

ESTRAYED

From my place at Three Buttes on May 2nd, 1908, three head of geldings. One sorrel branded on left thigh, and also I on right shoulder and right thigh. One bay branded D on left hip, also on left thigh. One black, two years old, with white face and white hind leg, branded on left thigh. I will pay a suitable reward for their return or information leading to their recovery.

EDWARD DESPIN,
18tf. Three Buttes, Mont.

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LANGFORD OF THE THREE BARS

BY KATE AND VIRGIL D. BOYLES
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CHAPTER XX.
The Moving Shadow.

"I'd rather not talk about it to-night. I'm not equal to it. It's too—too—it's devilish, Paul. I don't seem to be able to grasp it. I can't think about it with any coherence. I was sure—so sure."

Gordon was staring moodily out of the window, one arm hanging idly over the back of his chair. He had taken up office room in an empty shop building across the street from the hotel.

"It's so devilish, it's weird," agreed the ranchman. "But your part was great. You vanquished Jesse Black. That is more than we hoped for a week ago. Is it your fault or mine that those fool deputies acted like flies in tangle-foot and wear spraddle-fingered when something was expected of them? We have nothing to do with a little thing like a broken window-pane."

There was an ugly cut on his forehead caused by his violent contact with the sharp edge of the window-glass. He was pale, but he had lost none of the old faith in himself or in his power to dominate affairs in the cattle country. Defeat was intolerable to him. He refused to bow his head to the more determined, if that were possible, to free the land of its shame.

"I'll pull myself together again, never fear," said Gordon. "Just give me to-night. You see that's not all. I've something else to think about, too, now that I have time. It takes a fellow's nerve away to have everything that is worth while drop out at once. But I've rallied before. I know I'm beastly selfish not to talk to you to-night, but—"

"Dick," interrupted Langford, bluntly, "did she turn you down?"

"I never asked her. She is going back—home—next week."

"If you let her."

"You don't quite understand, Paul," said Gordon, a little wearily. "She said she could never live in this country—never. She would die here. Could I ask her after that? Could I ask any, and be a man? I know. She would just pine away."

"Girls don't pine—only in imagination. They are tougher than you give them credit for."

"But somehow, Mary seems different," said Gordon, thoughtfully. He surprised a flush in his friend's cheek. "You deserve her, old man, you'll be very happy. She is the right kind. I congratulate you with all my heart."

An odd lump came into Langford's throat. Despite Gordon's vigorous and healthful manhood, there seemed always a certain pathos of life surrounding him.

"I haven't asked her, either," confessed Paul. "But you have made it possible for me to do so—to-night—to-morrow—whenever I can find a chance. Take my advice, old man, don't let your girl go. You'll find she is the kind after all. You don't know her yet."

Paul left the room, and Gordon paced the narrow confines of his shabby office—back and forth—many times. Then he threw himself once more into his chair. The hours were long. He had all night to think about things. When morning came, all his weakness would be over. No one should ever again see him so unmanned as Paul had seen him to-night. And when Louise should go—his arms fell nervelessly to the table. He remained thus a moment, his eyes fixed and unseeing, and then his head dropped heavily upon his arms.

Alone in the night Louise awoke. She found it impossible to fall asleep again. She was nervous. It must be something in the atmosphere. She tossed and tossed and flounced and flounced. She counted up to thousands. She made her mind a blank so often that she flew to thinking to escape the emptiness of it. Still her eyes were wide and her mind fairly a-quiver with activity. She slipped out of bed. She would tire herself into sleep. She even dressed. She would show herself. If she must be a midnight prowler, she would wear the garments people affect when they have their thoughts and energies on matters mundane. Drawing the oil stove close to the window fronting the street, she sank into a chair, drew a heavy shawl over her shoulders, put her feet on the tiny fender and prepared to fatigue herself into oblivion.

A light shone from the window across the way. He was still at work, then. He ought not to sit up so late. No wonder he was looking so worn out lately. He ought to have some one to look after him. He never thought of himself. He never had time. She would talk to him about keeping such late hours—if she were not going back to God's country next week. Only next week! It was too good to be true—and yet she sighed. But there was no other way. She ought never to have come. She was not big enough. He, too, had told her she was not the kind. Doubtless, he knew. And she didn't belong to anybody here. She was glad she was going back to where she belonged to

somebody. She would never go away again.

Was that Gordon passing back and forth in front of the window? Something must be troubling him. Was it because Jesse Black had escaped? But what a glorious vindication of his belief in the man's guilt had that afternoon been given! Nothing lacked there. Why should he be sorry? Sometimes, she thought he might care—that day crossing the river for instance; but he was reserved—he never said—and it was much, much better that he did not care, now that she was going away and would never come back. There was nothing in all the world that could make her come back to this big, bleak, lonesome land where she belonged to nobody. But she was sorry for him. He looked sad and lonely. He didn't belong to anybody here, either, yet he wasn't going to run away as she was. Well, but he was a man, and men were different.

And now she noticed that his head had sunk down onto his arms. How still he sat! The minutes passed away. Still he sat motionless, his face buried.

It was dark. The yellow gleam streaming out of the window only served to make the surrounding darkness denser. The lamp on the table cast a pale circle immediately in front of the office. There was no other flicker of light on the street. Into this circle there moved a shadow. It retreated—advanced again—glided back in to obscurity. Was it something alive, or did the moving of the lamp cause the shadows to thus skip about? But the lamp had not been moved. It burned steadily in the same position. The relaxed form of the unconscious man was still bent over the table. Nothing had changed within. Probably some dog locked out for the night had trotted within the radius of light. Maybe a cotton-tail had hopped into the light for a second. Louise did not know whether rabbits ever came into the town, but it was likely they did. It might have been one of the strayed cattle wandering about in search of food. That was the most probable sup-

position of all. Of course it might have been only her imagination. The little pinch of fright engendered of the moving shadow and the eerie hour passed away. Her eyes grew pensive again. How still it was! Had Gordon fallen asleep? He lay so quietly. Had he grieved himself into slumber as a girl would do? No—men were not like that.

Ah! There was the moving shadow again! She caught her breath quickly. Then her eyes grew wide and fixed with terror. This time the shadow did not slink away again. It came near the window, crouching. Suddenly, it stood up straight. Merciful Father! Why is it that a human being, a creature of reason and judgment, prowling about at unnatural hours, inspires ten-fold more terror to his kind than does a brute in like circumstances of time and place? Louise tried to scream aloud. Her throat was parched. A sudden paralysis held her speechless. It was like a nightmare. She writhed and fought desperately to shake herself free of this dumb horror. The cold damp came out on her forehead. Afterward she remembered that she knew the man and that it was this knowledge that had caused her nightmare of horror to be so unspeakably dreadful. Now she was conscious only of the awfulness of not being able to cry out. If she could only awaken Mary! The man lifted his arm. He had something in his hand. Its terrible import broke the spell of her speechlessness.

"Mary! Mary!"

She thought she shrieked. In reality she gasped out a broken whisper; but it thrilled so with terror and pleading that Mary was awakened on the instant. She sprang out of bed. As her bare feet touched the floor a pistol shot rang out elope by. She had been trained to quick action, and smart health left no room for cog-

webs to linger in the brain when she was suddenly aroused. She had no need for explanations. The shot was enough. If more was needed there was the lighted window across the way and here was Louise crouched before their own. Swiftly and silently she seized her revolver from the bureau, glided to the window and fired three times in rapid succession, the reports mingling with the sound of shattered glass.

"I think I hit him the second time, Louise," she said, with a dull calm. "I can't be sure."

She lighted a lamp and began to dress mechanically. Louise stayed not to answer. In the hall she encountered Paul Langford, just as another shot rang out.

"Go back, Miss Dale," he cried, hurriedly but peremptorily. "You mustn't come. I am afraid there has been foul play."

She looked at him. It hurt, that look.

"He is dead," she whispered, "I am going to him," and glided away from his detaining hand.

He hurried after her. Others had been aroused by the nearness of the pistol shots. Doors were thrown open. Voices demanded the meaning of the disturbance. Putting his arm around the trembling girl Langford hastened across the street with her. At the door of Gordon's office he paused.

"I will go in first, Louise. You stay here."

He spoke authoritatively; but she slipped in ahead of him. Her arms fell softly over the bowed shoulders. Her cheek dropped to the dark, gray-streaked hair. There was little change, seemingly. The form was only a little more relaxed, the attitude only a little more helpless. It seemed as if he might have been sleeping. There was a sound, a faint drip, drip, drip, in the room. It was steady, monotonous, like drops falling from rain pipes after the storm is over. Langford opened the door.

"Doc! Doc Lockhart! Some one send Doc over here quick? Gordon's office. Be quick about it!" he cried, in a loud, firm voice. Then he closed the door and locked it. In response to his call footsteps were heard running. The door was tried. Then came loud knocking and voice demanding admittance.

"No one can come in but Doc," cried Langford through the keyhole. "Send him quick, somebody, for God's sake! Where's Jim Munson? He'll get him here. Quick, I tell you!"

He hastened back to the side of his friend and passed his hand gently over the right side to find the place whence came that heartbreaking drip. Disappointed in their desire to get in men crowded before the window. Louise stepped softly forward and drew the blind between him and the mass of curious faces without. She was very pale, but quiet and self-possessed. She had rallied when Langford had whispered to her that Gordon's heart was still beating. The doctor rapped loudly, calling to Langford to open. Paul admitted him and then stepped out in full sight of all, his hand still on the knob. The late moon was just rising. A faint light spread out before him.

"Boys," he cried, a great grief in his stern voice, "it's murder. Dick Gordon's murdered. Now get—you know what for—and be quick about it!"

They laid him gently on the floor, took off his coat and cut away the blood-soaked shirts. Louise assisted with deft, tender hands. Presently the heavy lids lifted, the gray eyes stared vacantly for a moment—then smiled. Paul bent over him.

"What happened, old man?" the wounded man whispered gropingly. It required much effort to say this little, and a shadow of pain fell over his face.

"Hush, Dick, dear boy," said Langford, with a catch in his voice. "You're all right now, but you mustn't talk. You're too weak. We are going to move you across to the hotel."

"But what happened?" he insisted.

"You were shot, you know, Dick. Keep quiet now! I'm going for a stretcher."

"Am I done for?" the weak voice

(Continued on page 5.)

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