



# LANGFORD OF THE THREE BARS

BY KATE AND VIRGIL D. BOYLES  
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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, liverman, 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



"You Are the Best Man in All the World."

hand that serves it. Kings and potentates could ask no better. Louise, dear child, I am fond of you and I hope you will never go back east."

"Thank you, Uncle Hammond," said Louise, who knew that an amusing thought was seeping through this declaration of affection. "I am sorry to give you a headache, but I am going back to God's country some day, nevertheless."

"Maybe so—maybe not," said the judge. "Mrs. Higgins, my good woman, how is our friend, the canker-worm, coming on these days?"

"Canker-worm?" repeated Mrs. Higgins. "Meanin' your honor—"

"Just what I say—canker-worm. Isn't he the worm gnawing in discontent at the very core of the fair fruit of established order and peace in the cow country?"

"I—I—don't understand, your honor," faltered the woman in great trepidation. Would his honor consider her a hopeless stupid? But what was the man talking about? Louise looked up, a flush of color staining her cheeks.

"Maybe fire-brand would suit you better, madame? My young friend, the fire-brand," resumed the judge, rising. "That is good—fire-brand. Is he not inciting the populace to open rebellion, false doctrine and schism? Is it not because of him that roofs are

burned over the very heads of the helpless homesteader?"

"For shame, Uncle Hammond," exclaimed Louise, still flushed and with a mischievous little sparkle in her eyes. "You are poking fun at me. You haven't any right to, you know; but that's your way. I don't care, but Mrs. Higgins doesn't understand."

"Don't you, Mrs. Higgins?" asked the judge.

"No, I don't," snapped Mrs. Higgins, and she didn't, but she thought she did. "Only if you mean Mr. Richard Gordon, I'll tell you now there ain't no one in this here God-forsaken country who can hold a tallow candle to him. Just put that in your pipe and smoke it, will you?"

She piled up dishes viciously. She did not wait for her guests to depart before she began demolishing the table. It was a tremendous breach of etiquette, but she didn't care. To have an ideal shattered ruthlessly is ever a heart-breaking thing.

"But my dear Mrs. Higgins," expostulated the judge.

"You needn't," said that lady, shortly. "I don't care," she went on, "if the president himself or an archangel from heaven came down here and plastered Dick Gordon with bad-smellin' names from the crown of his little toe to the tip of his head, I'd tell 'em to their very faces that they didn't know what they was talkin' about, and what's more they'd better go back to where they belong and not come nosin' round in other people's business when they don't understand one single mite about it. We don't want 'em puttin' their fingers in our pie when they don't know a thing about us or our ways. That's my say," she closed, with appalling significance, flattering herself that no one could dream but that she was dealing in the most off-hand generalities. She was far too politic to antagonize, and withal too good a woman not to strike for a friend. She congratulated herself she had been true to all her gods—and she had been.

Louise smiled in complete sympathy, challenging the judge meanwhile with laughing eyes. But the judge—he was still much of a boy in spite of his grave calling and mature years—just threw back his blonde head and shouted in rapturous glee. He laughed till the very ceiling rang in loud response; laughed till the tears shone in his big blue eyes. Mrs. Higgins looked on in undisguised amazement, hands on hips.

"Dear me, suz!" she sputtered, "is the man gone clean daffy?"

"Won't you shake hands with me, Mrs. Higgins?" he asked, gravely. "I ask your pardon for my levity, and I assure you there isn't a man in the whole world I esteem more or hold greater faith in than Dick Gordon—or love so much. I thank you for your championship of him. I would that he had more friends like you. Louise, are you ready?"

Their walk to the hotel was a silent one. Later, as she was leaving him to go to her own room, Louise laid her head caressingly on her uncle's sleeve.

"Uncle Hammond," she said, impulsively, "you are—incorrigible, but you are the best man in all the world."

"The very best?" he asked, smilingly.

"The very best," she repeated, firmly.

There was a full calendar that term, and the close of the first week found the court still wrestling with criminal cases, with that of Jesse Black yet uncalled. Gordon reckoned that Black's trial could not possibly be taken up until Tuesday or Wednesday of the following week. Long before that, the town began filling up for the big rustling case. There were other rustling cases on the criminal docket, but they paled before this one where the suspected leader of a gang was on trial. The interested and the curious did not mean to miss any part of it. They began coming in early in the week. They kept coming the remainder of that week and Sunday as well. Even as late as Monday, delayed range riders came scurrying in, leaving the cattle mostly to shift for themselves. The Velpen aggregation, better informed, kept to its own side of the river pretty generally until the Sunday, at least, should be past.

The flats southeast of town became the camping grounds for those unable to find quarters at the hotel, and who lived too far out to make the nightly ride home and back in the morning. They were tempted by the unusually mild weather. These were mostly Indians and half-breeds, but with a goodly sprinkling of cowboys of the rougher order. Camp-fires spotted the plain, burning redly at night. There was plenty of drift-wood to be had for the hauling. Blanketed Indians squatted and smoked around their fires—a revival of an older and better day for them. Sometimes they stalked majestically through the one street of the town.

The judicial party was safely housed in the hotel, with the best service it was possible for the management to give in this busy season of congested entrance. It was impossible to re-

commodate the crowds. Even the office was jammed with cots at night. Mary Williston had come in from White's to be with Louise. She was physically strong again, but ever strangely quiet, always somber-eyed.

### CHAPTER XIV.

#### The Game is On.

Contrary to expectation, the case of the State of South Dakota against Jesse Black was called soon after the sitting of the court Monday afternoon. No testimony was introduced, however, until the following day. Inch by inch, step by step, Gordon fought for a fair jury through that tense afternoon. Merciless in shrewd examination, keen to detect hesitancy, prejudices sought to be concealed he cleverly and relentlessly unearthed. Chair after chair was vacated—only to be vacated again. It seemed there was not a man in the county who had not heard somewhat of this much-heralded crime—if crime it were. And he who had heard was a prejudiced partisan. How could it be otherwise where feeling ran so high—where honest men mostly felt resentment against the man who dared to probe the wound without extracting the cause of it, and a hatred and fear curiously intermingled with admiration of the outlaw whose next move after obtaining his freedom might be to cut out of the general herd, cows of their own brands—where tainted men, officers or cowmen, awaited developments with a consuming interest that was not above manipulating the lines of justice for their own selfish ends? Yet, despite the obstacles in the way, Gordon was determined to have an unprejudiced jury in so far as it lay in

human power to seat such a one in the box. So he worked, and worked hard.

Court adjourned that evening with the jury-box filled. The state's friends were feeling pretty good about it. Langford made his way into the bar where Gordon was standing apart. He passed an arm affectionately over his friend's shoulder.

"You were inspired, Dick," he said. "Keep on the same as you have begun and we shall have everything our own way."

But the fire had died down in the young lawyer's bearing.

"I'm tired, Paul, dead tired," he said, wearily. "I wish it were over."

"Come to supper—then you'll feel better. You're tired out. It is a tough strain, isn't it?" he said, cheerily. He was not afraid. He knew the fire would burn the brighter again when there was need of it—in the morning.

They passed out of the bar together. At the hotel Mary and Louise were already seated at the table in the dining-room where the little party usually sat together when it was possible to do so. Judge Dale had not yet arrived. The landlady was in a worried dispute with Red Sanderson and a companion. The men were evidently cronies. They had their eyes on two of the three vacant places at the table.

"But I tell you these places are taken," persisted the landlady, who served as head-waitress, when such services were necessary, which was not often. Her patrons usually took and held possession of things at their own sweet will.

"You bet they are," chimed in Red, deliberately pulling out a chair next to Louise, who shivered in recognition.

"Please—" she began, in a small voice, but got no farther. Something in his bold, admiring stare choked her into silence.

"You're a mighty pretty girl, if you are a trottin' round with the Three Bars," he grinned. "Plenty time to change your life—"

"Just move, will you," said Gordon, curtly, coming up at that moment with Langford and shoving him aside with unceremonious brevity. "This is my place." He sat down quietly.

"You damned upstart," blustered Sanderson. "Want a little pistol play, do you?"

"Gentlemen! gentlemen!" implored the landlady.

"I'm not entering any objection," said Gordon, coolly. "Just shoot—why don't you? You have the drop on me."

For a moment it looked as if Sanderson would take him at his word and meet this taunt with instant death for the sender of it, so black was his anger. But encountering Langford's level gaze, he read something therein, shrugged his shoulders, replaced his pistol and sauntered off with his companion just as Judge Dale came upon the scene. Langford glanced quickly across the table at Mary. Her eyes were wide with startled horror. She,

too, had seen. Just above Red Sanderson's temple and extending from the forehead up into the hair was an ugly scar—not like that left by a cut, but as if the flesh might have been deeply bruised by some blunt weapon.

"Mary! How pale you are!" cried Louise, in alarm.

"I'm haunted by that man," she continued, biting her lip to keep from crying out against the terrors of this country. "He's always showing up in unexpected places. I shall die if I ever meet him alone."

"You need not be afraid," said Gordon, speaking quietly from his place at her side. Louise flashed him a swift, bewildering smile of gratitude.

Under this cover the young ranchman comforted Mary, whom the others had temporarily forgotten, with a long, carressing look from his handsome eyes that was a pledge of tireless vigilance and an unforgetting watchfulness of future protection.

### CHAPTER XV.

#### The Trial.

The next morning every available seat was filled early. People had blocked the rough plank walks leading to the courthouse long before the doors were unlocked. The day promised to be fine, and the many teams coming and going between Kemah and the river to pick up the Velpen people who had crossed the ice on foot gave to the little town somewhat of the gala appearance of fair time. The stately and blanketed Sioux from their temporary camps on the flat were standing around, uncommunicative, waiting for proceedings to begin. Long before the judicial party had arrived from the hotel the cramped room was crowded to its limits. There was loud talking, laughing and joking. Local wits amused themselves and others by throwing quips at different members of the county bar or their brethren from across the river as they walked to their places inside the railings with the little mannerisms that were peculiar to each.

The door in the rear of the bar opened and Judge Dale entered. A comparative quiet fell upon the people. He mounted to his high bench. The clerk came in, then the court reporter. She tossed her note books on the table, leisurely pulled off her gloves and took her place, examining the end of her pencils with a critical eye. It would be a busy day for the "gal reporter." Then Langford came shoving his way down the crowded aisle with a sad-faced, brown-eyed, young woman in his wake, who yet held herself erect with a proud little tilt to her chin. There was not an empty seat outside the bar. Louise motioned, and he escorted Mary to a place within and sat down beside her. The jurymen were all in their chairs. Presently came in Gordon with his quiet, self-reliant manner. Langford had been right. The county attorney was not tired to-day.

Shortly after Gordon came Small—Small, the dynamic, whose explosives had so often laid waste the weak and abortive independent reasoning powers of "Old Necessity" and his sort, and were the subject of much satire and some admiration when the legal fraternity talked "shop." As he strode to his place, he radiated bombs of just and telling wrath. He scintillated with aggressiveness. With him came Jesse Black, easy and disdainful as of old. After them, a small man came gliding in with as little commotion as if he were sliding over the floor of a waxed dancing hall in patent leather pumps. He was an unassuming little man with quick, cat-like movements which one lost if one were not on the alert. When he had slipped into a chair next his associate, Small, the inflammable Small, towered above him head and shoulders.

"Every inch the criminal," audibly observed a stranger, an Englishman over to invest in lands for stocking a horse ranch. "Strange how they always wear the imprint on their faces. No escaping it. I fancy that is what the Scriptures meant by the mark of Cain."

The remark was addressed to no in particular, but it reached the ears of Jim Munson, who was standing near.

"Good Lord, man!" he said, with a grin, "that's the plumb smartest criminal lawyer in the hull county. That's a fact. Lord, Lord! Him Jesse Black?"

His risibilities continued to thus get the better of his gravity at frequent intervals during the day. He never failed to snort aloud in pure delight whenever he thought of it. What a tale for the boys when he could get to them!

"These cattle men!" This time the tenderfoot communicated with himself—he had a square chin and a direct eye; there were possibilities in him. "Their perverted sense of the ridiculous is diabolical."

There were others who did not know the little man. He hailed from the southern part of the state. But Gordon knew him. He knew he was pitted against one of the sharpest, shrewdest men of his day.

"Gentlemen, I think we are ready," said the judge, and the game was on again.

The state called Paul Langford, its principal witness in default of Williston.

"Your name, place of residence and business?" asked the counsel for the state.

"Paul Langford. I reside in Kemah county and I own and operate a cattle ranch."

After Langford had clearly described and identified the animal in question, Gordon continued:

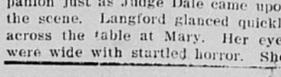
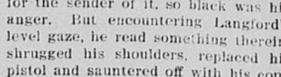
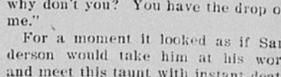
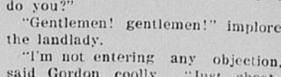
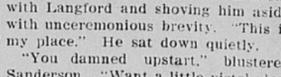
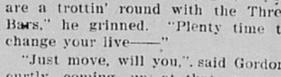
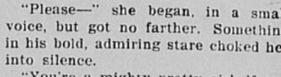
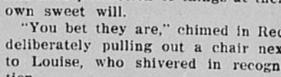
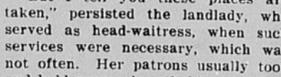
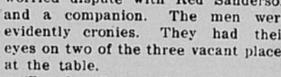
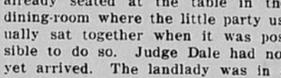
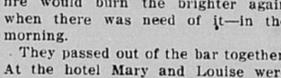
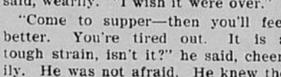
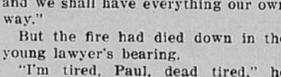
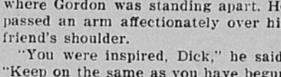
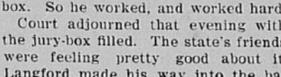
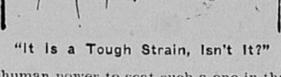
"Mr. Langford, when did you first miss this steer?"

"On the 15th day of July last."

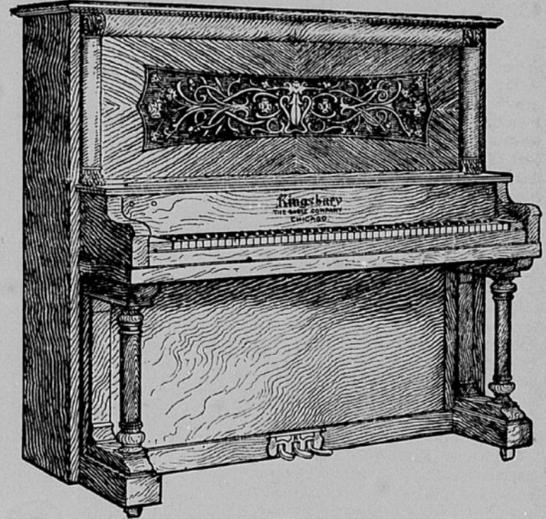
"How did you happen to miss this steer?"

"My attention was called to the fact

Continued on page 9



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