

Wednesday, April 20, 1892, Solon and I left Buffalo and started on our return journey to Laramie City. We had spent several days with friends in and around Buffalo, but during all this time we had said nothing about Charlie being present at the K. C. fight. We felt that it would be better to wait until the trial of the murderers and then give in our evidence. This thought had been with us from the start. While we had been with the cattlemen through necessity and not from choice, it was a fact of which we were in no way proud. Therefore, just as soon as we met at the T. A. and each learned from the other that no one knew of our brief sojourn with the cattlemen and their hirelings, we mutually agreed to continue silent. We had merely told Angus and the deputies that we had been captured and held prisoner, the truth, although we had fooled the cattlemen into the belief that we were with them willingly. What was unknown would injure no one. Had it leaked out that we were with the invaders at the K. C., we would have been eternally under suspicion and with someone always watching us. As it was we were considered merely "volunteers" with the deputies and homeguards and as such, treated with friendliness by all.

As it turned out, it was most fortunate for us that we did keep quiet. Otherwise, the fate of Jones and Walker would probably have been ours. We would have been arrested and spirited away on some trumped-up charge. Either this, or else the stockmen would have resorted to their favorite "dry gulching" and our bones would have lain hidden, or uncovered, in some lonely canon, rocky ravine, or amid the stunted sage-brush on some bleak and lonely hillside.

On this morning, we mounted our horses, thoroughly refreshed and strengthened by their long rest and ample food, and headed southeast on the return journey. We had filled our belts with shells, purchased at Foote's store, and had flour, bacon, salt, sugar and coffee, rolled in our blankets and tied behind our saddles.

In no hurry, we decided to take it easy and to return by the same road we had traveled earlier in the month when coming to Johnson County. Therefore, we rode southeast to the T. A. Ranch and here we spent several hours going over the scenes of the fight and reconstructing things from memory as we had seen them on these three earlier April days.

Relic hunters and passers by had made away with about everything in the line of relics; still I found, where it had been overlooked, a small pearl-handled, lady's dagger, of Spanish workmanship, which we presumed, had been dropped by some member of the Texas contingent. This dagger, after all these years, I still have in my possession. It is practically as I found it, even to the piece of soiled string with which the cracked handle is held together.

From the T. A., we moved on southwest toward the K. C., going far enough to sight the camp near Carr's ranch mentioned earlier in my narrative.

Well along in the afternoon of Thursday, April 21, we halted at the ruins of the K. C. and prepared to spend the night in the locality. Not knowing whether we would ever return, we had decided to spend the night here, to look over the ground carefully and thoroughly, and then, by making an early start, reach Casper the next day.

After caring for our horses, we went carefully over the ground. Charlie pointed out where he had been stationed and showed where Ray had stood when shot; where Flagg was fired on and then we moved over to the draw where the murderers were hidden at the time they opened fire on Champion. The place Champion fell was also pointed out and I have never forgotten the dreary-looking spot, the rocky soil, the stunted brush and the rising hills on either side and in the distance. To this day I vision the spot as I then saw it, and Charlie, to the day of his death, could do the same, but always, in his visions, gallant Champion lay, arms outstretched, face to the skies, gun beside him and blood pouring from his ball-pierced body.

No thought had we of danger. The war, if war it might be called, was over. Therefore, we lay down, wrapped in our blankets, with pitch pine fire blazing brightly. There we lay and talked until sleepy, dozing off toward 10 p. m. and sleeping soundly, the sleep of the young, light-hearted and untroubled until around 4:00 a. m.

At 4:00 a. m. we were up and preparing breakfast. Our horses were fed, watered and saddled, our supplies attached by whang leather strings to the back of the saddles and we were just in the act of mounting, when from the river bank, merely a couple of rods away, came the sharp command, "Hands up!" Needless to say, our hands went skyward at the harsh command. Standing thus, arms aloft, we were surrounded by some half score of armed stockmen.

With Winchesters "staring us in the face" and literally "boking us in the ribs" we stood, hands aloft, until relieved of our six shooters and the rifles in our saddle sheaths. These removed, we were allowed to drop our hands. Then we were ordered to "mount and ride" and this we did, protesting the while our innocence of any crime, and against being deprived of liberty.

Some few miles down stream, we accompanied our captors. Here, in a small grove or thicket along the stream, we came to the camp of the outfit. We dismounted and under orders unsaddled our horses and turned them loose to graze with the stock near at hand. Then, under guard, we lay down on the ground beneath the trees to await the arrival of the "boss of the outfit."

Beyond taking our guns and forcing us to accompany them, no violence had been offered us. Neither had we been threatened. That we were in the hands of cowmen, we well knew. We had seen several of the party at Buffalo where they had been pointed out to us as friends of the invaders. We were positive that they recognized us and knew we had been with the deputies and home guards. Still nothing was said. Time passed on and noon drew near.

A small fire was now lighted, coffee boiled and meat fried; this, with bread which one of them produced from his "war bag," made the dinner. We were told to "sit up and eat!" At the same time we received the first threat of the day, an inkling of what the future held for us, "Get busy and eat, you rustling devils, it will probably be the last chance you'll ever get."

Scarcely had we finished our dinner (little appetite had we) when two prominent stockmen rode in. They were familiar to me, but as my glance made them known, it was with vastly different feelings. One I knew well, the other I had merely met a few times. He looked at me and scowled, "Didn't I see you in Buffalo yesterday?"

"We were there!" I answered.

"What the hell are you doing here?" he then asked me.

"We answered, "We are leaving the country, are heading to the southeastern part of the state where jobs are awaiting us at Laramie City. We had come this way in order to see the T. A. and K. C. Ranches."

"Ever see them before?" he asked, and from the look in his eyes we knew that he knew the part we had played in the late "unpleasantness."

"Yes!" we truthfully answered, "we have been here before."

"You were with Wolcott, Canton and Smith until they entered the T. A., then you deserted to the rustlers." This came from him not as a question, but as a statement of fact. "Well, you two-faced birds can't get away with it always; we've got you now and we'll send you along to join your friends, Champion and Ray." Then, pointing to a large limb just before him, he said to the watchful and attentive cowboys, "Throw a couple of ropes over that limb. We'll treat them as the Carbon County boys did Averill and Cattle Kate and as the Weston County boys did to that horse stealing son-of-a-bitch, Waggoner."

Too dazed for utterance, I stared at him. Not so did Charlie, who was Irish, and ever was his Irish blood in the ascendant, "Hang us and be damned to you,"

said he. "What the hell are you waiting for?"

After our escape, Charlie explained his action, "I thought, Billie, we were goners and I wanted to die game!" This was Charlie. He would not have begged for his life had he had assurance it would be granted.

By this time a couple of ropes were in place, men had approached, caught hold of us, dragged us to the tree and placed the loops about our necks and then stepping back, they joined the others at the loose end of the rope and made ready for business. Just as I opened my mouth to speak, what I would have said, I know not, the other rancher, an older man (neither was beyond his late thirties) spoke up, "Wait a few minutes, boys, let's not be too hasty!"

"Hasty, hell!" answered his comrade, "here are two rustlers we've caught. Both were with Red Angus at Buffalo and the T. A. What more evidence do you want? Let's string them up and rid the earth of such vermin."

"I'm not so sure they are rustlers!" said the second speaker. Pointing to me, he said, "I know this boy well and I'll stake my life he is no rustler. If he can vouch for his companion I'll take his word for him."

"I surely can!" said I, "Charlie is fresh from the Union Pacific shops at Laramie City. We were merely riding through the country and are not now, and never have been, rustlers."

"I believe you, Billie" he said.

"But," began the other cowman, "they were with Wolcott here at the K. C. and against him at the T. A."

"How about it, Billie?" asked my friend.

Carefully omitting the fact that we had ridden from Laramie City to join the settlers, I answered truthfully that we were traveling through the country and had been captured by Wolcott, Canton and Smith and held prisoners by them. After the K. C. fight, we had escaped and in escaping had fallen in with Angus. Angus was

Sheriff of the County, and when he ordered us to join his deputies we must, perforce, obey him; that in both cases we had been compelled to be along; that if left to ourselves we would get out of the country and stay out. I further stated that the fight was none of ours; that our interests were in the southeastern part of the state; that, so far as we were concerned, the Stock Association and the rustlers could fight it out in the manner of the "Kilkenny Cats."

All this while, Charlie's eyes were like slumbering coals, but he knew, as I did, that this was the only way to save our lives, so he, too, questioned by the cattlemen, agreed with me.

Leaving us alone, but still guarded, the two cattlemen and the entire bunch of cowboys with the exception of one armed guard walked a few yards away and for almost half an hour discussed the matter. That they were widely separated in opinion we could plainly see. Frequently words, phrases and at times even sentences reached us. Before long they were divided into two distinct groups, the group surrounding our friendly cowman, we were happy to see, being much the larger and far more powerful of the two.

My friend was arguing for us, for me. "I've known the boy between three and four years. He's worked at, or with, the Two Bar, Bar M, Seven L, Umbrella, Half Diamond, Heart and other ranches. Always he was well-spoken of."

"But," came the answer, "he is friendly with the small ranchers!"

"Hell! What of that!" answered my friend, "so far as that goes, I am too. To tell you the truth, what this wholesale murderer Wolcott has led us into doesn't appeal very strongly to me. What wrong had these poor devils killed, or ever done to anyone? Champion was called a rustler, you and I have been called rustlers with, probably, more right. Nothing has ever been proven on Champion and as for poor

Nick Ray who has worked for me, I do not believe he ever was a rustler."

Thus it went, forward and back, with the boys gradually coming over to the side of our friendly rancher. At last, seemingly agreed, they returned to where we were waiting.

"Well, Billie!" said my friend, "we have decided to spare your lives and let you go, providing you will both take a solemn and binding oath to never divulge our names or the names of any others among the cattlemen. Furthermore, you will swear to leave the country and not to appear ^{to} bear witness against the cattlemen should they be brought to trial for this invasion and the killing of Champion and Ray. If you will take this oath," said he, "you will be released and allowed to continue your journey."

Charlie and I looked at each other and nodded. "Give us the oath," said we together, "and let us be going."

The following oath was then administered to us. Almost six and thirty years ago have passed since I swore it, but it is still fresh in my mind. Always I kept it. Always would have kept it, had not my friend, some little time back, released me, in part, from the obligation and its observance.

This is the oath we took, "I, (full name) do solemnly swear, by the everliving God, that I will not bear witness against Major Wolcott or any of his comrades or command, for this, their killing of Champion and Ray; that I will not reveal the names of any now present or any others among the cowmen and their employees, whose names would, otherwise, escape discovery; that I will leave the county and remain away for at least the full period of ten years. All this I swear and I will keep my oath unless released by those now administering same to me." This was the oath sworn to and this oath I have kept. It was more than twice ten years before I again rode any of the trails north of Laramie City.

In 1924, John Clay put out his book, MY LIFE ON THE RANGE. At the next meeting

of the Denver Stock Show, I met my old friend, now well along in years, but still the friend he was and proved to be on that dreary day in 1892, when on the North Fork of Powder River, he saved my life and the life of my friend, Solon. He is one of those to whom Clay alludes as "traitors." He refused to endorse the illegal and bloody actions of the Wyoming Stock Association and Cattle Ring. Said he, "Billie, you have kept your oath and never by word or hint made known the part played by any of us in that damnable action, the invasion of Johnson County and the murder of Champion and Ray. Now since Clay is out with his side of the story and since he has cast reflections on all such as did not remain with the gang, I am going to release you, in part, from the obligation taken April 22, 1892. You are now at full liberty to talk of, and write about, anything you saw or learned while with the invading army, or at any other time, providing only, that you mention no new names. Let the few of us who kept our skirts clean, even though we were guilty as hell, remain unknown until the end.

Evidently, Clay had had his book in view for several years, for he says, and this is one of the things that angered my friend, "At this late day, (1917) cast your eye over the list of Wyoming cattlemen and you will find quite a goodly list of men, who began at this time, 1886-7, with a rope and an iron and now have respectable herds of cattle." Now get what follows, "Nowadays when they pray they consign the thief to a warmer place than southern Texas. It makes all the difference as to whose ox is gored."

That night we remained with the outfit in the camp some miles below the ruins of the K. C. What they were doing I never learned. In fact, never asked. We were too well pleased the way things had turned out to go out of our way to ask questions.

We made an early start, Friday morning. Our friend, the cattleman, and most of the boys sending us along with good wishes. Said my friend in parting, "Well Billie, I've repaid, in part, the great debt I owe you." With this we shook hands, and, waving at the others, we rode off.

Some few moments later, when some quarter of a mile along the road and well out of hearing, Charlie asked, "What did he mean by that? He said it was a part of the debt he owed you!"

I laughed. (I could laugh now) "You've heard me speak of a fellow I found almost frozen one winter when I was driving stage in the LaBonte country?"

"Yes!" said Charlie, "I remember you had one heck of a time saving him."

"Well, that is the man!"

"Then," said Charlie, "you felt all the time you were safe?"

"I didn't know," I answered, "but I was hoping."

For a moment, Charlie pondered, then with a laugh, he said, "If I ever get a chance to save anyone from freezing, you can bet your life I'll do it."

That was all then or at a future time. Seldom, in the years to come, did we speak of what we had seen and experienced in Johnson County.

Friday night at Casper, Saturday night at Douglas and Sunday night we camped in the LaBonte country. Monday night we were at Rock Creek and by Tuesday evening, we were back in Laramie City. With horses cared for, we were ready to consider anything that might turn up in the job line.

We had been away from Laramie City a little less than a month. That night, on the street, we met many friends.

"Where have you been?" all asked. "We've not seen you for days!"

To all, we made answer, "Oh, up in the hills!" And this ended it.

END OF TENTH PART