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RAILROAD TIME TABLE

Table with columns for Chicago Great Western, Chicago & North Western, and Iowa Central, listing various train routes and schedules.

Cavanagh, Forest Ranger

The Great Conservation Novel By HAMLIN GARLAND

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CHAPTER VI. IN THE VIOLENT PAST.

TALKING about Cavanagh was quite too absorbingly interesting to both Lee and Redfield to permit of any study of the landscape, which went by as if dismissed by the chariot wheels of some contemptuous magician.

She kept the conversation to the desired point. "Mr. Cavanagh's work interests me very much. It seems very important, and it must be new, for I never heard of a forest ranger when I was a child."

"The forester is new, at least in America," he answered. "My dear young lady, you are returned just in the most momentous period in the history of the west. The old dominion—the cattle range—is passing. The supremacy of the cowboy is ended. The cowboy is raising oats. The cowboy is pitching alfalfa and swearing horribly as he blisters his hands. Some of the rangers at the moment are men of western training, like Ross, but whose allegiance is now to Uncle Sam. With others that transfer of allegiance is not quite complete; hence the insolence of men like Greg, who think they can bribe or intimidate these forest guards and so obtain favors. The newer men are college bred, real foresters. But you can't know what it all means till you see Ross or some other ranger on his own head. We'll make up a little party some day and drop down upon him and have him show us about. It's a lonely life, and so the ranger keeps open house. Would you like to go?"

"Oh, yes, indeed. I'm eager to get into the mountains. Every night as I see the sun go down over them I wonder what the world is like up there."

Then he began very delicately to inquire about her eastern experience. There was not much to tell. In a lovely old town not far from Philadelphia, where her aunt lived, she had spent ten years of happy exile.

"What was it all about? I never understood it. What were they fighting about?"

"In a sense it was all very simple. You see, Uncle Sam in his careless, do-nothing way has always left his range to the man who got there first. That was the cattleman. At first there was grass enough for us all, but as we built sheds and corrals about watering places we came to claim rights on the range. We usually secured by fraud homesteads in the sections containing water and so, gun in hand, 'stood off' the man who came after."

"How, a very curious law of our own making was our undoing. Of course the 'nester' or 'punkin roller,' as we contemptuously called the small farmer, began sifting in here and there in spite of our guns, but he was only a mosquito bite in comparison with the trouble which our cowpunchers stirred up. Perhaps you remember enough about the business to know that an unbranded yearling calf without its mother is called a maverick?"

"Yes; I remember that. It belongs to the man who finds him and brands him."

"Precisely. Now, that law worked very nicely so long as the poor cowboy was willing to catch and brand him for his employer, but it proved a 'joker' when he woke up and said to his fellows, 'Why brand these mavericks at \$5 per head for this or that outfit when the law says they belong to the man who finds them?'"

Lee Virginia looked up brightly. "That seems right to me."

swarmed with idle cowpunchers. Then came the breakdown on our scheme. The cowboys took to 'mavericking' of their own account. Some of them had the grace to go into partnership with some farmer, and so claim a small bunch of cows, but others suddenly and unaccountably acquired herds of their own. From keeping within the law they passed to violent methods. They slit the tongues of calves for the purpose of separating them from their mothers. Finding he could not suck, bossy would at last wander away from his dam and so become a maverick. In short, anarchy reigned on the range."

"But surely my father had nothing to do with this?"

"No; your father up to this time had been on good terms with everybody. He had a small herd of cattle down the river, which he owned in common with a man named Hart."

"I remember him."

"He was well thought of by all the big outfits, and when the situation became intolerable and we got together to weed out the rustlers, as these cattle thieves were called, your father was approached and converted to a belief in drastic measures. He had suffered less than the rest of us because of his small herd and the fact that he was very popular among the cowboys. So far as I was concerned, the use of violent methods revolted me. My training in the east had made me a respecter of the law. 'Change the law,' I said. 'The law is all right,' they replied; 'the trouble is with these rustlers. We'll hang a few of 'em, and that will break up the business.'"

Parts of this story came back to the girl's mind, producing momentary flashes of perfect recollection. She heard again the voices of excited men arguing over and over the question of "mavericking," and she saw her father as he rode up to the house that last day before he went south.

Redfield went on. "The whole plan as developed was silly, and I wonder still that Ed Wetherford, who knew the 'nester' and the cowboy so well, should have lent his aid to it. The cattlemen, some from Cheyenne, some from Denver and a few from New York and Chicago, agreed to finance a sort of vigilante corps composed of men from the outside on the understanding that this policing body should be commanded by one of their own number. Your father was chosen second in command and was to guide the party, for he knew almost every one of the rustlers and could ride directly to their doors."

"I wish he hadn't done that," murmured the girl.

"I must be frank with you, Virginia. I can't excuse that in him. It was a kind of treachery. He must have been warned by his associates. They could have said that the cattle barons were coming with a hundred Texas bad men 'to clean out the town' and to put their own men into office. This last was silly rot to me, but the people believed it."

The girl was tingling now. "I remember! I remember the men who rode into the town to give the alarm. I was scared almost breathless."

"I was in Sulphur City and did not hear of it till it was nearly all over," Redfield resumed, his speech showing a little of the excitement which thrilled through the girl's voice. "Well, the first act of vengeance was so ill considered that it practically ended the whole campaign. The invaders fell upon and killed two ranchers, one of whom was probably not a rustler at all, but a peaceable settler, and the other one they most barbarously hanged. More than this, they attacked and vainly tried to kill two settlers whom they met on the road—German farmers, with no connection, so far as known, with the thieves. These men escaped and gave the alarm. In a few hours the whole range was aflame with vengeful fire. The forks, as you may recall, was like a swarm of bumbees. Every man and boy was armed and mounted. The storekeepers distributed guns and ammunition, leaders developed, and the embattled 'punkin rollers,' rustlers and townsmen rode out to meet the invaders."

"The girl paled with memory of it. 'It was terrible. I went all day without eating, and for two nights we were all too excited to sleep. It seemed as if the world were coming to an end. Mother cried, because they wouldn't let her go with them. She didn't know father was leading the other army.'"

"She must have known soon, for it was reported that your father was among them. She certainly knew when they were driven to earth in that log fort, for they were obliged to restrain her by force from going to your father. As I run over those furious days it all seems incredible, like a sudden reversion to barbarism."

"But my father—what became of him? They took him away to the east, and that is all I ever knew. What do you think became of him?"

"I could never make up my mind. All sorts of rumors came to us concerning him. As a matter of fact, the state authorities sympathized with the cattle barons, and my own opinion is that your father was permitted to escape. He was afterward seen in Texas, and later it was reported that he had been killed there."

The girl sat still, listening to the tireless whir of the machine and looking out at the purple range with tearful eyes. At last she said, "I shall never think of my father as a bad man—he was always so gentle to me."

"You need not condemn him, my dear young lady. The people of the Forks—some of them, at least—consider him a traitor and regard you as the daughter of a renegade, but what does it matter? Each year sees the old west diminish, and already, in the work of the forest service, law and order advance. Notwithstanding all the shouting of herdsmen and the beating to death of sheep, no hostile shot has ever been fired within the bounds of a national forest. In the work of the forest rangers lies the hope of ultimate peace and order over all the public lands."

The girl fell silent again, her mind filled with larger conceptions of life than her judgment had hitherto been called upon to meet. She knew that Redfield was right, and yet that world of the past—the world of the swift herdsman and his tramping, long horned, half wild kine—still appealed to her imagination. The west of her girlhood seemed heroic in memory. Even the quiet content of it to which she had just listened could not conceal its epic largeness of movement. The part which troubled her most was her father's treachery to his neighbors. That he should fight, that he should kill men in honorable warfare, she could understand, but not his recreancy, his desertion of her mother and herself.

She came back to dwell at last on the action of that slim young soldier who had calmly ridden through the infuriated mob. She remembered that she had thrilled even then at the vague and impersonal power which he represented. To her childish mind he seemed to bear a charm, like the hero of her story books—something which made him invulnerable.

After a long pause Redfield spoke again. "The memory of your father will make life for a time a bit hard for you in Rearing Fork. Perhaps your mother's advice is sound. Why not come to Sulphur City, which is almost entirely of the new spirit?"

"If I can get my mother to come, too, I will be glad to do so, for I hate the Forks. But I will not leave her there, sick and alone."

"Much depends upon the doctor's examination tomorrow."

They had topped the divide now between the Fork and Sulphur creek basin, and the green fields, the alfalfa meadows and the painted farmhouses thickened beneath them. Strange how significant all these signs were now! A few days ago they had appeared doubtful improvements; now they represented the oncoming dominion of the east. They meant cleanliness and decent speech, good bread and sweet butter.

Redfield swept through the town, then turned up the stream directly toward the high wall of the range, which was ragged and abrupt at this point. They passed several charming farmhouses, and the western sky grew ever more glorious with its plum color and saffron, and the range reasserted its mastery over the girl. At last they came to the very jaws of the canyon, and there, in a deep natural grove of lofty cottonwood trees, Redfield passed before a high rustic gate which marked the beginning of his estate. The driveway was of gravel, and the intermingling of transplanted shrubs and pine trees showed the care of the professional gardener.

The house was far from being a castle. Indeed, it was very like a house in Bryn Mawr, except that it was built entirely of half-burned logs, with a wide projecting roof. Giant hydrangeas and other flowering shrubs bordered the drive, and on the rustic terrace a lady in white was waiting. Redfield slowed down and scrambled ungracefully out. But his voice was charming as he said: "Eleanor, this is Miss Wetherford. She was on the point of getting the blues, so I brought her away," he explained.

Mrs. Redfield, quite as urban as the house, was a slim little woman of delicate habit, very far from the ordinary conception of a rancher's wife. Her manner was politely considerate, but not heatedly cordial (the visitor was not precisely hers), and, though she warned a little after looking into Virginia's face, she could not by any stretch of phrase be called cordial. "Are you tired? Would you like to lie down before dinner?" she asked. "Oh, no, indeed. Nothing ever tires me," Virginia responded, with a smile. "You look like one in perfect health," continued her hostess in the envious tone of one who knew all too well what ill health meant. "Let me show you to your room."

her husband had given. Her prejudices were swept away, and she treated her young guest as one well born and well educated woman treats another.



"ELEANOR, THIS IS MISS WETHERFORD." Lee Virginia went to her room borne high upon a new conception of the possibilities of the west. It was glorious to think that one could enjoy the refinement, the comfort, of the east at the same time that one dwelt within the inspiring shadow of the range. Her hands were a-tremble as she put on the bright muslin gown which was all she had for evening wear. She felt very much like the schoolgirl again, and after she had done her best to look nice she took a seat in the little rocker with intent to compose herself for her meeting with strangers. "I wish we were dining without visitors," she said as she heard a carriage drive up. A little later a galloping horse entered the yard and stopped at the door. She heard voices in the hall and among them one with a very English accent, one that sounded precisely like those she had heard on the stage.

At last she dared wait no longer and, taking courage from necessity, descended the stairs, a pleasant picture of vigorous yet somewhat subdued maidenhood.

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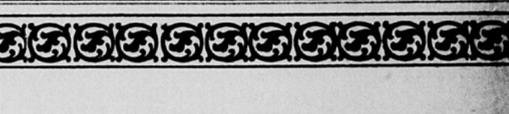
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