

LANGFORD OF THE THREE BARS

BY KATE AND VIRGIL D. BOYLES

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...et in front was rapidly filling. One would hardly have dared to shoot—then—if one had meant to. And he did not know. He only knew that Goviltry had been in the air for Gor-



Gordon Unlocked the Door Quietly.

good and all. It was no longer safe to be within. Gordon was the last one out. He carried a battered little teakettle in his hand. He looked at it in a whimsical surprise as if he had not known until then that he had it in his hand. Obeying a sudden impulse, he held it out to Louise.

"Please take care of—my poor little dream," he whispered with a strange, intent look.

Before she could comprehend the significance or give answer, the judge had faced about. He bore the girls back to the hotel, scolding helplessly all the way as they scudded with the wind. But Louise held the little tin kettle firmly.

Men knew of Richard Gordon that night that he was a marked man. The secret workings of a secret clan had him on their proscription list. Some one had at last found this unwearied and doggedly persistent young fellow in the way. In the way, he was a menace, a danger. He must be removed from out the way. He could not be bought from it—his home should be warned from it. So now his home—his work room and his rest room, the first by many hours daily the more in use, with all its furnishings of bachelor plainness and utility, that yet had held a curious charm for some men, friends and cronies like Langford—was burning that he might be warned. Could any one say, "Jesse Black has done this thing?" Would he not bring down proof of guilt by a retaliation struck too soon? It would seem as if he were anticipating an unfavorable verdict. So men reasoned. And even then they did not arise to stamp out the evil that had endured and hugged itself and spit out corruption in the cattle country. That was reserved for another.

They talked of a match thrown down at the court-house by a tramp, likely—when it was past midnight, when the fire broke out with the wind a piercing gale, and when no vagrant but had long since left such cold comfort and had slept these many weeks in sunnier climes. Some argued that the windows of the court-room might have been left open and the stove blown down by the wind tearing through, or the stove door might have blown open and remains of the fire been blown out, or the pipe might have fallen down. But it was a little odd that the same people said Dick Gordon's office likely caught fire from flying sparks. Dick's office was two blocks to westward of the court-house and it would have been a brave spark and a lively one that could have made headway against that northwester.

CHAPTER XIX.

The Escape.

The little county seat awoke in the morning to a strange sight. The storm had not abated. The wind was still blowing at blizzard rate. The noise was deafening, and fine, icy snow was swirling so thickly through the cold air that vision was obstructed. Buildings were distinguishable only as shadows showing faintly through a heavy white veil. The thermometer had gone many degrees below the zero mark. It was steadily growing colder. The older inhabitants said it would surely break the record the coming night.

An immense fire had been built in the sitting-room. Thither Mary and Louise repaired. Here they were joined by Dale, Langford and Gordon.

"You should be out at the ranch looking after your poor cattle, Mr. Langford," said Mary, smilingly. She could be light-hearted now—since a little secret had been whispered to her last night at a tea party where no tea had been drunk. Langford had gravitated toward her as naturally as steel to a magnet. He shrugged his big shoulders and laughed a little.

"The Scribe will do everything that can be done. Honest, now, did you think this trial could be pulled off without me?"

"But there can be no trial to-day."

"Why not?"

"Did I dream the court-house burned last night?"

"Then how can you hold court?"

"We have gone back to the time when church and state were one and inseparable, and court convenes at 10 o'clock sharp in the meeting-house," he said.

Louise was looking white and miserable.

"You are not contemplating running away, are you?" asked Gordon. "This is unusual weather—really."

She looked at him with a pitiful smile.

"I should like to be strong and brave and enduring and capable—like Mary. You don't believe it, do you? It's true, though. But I can't. I'm weak and homesick and cold. I ought not to have come. I am not the kind you said I was. I am going home just as soon as this court is over. I mean it."

There was no mistaking that. Gordon bowed his head. His face was white. It had come sooner than he had thought.

All the records of the work yesterday had been burned. There was nothing to do but begin at the beginning again. It was discouraging, uninteresting. But it had to be done. Dale refused positively to adjourn. The jurymen were all here. So the little frame church was bargained for. If the fire-bugs had thought to postpone events—to gain time—by last night's work, they would find themselves very greatly mistaken. The church was long and narrow like a country school-house, and rather roomy considering the size of the town. It had precise windows—four on the west side, through which the fine snow was drifting, four opposite. The storm kept few at home with the exception of the people from across the river. There were enough staying in the town to fill the room to its utmost limits. Standing room was at a premium. The entry was crowded. Men not able to get in ploughed back through the cutting wind and snow only to return presently to see if the situation had changed any during their brief absence. So all the work of yesterday was gone over again.

So close was the pack of people that the fire roaring in the big stove in the middle of the room was allowed to sink in smouldering quiet. The heavy air had been unbearable else. The snow that had been brought in on tramping feet lay in little melted pools on the rough flooring. Men forgot to eat peanuts and women forgot to chew their gum—except one or two extremely nervous ones whose jaws moved the faster under the stimulus of hysteria. Jesse Black was telling his story.

"Along toward the 1st of last July, I took a hike out into the Indian country to buy a few head of cattle. I trade considerable with the half-breeds around Crow creek and Lower Brule. They're always for sellin' and if it comes to a show-down never haggle much about the lucre—it all goes for snake-juice anyway. Well, I landed at John Yellow Wolf's shanty along about noon and found there was others ahead of me. Yellow Wolf always was a popular cuss. There was Charlie Nightbird, Pete Monroe, Jesse Big Cloud and two or three others whose mugs I did not happen to be onto. After our feed, we all strolled out to the corral. Yellow Wolf said he had bought a likely little bunch from some English feller who was skipping the country—starved out and homesick—and hadn't put 'em on the range yet. He said J. R. was the English feller's brand. I didn't suspicion no under-hand dealin's. Yellow Wolf's always treated me white before, so I bargained for this here chap and three or four others and then pulled out for home driving the bunch. They fed at home for a spell and then I decided to put 'em on the range. On the way I fell in with Billy Brown here. He was dead set on havin' the lot to fill in the chinks of the two car loads he was shippin', so I up and lets him have 'em. I showed him this here bill-of-sale from Yellow Wolf and made him out one from me, and that was all there was to it. He rode to Velpen and I turned on my trail."

It was a straight story, and apparently damaging for the prosecution. It corroborated the attestations of other witnesses—many others. It had a plausible ring to it. Two bills of sale radiated atmospheric legality. If there had been dirty work it must have originated with that renegade half-breed, Yellow Wolf. And Yellow Wolf was dead. He had died while serving a term in the penitentiary for cattle rustling. Uncle Sam himself had set the seal upon him—and now he was dead. This insinuated charge he could not answer. The finality of it seemed to set its stamp upon the people gathered there—upon the 12 good men and true, as well as upon others. Yellow Wolf was dead. George Williston was dead. Their secrets had died with them. An inscrutable fate had lowered the veil. Who could pierce it? One might believe, but who could know? And the law required knowledge.

"Is Charlie Nightbird present?" asked Small, casting rather anxious eyes over the packed, intent faces. Charlie Nightbird was not present. At least he made no sign of coming forward. The face of the young counsel for the state was immobile during the brief time they waited for Charlie Nightbird—whose dark, frozen face at that moment turned toward the cold, sparkling sky, and who would never come, not if they waited for him till the last dread trump of the last dread day.

There was some mistake. Counsel had been misinformed. Nightbird was an important witness. He had been reported present. Never mind. He was probably unavoidably detained by the storm. They would call Jesse Big Cloud and others to corroborate the defendant's statements—which they did, and the story was sustained in all its parts, major and minor. Then the defense rested.

Richard Gordon arose from his chair. His face was white. His lean jaws were set. His eyes were steel. He was anything but a lover now, this man Gordon. Yet the slim little court reporter with dark circles of homesickness under her eyes had never loved him half so well as at this moment. His voice was clear and deliberate.

"Your honor, I ask permission of the court to call a witness in direct testimony. I assure your honor that the state had used all efforts in its power to obtain the presence of this witness before resting its case, but had failed and believed at the time that he could not be produced. The witness is now here and I consider his testimony of the utmost importance in this case."

Counsel for the defendant objected strenuously, but the court granted the petition. He wanted to hear everything that might throw some light on the dark places in the evidence.

"I call Mr. George Williston," said Gordon.

He paused a moment in his recital. Faces strained with expectancy favored him—his every look and word and action. Mary was very pale, carried thus back to the dread realities of that night in August, and shuddered, remembering that ghastly galloping. Langford could scarce restrain himself. He wanted to rip out a blood-curdling Sioux war-whoop on the spot.

"Who was this man, Mr. Williston?" asked Gordon.

"Jesse Black."

Small was on his feet again, gesticulating wildly.

"I object! This is all a fabrication, put in here to prejudice the minds of the jury against this defendant. It is a pack of lies, and I move that it be stricken from the record."

The little lawyer bowed his head to the storm and shrugged up his shoulders. Perhaps he wished that he, or his associates—one of the unholy alliance at least—was where the wicked cease from troubling, on the far-away islands of the deep seas, possibly, or home on the farm. But his expression told nothing.

"Gentlemen! gentlemen!" expostulated Judge Dale. "Gentlemen! I insist. This is all out of order." Only one gentleman was out of order, but that was the judge's way. Gordon had remained provokingly cool under the trade.

Again the soft touch. Small fell into his chair. He poured himself a glass of water from the pitcher standing on the attorneys' table and drank a little of it nervously.

"I move," said the little lawyer, "that all this touching upon the personal matter of this witness and having to do with his private quarrels be stricken out of the evidence as not bearing on the case in question."

All in vain. The judge ruled that it did bear on the case, and Williston picked up the thread of his story.

"We rode and rode hard—it must have been hours; daylight was coming before we stopped. Our horses were spent. I had no idea where we were. From the formation of the land, I judged we were not far from the river. We were surrounded by bluffs. I can hardly make you see how clearly this little retreat had been planned. It was in a valley—one of a hundred similar in all essential respects. The gulch at the bottom of the valley was heavily wooded with scrub-oak, cottonwood, woodbine and plum trees, and this tangle of foliage extended for some distance up the sides of the hills. In the midst of this underbrush—a most excellent screen—was a tiny cabin. In this tiny cabin I have lived, a closely watched prisoner, from that day until I escaped."

The defendant stirred a little uneasily. Was he thinking of Nightbird with the dark, frozen face—who had not answered to his call?

"Black left me soon after. He did not unbind me, rather bound me tighter. There was no one then to watch me. He deigned to inform me that he had found it rather inconvenient to kill me after the relief party rode up, as then there was no absolute surety of his making a clean getaway, and being caught in the act would be bound to be unpleasant, very unpleasant just then, so he had altered his plans a little—for the present. He gave me no hint either that time, nor either of the two times I saw him subsequently, as to what was to be his ultimate disposal of me. I could only suppose that after this trial was well over in his favor, and fear of indictment for arson and murder had blown over—if blow over it did—he would then quietly put an end to me. Dead men tell no tales. The shanty in the gulch did not seem to be much of a rendezvous for secret meetings. I led a lonely existence. My fallers were mostly half-breeds—usually Charlie Nightbird. Two or three times Jake

Sanderson was my guard."

Then from the doorway came a loud, clear, resonant voice, a joyful voice, a voice whose tones fairly oozed rapture.

"Hellity damn! The Three Bars 'a gettin' busy, Mouse-hair!"

Judge Dale started. He glared angrily in that direction.

"Remove that man!" he ordered, curtly. He liked Jim, but he could not brook this crying contempt of court. Jim was removed. He went quietly, but shaking his head reproachfully.

"I never would 'a thought it o' the judge," he murmured, disconsolately. "I never would 'a thought it."

There was a movement in the back of the room. A man was making his way out, slipping along, cat-like, trying to evade attention. Quietly Gordon motioned to the sheriff and slipped a paper into his hand.

"Look sharp," he whispered, his steady eyes on the shifty ones of the sheriff. "If you let him get away, just remember the handwriting on the wall. It's our turn now."

Presently there was a slight scuffle by the door and two men quietly left the improvised court-room.

"Day before yesterday, in the afternoon," continued Williston, "I managed to knock Nightbird down at the threshold as he was about to enter. I had secretly worked a cross-beam from the low, unfinished ceiling. There was nothing else in the room I might use for a weapon. They were very careful. I think I killed him, your honor and gentlemen of the jury. I am not sorry. There was no other way. But I would rather it had been the maker, not the tool. By the time I had made my way back to the Lazy S I was too exhausted to go further; so I crawled over to my neighbors, the Whites, and Mother White made me a shake-down. I lay there, nearly dead, until this morning."

He leaned back wearily.

Black stood up. He "as not lank nor lazy now, nor shuffling. His body was drawn to its full height. In the instant before the spring, Mary, who was sitting close to the attorneys' table, met his glance squarely. She read there what he was about to do. Only a moment their eyes held each other's but it was time enough for a swift message of understanding, of utter dislike, and of a determined will to defeat the man's purpose, to pass from the accusing brown eyes to the cruel ones of the defendant.

Quick as a flash Black seized the chair upon which he had been sitting, sprang clear of the table and his lawyers, and landed close to Mary's side. With his chair as a weapon, he meant to force his way to the nearest window. Mary's dilated. Unhesitatingly she seized the half-emptied glass on the table and dashed the contents full into the prisoner's face. Blinded, he halted a moment in his mad rush. Mary's quick maneuver made Langford's opportunity. He grappled with Black. The crowd went mad with excitement.

The prisoner still retained his chair. When Langford grappled with him, he attempted to bring it down upon the fair head of his antagonist. Mary gasped with dread, but Langford grasped the chair with one muscular hand, wrested it from the desperado's hold and threw it to the floor. The two men locked in a close embrace, Langford's great strength was more than sufficient to hold the outlaw until the dazed officers could do their duty—had he been let alone; but two men, who had been standing near the door



The Game Was On.

who had not seemed to be working at when the prisoner made his unexpected leap for liberty, had succeeded in worming their way through the excited crowd, and now suddenly threw themselves upon the ranchman, dragging him back.

"Stand aside or I'll shoot!"

It was a girl's voice, clear and firm. Mary had been the first to realize that Black's friends, not Langford's had joined in the struggle. She snatched her revolver from her cowboy belt—she had not been without either since the Lazy S was burned—and cried out her challenge. Glancing quickly from the gleaming barrel to the determined face of the young girl, the men let go their hold of Langford and fell back precipitately.

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The sale of alum foods has been made illegal in Washington and the District of Columbia, and alum baking powders are everywhere recognized as injurious.

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and be very sure you get Royal.

Royal is the only Baking Powder made from Royal Grape Cream of Tartar. It adds to the digestibility and wholesomeness of the food.

Louisville

From the Courier.

Born to Mr. and Mrs. Wes Taylor April 22, a girl.

C. W. Spence was down from Havenlock forepart of the week visiting with his family.

M. L. Williams spent Easter Sunday at Beatrice with his little daughter who is there attending school.

Uncle Henry Lenhoff was down from Lincoln one day last week visiting old time friends and looking after his farm south of town.

During the rain storm Thursday lightning struck the steeple of the German Lutheran church west of town but the damage was slight.

Mr. and Mrs. George Fand returned from Holdrege Friday. Mr. Rand appears much improved in health. They leave at once for a two weeks visit with their daughter in South Dakota.

Mr. and Mrs. C. G. Clifford went to Glenwood, Iowa, Thursday to attend the funeral of Mrs. Dorans and her son, Andrew, both of them having died within a few hours of each other at the home of Ed, Dorans near Lincoln. Andrew Dorans lived in Lotisville a number of years ago and was foreman of the teamster gang in the old W. H. B. Stout quarries. The remains were taken to Glenwood for interment.

Gentle and Effective.

A well-known Manitoba editor writes: "As an inside worker I find Chamberlain's Stomach and Liver Tablets invaluable for the touches of biliousness natural to sedentary life, their action being gentle and effective, clearing the digestive tract and the head." Price, 25 cents. Samples free. F. G. Fricke & Co.

Union

From the Ledger.

Mrs. John Carper, who came in from Denver last week to attend the funeral of her father, departed for home Saturday.

L. J. Hall and wife departed on Tuesday for Petersburg, Neb., to make several days visit with some of their relatives and friends.

Wes Clark was partially disabled a few days ago by the explosion of a pop bottle whereby his leg was injured, but no very serious damage resulted.

Miss Mary Foster, county superintendent, was here Wednesday, having been over to Avoca to visit the schools. She also visited the Ervin district east of here.

Mrs. T. G. Barnum went to Lincoln Monday in response to a message stating that her sister, Mrs. Emma Wallace, was seriously ill and that a surgical operation was to be performed.

George Graves of Murray passed through here on the Tuesday forenoon train, bound for Bartlesville, Oklahoma to join the league ball team with which he is under contract to play this season.

Mrs. Dave Lalue and children departed Monday morning for their new home at Magnet, Neb., where Dave went some time ago and engaged in the blacksmith business. Their numerous friends here hope they may be prosperous and happy in their new location.

Reese Delaney has plans drawn and contract let for the erection of a new residence to cost about \$2,000 on his lots east of the school building, and the work will begin at once. W. B. Banning is the contractor, and Joe and Emory Bauer are to do the carpenter work.

The Ladies of St. John's Church will give a supper at Coates' Hall on the evening of Tuesday, May 19th.

Nehawka

(From the Register.)

Wesley Magney returned from Oklahoma Tuesday evening. He sold one of his farms to Alph Tucker and has bought another. Verily Oklahoma is a great place to make money.

Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Fries are the happy parents of a little son born April 18. If Albert walks a trifle prouder than usual and wears a large grin with him, he has joined the smile club. The Register extends congratulations.

Governor Sheldon accompanied by his family, private secretary Mr. Dimery and stenographer, Miss Kaup, came down Friday evening to clean up a lot of official business prior to his departure to the Pacific coast.

Mrs. J. M. Palmer returned home Friday from Okaloosa, Iowa, where she has been the past three weeks with Mrs. D. C. West who is in a hospital there. She reports Mrs. West as getting along finely.

L. H. Young and his brother, Robert shipped a carload of hogs to the South Omaha market last week that made a record for them. They were of sufficient importance to call for a spendid write up in the Journal-Stockman.

Peter Opp was in town Tuesday the first time since he returned from Excelsior Springs. He reports that he is feeling spendid and that he looks for permanent relief—at any rate he looks better than he has for a year.

Henry and Jacob Wessel have received word of the death of their father, Mathias Wessel, March 22, at Suedau, Holstein, Germany. Mr. Wessel was nearly eighty-three years of age. He leaves a widow and five children, Jacob Henry and Marcus of this neighborhood, and a son and a daughter near the old home.

Elmwood

From the Leader-Kcho.

Dr. Neely has made several trips to Wabash this week to see Mrs. VanEvery, who is very sick with uraemic poisoning.

Mrs. Amanda Bailey, whose health has been very poor for the past three months, is now quite sick at the home of her daughter, Mrs. H. L. Gresson.

Mrs. William Atchison has so far recovered from her long siege of typhoid fever as to be able to ride to town Tuesday. Her many friends are glad to see her out again.

Miss Effie Wilson has just completed a neat four-room cottage on the "Hollenbeck farm," northeast of town, to take the place of the house that burned down this winter. Loren Parish will farm the place this year.

Dr. Munger has ordered an automobile from Cincinnati, O., a one-seated runabout, which he expects here next week. When Charley Clap gets his touring car home from Washington, Elmwood will have three automobiles.

Harry Waltz's girl is a boy. "Grandpa" Saxton was so excited when he told us the good news at first that we were of the opinion that "he" was a girl, but Delmar declared yesterday that the new arrival was a real republican boy.

John R. Baird, retired capitalist and farmer, has rented the Ben Hoffman lots and planted them to potatoes. He expects to raise potatoes to burn, and is now in negotiations with the Missouri Pacific to build a switch to his potato patch in time to take care of the shipment of the crop to Southern Texas.

Good Pasturage

Good pasture in plenty, for horses and cattle. Water in pasture. Enquire of JOHN RUTHFORD.