

LANGFORD OF THE THREE BARS

BY KATE AND VIRGIL D. BOYLES

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you say. And I want you to believe that every thing will be all right. They would not dare to kill him now, knowing that we are after them. If we are not back to-night, you will not worry, will you? They had so much the start of us."

"I will try not to worry."

"Well, good-bye. Be a good girl, won't you?"

"I will try," she answered, wearily. With a last look into the brave, sweet face, and smothering a mad, uncouthman-like desire to stay and comfort this dear little woman while others rode away in stirring quest, Langford strode from the sick-room into the kitchen.

"Don't let her be alone any more than you can help. Mother White," he said, brusquely, "and don't worry her about going to bed."

"Have a bite before you start, Mr. Langford, do," urged the good woman, hospitably. "You're that worn out you're white around the gills. I'll bet you haven't had any bite of breakfast."

"I had forgotten—but you are right. No, thank you, I'll not stop for anything now. I'll have to ride like king-dome come. I'm late. Be good to her, Mother White," this last over his shoulder as he sprang to his mount from the kitchen stoop.

The long day wore along. Mother White was baking. The men would be ravenous when they came back. Many would stop there for something to eat before going on to their homes. It might be to-night, it might be to-morrow, it might not be until the day after, but whenever the time did come, knowing the men of the range country, she must have something "by her."

At last came the doctor and Gordon, driving up in the doctor's top-buggy, weather-stained, mud-bedaubed with the mud of last spring, of many springs. The doctor was a badly dressed, pleasant-eyed man, past middle age, with a fringe of gray whiskers. He was a sort of journeyman doctor, and he had drifted hither one day two summers ago from the Lake Andes country in this self-same travel-worn conveyance with its same bony sorrel. He had found good picking, he had often jovially remarked since, chewing serenely away on a brand of vile plug the while. He had elected to remain. He was part and parcel of the cattle country now. He was an established condition. People had learned to accept him as he was and be grateful. Haste was a mental and physical impossibility to him. He took his own time. All must perforce acquiesce.

"You have worked yourself into a high fever, Miss Williston, that's what you've done," he said, with professional mournfulness.

"I know it," she smiled wanly. "I couldn't help it. I'm sorry."

Gordon drew up a chair and sat down by her, saying with grave kindness, "You are fretting. We must not let you. I am going to stay with you all night and shoo the goblins away."

"You are kind," said Mary, gratefully. "May I tell you when they come? If some one speaks to me they go away."

"Indeed you may, dear child," he exclaimed, heartily. He had been half joking when he spoke of keeping things away. He now perceived that these things were more serious than he knew.

The doctor administered medicine to reduce the fever, dressed the wounded arm, with Gordon's ready assistance, and then called in Mother White to prepare the bed for his patient; but he paused nonplussed before the weight of entreaty in Mary's eyes and voice.

"Please don't," she cried out, in actual terror. "Oh, Mr. Gordon, don't let him! I see such awful things when I lie down. Please! Please! And Mr. Langford said I might sit up till he came. Mr. Gordon, you will not let him put me to bed, will you?"

"I think it would be better to let her have her way, Lockhart," said Gordon in a low voice.

"Maybe it would, Dick," said the doctor, with surprising meekness.

"I'll stay all night and I'll take good care of her, Lockhart. There's Mother White beckoning to supper. You'll eat before you go? No, I won't take any supper now, thank you, mother, I will stay with Mary."

And he did stay with her all through the long watches of that long night. He never closed his eyes in sleep. Sometimes Mary would drop off into uneasy slumber—always of short duration. When she awakened suddenly in wide-eyed fright, he soothed her with all tenderness. Sometimes when he thought she was sleeping, she would clutch his arm desperately and cry out that there was some one behind the big cottonwood. Again it would be to ask him in a terrified whisper if he did not hear hoof-beats, galloping, galloping, galloping, and begged him to listen. He could always quiet her, and she tried hard to keep from wandering; but after a short, broken rest, she would cry out again in endless repetition of the terrors of that awful night.

Mrs. White and several of her small

progeny breathed loudly from an adjoining room. A lamp burned dimly on the table. It grew late—12 o'clock and after. At last she rested. She passed from light, broken slumber to deep sleep without crying out and thus awakening herself. Gordon was tired and sad. Now that the flush of fever was gone, he saw how white and miserably she really looked. The circles under her eyes were so dark they were like bruises. The mantle of his misfortune was spreading to bring others besides himself into its somber folds.

The men were coming back. But they were coming quietly, in grim silence. He dared not awaken Mary for the news he knew they must carry. He stepped noiselessly to the door to warn them to a yet greater stillness and met Langford on the threshold.

The two surveyed each other gravely with clasped hands.

"You tell her, Dick. I—I can't," said Langford. His big shoulders drooped as under a heavy burden.

"Must I?" asked Gordon.

"Dick, I—I can't," said Langford, brokenly. "Don't you see?—if I had been just a minute sooner—and I promised."

"Yes, I see, Paul," said Gordon, quietly. "I will tell her."

"You need not," said a sweet clear voice from across the room. "I know. I heard. I think I knew all the time—but you were all so good to make me hope. Don't worry about me any more, dear friends. I am all right now. It is much better to know. I hope they didn't hang him. You think they shot him, don't you?"

"Little girl, little girl," cried Langford, on his knees beside her, "it is not that! It is only that we have not found him. But no news is good news. That we have found no trace proves that he is alive. We are going on a new track to-morrow. Believe me, little girl, and go to bed now, won't you, and rest?"

"Yes," she said, wearily, as one in whom no hope was left, "I will go. I will mind—the boss."

As he laid her gently on the bed, while Mrs. White, aroused from sleep, fluttered aimlessly and drowsily about, he whispered, his breath caressing her cheek:

"You will go to sleep right away, won't you?"

"I will try. You are the boss."

CHAPTER XII.

Waiting.

The man found dead the night the Lazy S was burned out was not easily identified. He was a half-breed, but half-breeds were many west of the river, and the places where they laid their heads at night were as shifting as the sands of that rapid, ominous, changing stream of theirs, which ever cut them off from the world of their fathers and kept them bound, but restless, chafing, in that same land where their mothers had stared stolidly at a strange little boatload tugging up the river that was the forerunner of the ultimate destiny of this broad north-west country, but which brought incidentally—as do all big destinies in the great scheme bring sorrow to some one—wrong, misunderstanding, forgetfulness, to a once proud, free people now in subjection.

At last the authorities found trace of him far away at Standing Rock, through the agent there, who knew him as of an ugly reputation—a dissipated, roving profligate, who had long since squandered his government patrimony. He had been mixed up in sundry bad affairs in the past, and had been an inveterate gambler. So much only were the Kemah county authorities able to uncover of the wayward earthly career of the dead man. Of his haunts and cronies of the period immediately preceding his death, the agent could tell nothing. He had not been seen at the agency for nearly a year. The reprobate band had covered its tracks well. There was nothing to do but lay the dead body away and shovel oblivion over its secret.

In the early morning after the return of the men from their unsuccessful man hunt, Gordon, gray and haggard from loss of sleep and from hard thought, stepped out into the kitchen to stretch his cramped limbs. He stumbled over the figure of Langford prone upon the floor, dead asleep in utter exhaustion. He smiled understandingly and opened the outdoor door quietly, hoping he had not aroused the worn-out boss. The air was fresh and cool, with a hint of autumn sharpness, and a premature Indian summer haze, that softened the gauntness of the landscape, and made the distances blue and rest-giving. He felt the need of invigoration after his night's vigil, and struck off down the road with long strides, in pleasant anticipation of a coming appetite for breakfast.

Thus it was that Langford, struggling to a sitting posture, rubbing his heavy eyes with a dim consciousness that he had been disturbed, and wondering drowsily why he was so stupid, felt something seeping through his senses that told him he did not do

well to sleep. So he decided he would take a plunge into the cold arctic pond, and with such drastic measures banish once and for all the elusive yet all-pervading cobwebs which clung to him. Rising to his feet with unusual awkwardness, he looked with scorn upon the bare floor and accused it blindly and bitterly as the direct cause of the strange soreness that beset his whole anatomy. The lay of the floor had changed in a night. Where was he? He glanced helplessly about. Then he knew.

Thus it was, that when Mary languidly opened her eyes a little later it was the boss who sat beside her and smiled reassuringly.

"You have not slept a wink," she cried, accusingly.

"Indeed I have," he said. "Three whole hours, I feel tip-top."

"You are—fibbing," she said. "Your eyes look so tired, and your face is all worn."

His heart leaped with the joy of her solicitude.

"You are wrong," he laughed, teasingly. "I slept on the floor; and a good bed it was, too. No, Miss Williston, I am not 'all in' yet, by any means."

In his new consciousness, a new formality crept into his way of addressing her. She did not seem to notice it.

"Forgive me for forgetting, last night," she said, earnestly. "I was very selfish. I forgot that you had not slept for nearly two days and were riding all the while in—our behalf. I forgot. I was tired, and I went to sleep. I want you to forgive me. I want you to believe that I do appreciate what you have done. My father—"

"Don't, don't, little girl," cried Langford, forgetting his new awe of her maidenhood in his pity for the stricken child.

"My father," she went on steadily, "would thank you if I were here. I thank you, too, even if I did forget to think whether or no you and all the men had any sleep or anything to eat last night. Will you try to believe that I don't forget willingly? I was so tired."

When Langford answered her, which was not immediately, his face was white and he spoke quietly with a touch of injured pride.

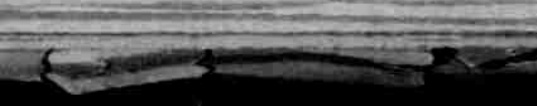
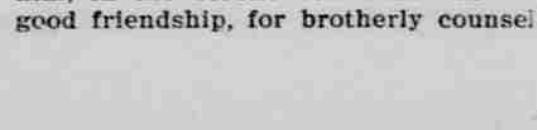
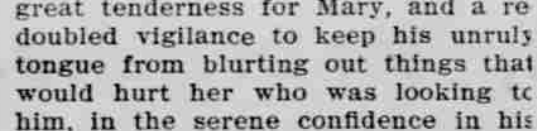
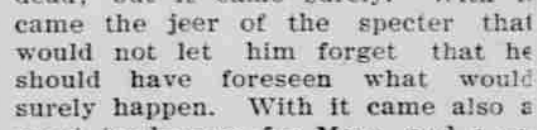
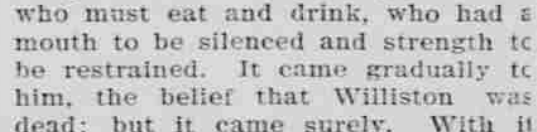
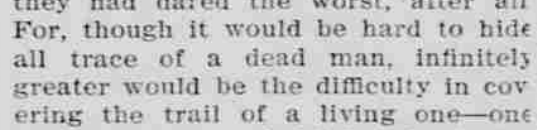
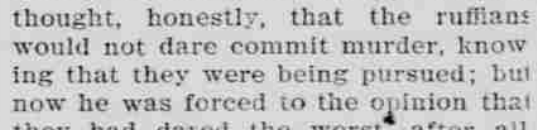
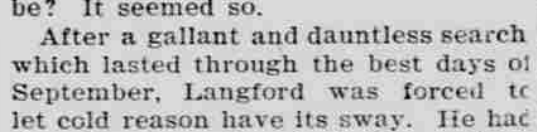
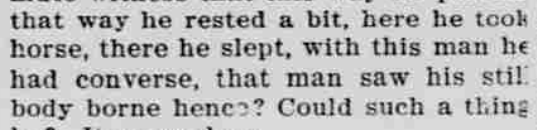
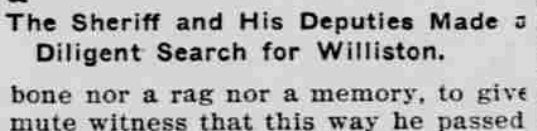
"If you want to hurt us, Miss Williston, that is the way to talk. We cowmen do not do things for thanks."

She looked at him wonderingly a moment, then said, simply, "Forgive me," but her lips were trembling and she turned to the wall to hide the tears that would come. After all, she was only a woman—with nerves—and the reaction had come.

The sheriff and his party of deputies made a diligent search for Williston that day and for many days to come. It was of no avail. He had disappeared, and all trace with him, as completely as if he had been spirited away in the night to another world—body and soul. That the soul of him had really gone to another world came to be generally believed—Mary held no hope after the return of the first expedition; but why could they find no trace of his body? Where was it? Where had it found a resting place? Was it possible for a man, quick or dead, even west of the river in an early day of his civilization when the law had a winking eye, to fall away from his wonted haunts in a night and leave no print, neither a

bone nor a rag nor a memory, to give mute witness that this way he passed that way he rested a bit, here he took horse, there he slept, with this man he had converse, that man saw his still body borne hence? Could such a thing be? It seemed so.

After a gallant and dauntless search which lasted through the best days of September, Langford was forced to let cold reason have its way. He had thought, honestly, that the ruffians would not dare commit murder, knowing that they were being pursued; but now he was forced to the opinion that they had dared the worst, after all. For, though it would be hard to hide all trace of a dead man, infinitely greater would be the difficulty in covering the trail of a living one—one who must eat and drink, who had a mouth to be silenced and strength to be restrained. It came gradually to him, the belief that Williston was dead; but it came surely. With it came the jeer of the specter that would not let him forget that he should have foreseen what would surely happen. With it came also a great tenderness for Mary, and a redoubled vigilance to keep his unruly tongue from blurring out things that would hurt her who was looking to him, in the serene confidence in his good friendship, for brotherly counsel



and comfort.

In the first dark days of his new belief, he spoke to Gordon, and the young lawyer had written a second letter to the "gal reporter." In response, she came at once to Kemah and from thence to the White home steady in the boss's "own private." This time the boss did the driving himself, bringing consternation to the heart of one Jim Munson, cow-puncher, who viewed the advent of her and her "mouse-colored hair" with serious trepidation and alarm. What he had dreaded had come to pass. 'Twas but a step now to the Three Bars. A fussy woman would be the means of again losing man his Eden. It was monstrous. He sulked, aggrievedly, systematically.

Louise slipped into the sad life at the Whites' easily, sweetly, adaptably. Mary rallied under her gentle ministrations. There was—would ever be—a haunting pathos in the dark eyes, but she arose from her bed, grateful for any kindness shown her, strong in her determination not to be a trouble to any one by giving way to weak and unavailing tears.

Mary, because of her abounding health, healed of her wound rapidly. Langford took advantage of the girls' absorption in each other's company to ride often and at length on quests of his own creation. With October, Louise must join Judge Dale for the autumn term of court. He haunted the hills. He was not looking now for a living man; he was seeking a cleverly concealed grave. He flouted the opinion—held by many—that the body had been thrown into the Missouri and would wash ashore some later day many and many a mile below. He held firmly to his fixed idea that impenetrable mystery clouding the ultimate close of Williston's earthly career was the sought aim of his murderers, and they would risk no river's giving up its dead to their undoing.

It had been ascertained beyond reasonable doubt that Williston could not have left the country in any of the usual modes. His description was at all the stations along the line, together with the theory that he would be leaving under compulsion.

Meanwhile, Gordon had buckled down for the big fight. He was sadly handicapped, with the whole proffer of his testimony struck from under him by Williston's disappearance. However, those who knew him best—the number was not large—looked for things to happen in those days. They, the few, the courageous minority, through all the ups and downs—with the balance in favor of the downs most of the time—of the hardest-

fought battle of his life, the end of which left him gray at the temples, maintained a deep and abiding faith in this quiet, unassuming young man, who had squared his shoulders to this new paralyzing blow and refused to be knocked out, who walked with them and talked with them, but kept his own counsel, abided his time, and in the meantime—worked.

One day Langford was closeted with him for a long two hours in his dingy, one-roomed office on the ground floor. The building was a plain wooden affair with its square front rising above the roof. In the rear was a lean-to where Gordon slept and had his few hours of privacy.

"It won't do, Paul," Gordon said in conclusion. "I have thought it all out. We have absolutely nothing to go upon—nothing at least but our own convictions and a bandaged arm, and they won't hang a man with Jesse's diabolical influence. We'll fight it out on the sole question of 'Mag.' Paul. After that—well—who knows? Something else may turn up. There may be developments. Meanwhile, just wait. There will be justice for Williston yet."

CHAPTER XIII.

Mrs. Higgins Rallies to Her Colors.

The Kemah county court convened on a Tuesday, the second week in December. The judge coming with his court reporter to Velpen on Monday found the river still open. December had crept softly to its appointed place in the march of months with a gentle heralding of warm, southwest winds.

"Weather breeder," said Mrs. Higgins of the Bon Ami, with a mournful shake of her head. "You mark my words and remember I said it. It's a sorry day for the cows when the river's running in December."

She was serving the judicial party herself, and capably, too. She dearly loved the time the courts met, on either side of the river. It brought many interesting people to the Bon Ami, although not often the judge. His coming for supper was a most unusual honor, and it was due to Louise, who had playfully insisted. He had humored her much against his will, it must be confessed; for he had a deeply worn habit of making straight for the hotel from the station and there remaining until Hank Bruebacher, liv-
eryman, who never permitted anything to interfere with or any one to usurp his prerogative of driving his honor to and from Kemah when court was in session, whistled with shameless familiarity the following morning to make his honor cognizant of the fact that he, Hank, was ready. But he had come to the Bon Ami because Louise wished it, and he reflected, whimsically on the astonishment, amounting almost to horror, on the face of his good landlord at the Velpen house when it became an assured fact that he was not and had not been in the dining-room.

"You are right, Mrs. Higgins," assented the judge gravely to her weather predictions, "and the supper you have prepared for us is worthy the

dear child, I am round of you and a bone you will never go back east."

Economizes the use of flour, butter and eggs; makes the biscuit, cake and pastry more appetizing, nutritious and wholesome.

Royal Baking Powder

ABSOLUTELY PURE

This is the only baking powder made from Royal Grape Cream of Tartar.

It Has No Substitute

There are Alum and Phosphate of Lime mixtures sold at a lower price, but no housekeeper regarding the health of her family can afford to use them.

Louisville

From the Courier.

Mrs. G. H. Wood returned from the hospital at Omaha last Saturday.

County Assessor H. M. Soennichsen was a Louisville visitor Wednesday and paid this office a pleasant call.

Miss Mabel Wirth returned home from the St. Joseph hospital at Omaha last Saturday, where she underwent an operation for appendicitis.

Grandma Hoover was in town Monday visiting with her son, B. J. Hoover and wife. This was Mrs. Hoover's first visit to town since last Thanksgiving.

Uncle Thomas Urwin was down town Tuesday for the first time in several years. He was brought down in an automobile and cast his vote at the village election.

Fred Ossenkup has returned from Omaha where he took the civil service examination for a railroad clerkship. He says there were seventy in the class who took the same examination.

Joe Fitzgerald of Plattsmouth and Barack Teodorski of Omaha were in Louisville. Mr. Teodorski is thinking of putting in an automobile livery in Louisville this spring, and says if the bridge was rebuilt it wouldn't take him long to make up his mind to do so.

Say! gentlemen of the city council and gentlemen of the Commercial club, what's the matter with having a general "cleaning up" day for Louisville? Why not set a day apart for every body to take a hand in cleaning streets and alleys, brushing up premises, trimming trees and making lawns. Understand this would make the town pleasant in our own sight and attractive to those who sojourn among us temporarily.

A Twenty year Sentence.

"I have just completed a twenty year health sentence, imposed by Bucklen's Arnica Salve, which cured me of bleeding piles just twenty years ago," writes O. S. Woollever, of LeRayville, N. Y. Bucklen's Arnica Salve heals the worst sores, boils, burns, wounds and cuts in the shortest time. 25c. at F. G. Fricke & Co. drug store.

Elmwood

From the Leader-Echo.

H. M. Soennichsen, county assessor, was in town yesterday.

Neal McCrory and Herman Dettman left Tuesday for Corpus Christi, Texas.

Ezra Miller has rented the Ed Swartz property, west of the catholic church, and is moving his family therein.

Another child of Geo. Nentiel is down with pneumonia. This is the third one of his children to have pneumonia this spring.

Henry Mollen severely injured his spine while scuffling Thursday evening of last week. Friday the pain became so intense he fainted and was taken to the hospital for treatment. He is able to be out again now.

C. D. Kunz, sr., had one of his thumbs thrown out of joint and one of his ankles crushed Wednesday by his horse running away, throwing him down and buggy running over him. He was talking off the bridle and putting on the halter in front of Schneider's harness shop, when the horse started to run. Mr. Kunz grabbed the horse around the neck and hung on until the animal threw him. The horse was caught near the livery barn no damage being done to either the harness or buggy.

THE HELPFUL HAND

you can most surely depend upon in time of trouble is your bank account. Better start to acquire a balance by depositing what you have in the Bank of Cass County. You'll find the necessity of thinking before paying a great incentive to saving. When trouble comes what you have been prevented from frittering away will make a comfortable balance.

The BANK OF CASS COUNTY, PLATTSMOUTH, NEBRASKA.