

By D. M. AMBERRY

BROKEN BOW, NEBRASKA

LANGFORD of the THREE BARS By KATE AND VIRGIL D. BOYLES

SYNOPSIS.

Cattle thieves despoiling ranches of South Dakota. George Williston, small ranchman, runs into rendezvous of thieves on island in Missouri river. They have stolen cattle from Three Bar ranch. Langford visits Williston and his daughter and Williston reports what he has seen to Langford, who determines to rid country of thieves. Jesse Black heads outlaw law. Langford falls in love with Williston's daughter, but does not tell her so. Louise Dale, court stenographer, and niece of Judge Dale, visits Kemah at request of county attorney, Gordon, to take testimony in preliminary hearing. Gordon falls in love with her. After preliminary examination Williston's home is attacked and defended by his daughter and himself. Outlaws fire building just as Langford and his cowboys arrive. Outlaws carry off Williston but Langford rescues the daughter. Without Williston evidence against Black is meager, and case seems to be going against the state. Gordon takes a night ride and finds Williston, who has escaped from captors. The courthouse at Kemah burns at night. Williston holds a tea party in his room following court house fire, and Mary Williston and Louise Dale attend. Court convenes in the church, and Williston's testimony is introduced by Gordon.

CHAPTER XIX.—Continued.

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.

"We will call Charlie Nightbird," said Small, complacently.

There was a little waiting silence—a breathless, palpitating silence.

"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.

Had the strain crazed him? Louise covered her eyes with her hands. Men sat as if fazed. And thus, the cynosure of all eyes—stupefied eyes—Williston of the ravaged Lazy S, thin and worn but calm, natural and scholarly-looking as of old—walked from the little ante-room at the side into the light and knowledge of men once more and raised his hand for the oath. Not until this was taken and he had sat quietly down in the witness chair did the tension snap. Even then men found it difficult to focus their attention on the enormous difference this new witness must make in the case that a few moments before seemed settled.

Mary sat with shining eyes in the front row of wooden chairs. It was no wonder she had laughed and been so gay all the dreary yesterday and all the worse today. Louise shot her a look of pure gladness.

Small's face was ludicrous in its drop-jawed astonishment. The little lawyer's face was a study. A look of defiance had crept into the defendant's countenance.

The preliminary questions were asked and answered.

"Mr. Williston, you may state where you were and what you saw on the 14th day of July last."

Williston, the unfortunate gentleman and scholar, the vanquished cowman, for a brief while the most important man in the county, perhaps, was about to uncover to men's understanding the dark secret hitherto obscured by a cloud of supposition and hearsay. He told the story of his visit to the island, and he told it well. It was enough. Gordon asked no further questions regarding that event.

"And now, Mr. Williston, you may tell what happened to you on the night of the 30th of last August?"

Williston began to tell the story of the night attack upon the Lazy S, when the galvanic Small jumped to his feet. The little lawyer touched him with a light hand.

"Your honor," he said, smoothly, "I object to that as incompetent, irrelevant and immaterial, and not binding on the defendant."

"Your honor," interrupted Gordon, with great calmness, "we intend to show you before we get through that this testimony is competent, and that it is binding upon the defendant."

"Was the defendant there?"

"The defendant was there."

The objection was overruled.

So Williston told briefly but to the point the story of the night attack upon his home, of the defence by himself and daughter, and of the burning of his house and sheds. Then he proceeded:

"Suddenly, some one caught me from behind, my arms were pinioned to my sides, something was clapped over my mouth. I was flung over a horse and strapped to the saddle all in less time than it takes to tell it, and was borne away in company with the man who had overpowered me."

He paused a moment in his recital. Faces strained with expectancy devoured 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 re-

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"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 was 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.