marbles in my slippers." Then she turned to Dalton. "Now, what's it all about? Is it true that Ross is down?"

"No. So far as we know, he is well."

"Well, I'm going to find out. I don't intend to see here and have him live there without a cook or a nurse."

At this moment a tall, fair young fellow, dressed in a ranger's uniform, entered the room and made his way directly to the spot where Lee, her mother and Redfield were standing. "Mr. Supervisor, Cavanaugh has sent me to tell you that he needs a doctor. He's got a sick man up at the station, and he's afraid it's a case of smallpox." He turned to Lee. "He told me to tell you that he would have written, only he was afraid to even send a letter out."

"What does he need?" asked Redfield.

"He needs medicine and food, a doctor, and he ought to have a nurse."

"That's my job," said Lize. "Nonsense!" said Redfield. "You're not fit to ride a mile. I won't bear of your going."

"You wait and see. I'm going, and you can't stop me."

"Who is the man with him?" asked the forester.

"I don't know—an old herder, he said. He said he could take care of him all right for the present, but that if he were taken down himself—"

Lee's mounting emotion broke from her in a little cry. "Oh, Mr. Redfield, please let me go too! I want to help! I must help!"

Redfield said: "I'll telephone to Sulphur City and ask Brooks to get a nurse and come down as soon as possible. Meanwhile I'll go out to see what the conditions are."

"I'm going, too, I tell you," announced Lize. "I've had the cussed disease, and I'm not afraid of it. We had three stages of it in my family. You get me up there, and I'll do the rest."

"But you are ill."

"I was, but I'm not now." Her voice was firmer than it had been for days. "All I needed was something to do. Ross Cavanaugh has been like a son to me for two years. He's the one man in this country I'd turn my hand over for—barring yourself, Reddy—and it's my job to see him through this pinch."

In spite of all opposition she had her way. Returning to her room to get such clothing as she needed for her stay in the hills, she waited for Redfield to send a carriage to her. "I can't ride a horse no more," she sorrowfully admitted. "Lee's secret was no secret to any one there. Her wide eyes and heaving breast testified to the profound stir in her heart. She was in an anguish of fear lest Ross should already be in the grip of his loathsome enemy. That it had come to him by way of a brave and noble act made the situation only the more tragic."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FESTHOUS.

Cavanaugh had kept a keen watch over Wetherford, and when one night the old man began to complain of the ache in his bones his decision was instant. "You've got it," he said. "It's up to us to move down the valley tomorrow."

Wetherford protested that he would as soon die in the hills as in the valley. "I don't want Lee Virginia to know, but if I seem liable to fade out I'd like Lize to be told that I didn't forget her and that I came back to find out how she was. I hate to be a nuisance to you, and so I'll go down the valley if you say so."

As he was about to turn in that night Ross heard a horse cross the bridge and, with intent to warn the rider of his danger, went to the door

and called out: "Halt! Who's there?"

"A friend," replied the stranger in a weak voice. Ross permitted the visitor to ride up to the pole. "I can't ask you in," he explained. "I've a sick man inside. Who are you, and what can I do for you?"

Notwithstanding this warning the rider dropped from his saddle and came into the light which streamed from the door.

"My name is Dunn," he began. "I'm from Deer Creek."

"I know you," responded the ranger. "You're that rancher I saw working in the ditch the day I went to telephone, and you've come to tell me something about that murder."

The other man broke into a whimper. "I'm a law abiding man, Mr. Cavanaugh," he began tremulously. "I've always kept the law and never intended to have anything to do with that business. I was dragged into it against my will. I've come to you because you're an officer of the federal law. You don't belong here. I trust you. You represent the president, and I want to tell you what I know, only I want you to promise not to bring me into it. I'm a man with a family, and I can't bear to have them know the truth."

There were deep agitation and complete sincerity in the rancher's choked and hesitant utterance, and Cavanaugh turned cold with a premonition of what he was about to disclose. "I am not an officer of the law, Mr. Dunn, not in the sense you mean, but I will respect your wishes."

"I know that you are not an officer of the county law, but you're not a cattleman. It is your business to keep the peace in the wild country, and you do it. Everybody knows that. But I can't trust the officers of this country; they're all afraid of the cowboys. You are not afraid, and you represent the United States, and I'll tell you. I can't bear it any longer!" he wailed. "I must tell somebody. I can't sleep, and I can't eat. I've been like a man in a nightmare ever since. I had no hand in the killing—I didn't even see it done—but I knew it was going to happen. I saw the committee appointed. The meeting that decided it was held in my barn, but I didn't know what they intended to do. You believe me, don't you?" He peered up at Cavanaugh with white face and wild eyes. "I'm over seventy years of age, Mr. Cavanaugh, and I've been a law abiding citizen all my life."

His mind, shattered by the weight of his ghastly secret, was in confusion, and, perceiving this, Cavanaugh began to question him gently. One by one he probed the names of those who voted to "deal with" the herders. One by one he obtained also the list of those named on "the committee of re-

praisal, and as the broken man delivered himself of these accusing facts he grew calmer. "I didn't know—I couldn't believe—that the men on that committee could chop and burn!" His utterance faltered again, and he fell silent abruptly.

"They must have been drunk—mad drunk," retorted Cavanaugh. "And yet who would believe that even drink could inflame white men to such devil's work? When did you first know what had been done?"

"That night after it was done one of the men, my neighbor, who was drawn on the committee, came to my house and asked me to give him a bed. He was afraid to go home. 'I can't face my wife and children,' he said. 'He told me what he'd seen, and then when I remembered that it had all been decided in my stable and the

committee appointed there I began to tremble. You believe I'm telling the truth, don't you?' he again asked, with piteous accent.

"Yes, I believe you. You must tell this story to the judge. It will end the reign of the cattlemen."

"Oh, no; I can't do that." "You must do that. It is your duty as a Christian man and citizen." "No, no; I'll stay and help you—I'll do anything but that. I'm afraid to tell what I know. They would burn me alive. I'm not a western man. I've never been in a criminal court. I don't belong to this wild country. I came out here because my daughter is not strong, and now— He broke down altogether and, leaning against his horse's side, sobbed pitifully. Cavanaugh, convinced that the old man's mind was too deeply affected to enable him to find his way back over the rough trail that night, spoke to him gently. "I'll get you something to eat," he said. "Sit down here and rest and compose yourself."

Wetherford turned a wild eye on the ranger as he re-entered. "Who's out there?" he asked. "Is it the marshal?" "No; it's only one of the ranchers from below. He's tired and hungry, and I'm going to feed him." Ross replied, filled with a vivid sense of the diverse characters of the two men he was serving.

Dunn received the food with an eager hand, and after he had finished his refreshment Cavanaugh remarked: "The whole country should be obliged to you for your visit to me. I shall send your information to Supervisor Redfield."

"Don't use my name," he begged. "They will kill me if they find out that I have told. We were all sworn to secrecy, and if I had not seen that fire, that pile of bodies—"

"I know, I know! It horrified me. It made me doubt humanity," responded Cavanaugh. "We of the north cry out against the south for its lynchings, but here under our eyes goes on an equally horrible display of rage over the mere question of temporary advantage, over the appropriation of free grass, which is a federal resource—something which belongs neither to one claimant nor to the other, but to the people, and should be of value to the people. You must bring these men to punishment."

Dunn could only shiver in his horror and repeat his fear. "They'll kill me if I do."

Cavanaugh at last said: "You must not attempt to ride back tonight. I can't give you lodging in the cabin because my patient is sick of smallpox, but you can camp in the barn till morning, then ride straight back to my friend Redfield and tell him what you've told me. He will see that you are protected. Make your deposition and leave the country if you are afraid to remain."

In the end the rancher promised to do this, but his tone was that of a broken and distraught dotard. All the landmarks of his life seemed suddenly shifted.

Meanwhile the sufferings of Wetherford were increasing, and Cavanaugh was forced to give up all hope of getting him down the trail next morning, and when Swenson, the forest guard from the South, knocked at the door to say that he had been to the valley and that the doctor was coming up with Redfield and the district forester Ross thanked him, but ordered him to go into camp across the river and to warn everybody to keep clear of the cabin. "Put your packages down outside the door," he added, "and take charge of the situation on the outside. I'll take care of the business inside."

Wetherford was in great pain, but the poison of the disease had misted his brain, and he no longer worried over the possible disclosure of his identity. At times he lost the sense of his surroundings and talked of his prison life or of the long ride northward. Once he rose in his bed to beat off the wolves which he said were attacking his pony.

He was a piteous figure as he struggled thus, and it needed neither his relationship to Lee nor his bravery in caring for the Basque herder to fill the ranger's heart with a desire to relieve his suffering. "Perhaps I should have sent for Lize at once," he mused as the light brought out the red signatures of the plague.

Once the old man looked up with wide, dark, unseeing eyes and murmured, "I don't seem to know you."

"I'm a friend. My name is Cavanaugh."

"I can't place you," he sadly admitted. "I feel pretty bad. If I ever get out of this place I'm going back to the Fork. I'll get a gold mine; then I'll go back and make up for what Lize has gone through. I'm afraid to go back now."

"All right," Ross soothingly agreed. "But you'll have to keep quiet till you get over this fever; you're suffering from."

"If Lize weren't so far away she'd come and nurse me. I'm pretty sick."

Swenson came back to say that probably Redfield and the doctor would reach the station by noon, and thereafter, for the reason that Cavanaugh expected their coming, the hours dragged wearily. It was after 1 o'clock when Swenson announced that two teams were coming with three men and two women in them. "They'll be here in half an hour."

The ranger's heart leaped. Two women! Could one of them be Lee Virginia? What folly—what sweet, desperate folly! And the other—she could be Lize, for Lize was too feeble to ride so far. "Stop them on the other side of the bridge," he commanded. "Don't let them cross the creek on any pretext."

As he stood in the door the flutter of a handkerchief, the waving of a hand, made his pulse glow and his eyes grow dim. It was Virginia!

Lize did not flutter a kerchief or wave a hand, but when Swenson stopped the carriage at the bridge she said: "No, you don't! I'm going across. I'm going to see Ross, and if he needs help I'm going to roll up my sleeves and take hold."

Cavanaugh saw her advancing, and as she came near enough for his voice to reach her he called out: "Don't come any closer! I tell you!" His voice was stern. "You must not come a step nearer. Go back across the dead line and stay there. No one but

Women's Secrets

There is one man in the United States who has perhaps heard more women's secrets than any other man or woman in the country. These secrets are not secrets of guilt or shame, but the secrets of suffering, and they have been confided to Dr. R. V. Pierce, of the hope and expectation of advice and help. That few of these women have been disappointed in their expectations is proved by the fact that ninety-eight per cent. of all women treated by Dr. Pierce have been absolutely and altogether cured. Such a record would be remarkable if the cases treated were numbered by hundreds only. But when that record applies to the treatment of more than half-a-million women in a practice of over 40 years, it is phenomenal, and entitles Dr. Pierce to the gratitude accorded him as the first of specialists in the treatment of women's diseases.

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believe there was anything really serious about the matter with me, anyway. I reckon I was just naturally grouchy and worried over you and Ross."

(To be continued.)

New Rays of Light

One of the most wonderful electrical appliances is the X-ray which may be used both in the treatment of various diseases and in the diagnosis of many obscure conditions. With its aid the interior of the human body is no longer the sealed book it has been heretofore. Abnormal states of the bones, gall stones, stones in the bladder or in the kidneys, are shown plainly by what are known as X-ray photographs. Internal tumors, and the enlargement of the deep-seated organs, are also discovered by this means and in the diagnosis of tuberculosis of the lungs this agent has proven a most valuable aid. When applied to some of the less fatal chronic ailments of germ origin it has proven very effective as a curative agent.

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