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KEITH OF THE BORDER

A TALE OF THE PLAINS
BY RANDALL DARRISH
AUTHOR OF 'MY LADY OF THE SOUTH' AND 'WILDERNESS WAS KING ETC. ETC.'
ILLUSTRATIONS BY DEARBORN MELVILL

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CHAPTER XXXI.

The Search for the Missing.
The note of unrestrained joy of relief in the woman's voice rang through the room, stilling all else, and causing those who heard to forget for an instant the sterner purpose of their gathering. Fairbairn bent over her, like a fat guardian angel, patting her shoulder, her eyes so blurred with tears as to be practically sightless, yet still turned questioning upon Waiter. The sheriff was first to recover speech, and a sense of duty.

"Then this lets Miss Maclaire out of the conspiracy charge," he said, gravely, "but it doesn't make it any brighter for Hawley so far as I can see—there's a robbery charge against him if nothing else. Any one here know where the fellow is?"

For a moment no one answered, although Keith took a step forward, reminding instantly of Hope's predicament. Before he could speak, however, Christie looked up, with swift gesture pushing back her loosened hair.

"He was to have met me at the theater to-night," she said, her voice trembling, "but was not there when I came out; he—he said he had important news for me."

"And failed to show up—did he send no message?"

"Doctor Fairbairn was waiting for me instead. He said that Mr. Hawley was called suddenly out of town."

The eyes of the sheriff turned to Fairbairn, whose face grew redder than usual, as he shifted his gaze toward Keith.

"That was a lie," he confessed, lamely. "I—I was told to say that."

"Just a moment, Sheriff," and Keith stood before them, his voice clear and convincing. "My name is Keith, and I have unavoidably been mixed up in this affair from the beginning. Just now I can relieve the doctor of his embarrassment. Miss Hope Waiter and I have been associated together in an effort to solve this mystery. This evening, taking advantage of the remarkable resemblance existing between herself and Miss Maclaire, Miss Hope decided upon a mask."

"What's that," Waiter broke in excitedly. "Is Hope here?"

"Yes, has been for a week; we've had all the police force of Sheridan hunting you."

The old man stared at the speaker, open-mouthed, and muttered something about Fort Hays, but Keith, paying little attention to him, hurried on with his story.

"As I say, she decided upon impersonating Christie here, hoping in this way to learn more regarding Hawley's plans. We had discovered that the two were to meet after the evening performance at the stage door of the Trocadero. I escorted Hope there, dressed as near like Miss Maclaire as possible, and left her inside the vestibule waiting for 'Black Bart' to appear. At the head of the alley I ran into Fairbairn, told him something of the circumstances, and persuaded him to escort Miss Christie back to the hotel. He was not very hard to persuade. Well, Hawley came, and Hope met him; they went out of the alleyway together arm in arm, talking pleasantly, and turned this way toward the hotel. The doctor and I were delayed not to exceed two minutes, speaking a final word to Fairbairn, and when I reached the street they had disappeared. I have hunted them everywhere without finding a trace—I have even been through the reports. She has not returned to the hotel, and I burst in upon you here hoping that Miss Maclaire might have some information."

She shook her head, and Waiter, glaring impatiently at the two of them, swore sharply.

"Good God, man! my girl! Hope, alone with that damn villain. Come on, Sheriff; we've got to find her. Wait, though!" and he strode almost menacingly across the room. "First, I want to know who the devil you are?"

Keith straightened up, looking directly into the fierce questioning eyes. "I have told you my name—Jack Keith," he replied, quietly. "Doctor Fairbairn knows something of me, but for your further information I will add that when we met before I was Captain Keith, Third Virginia Cavalry and bearing dispatches from Long street to Seneval Jackson."

The gruff old soldier, half-crazed by the news of his daughter's peril, the gleam of his eyes still revealing uncontrolled terror, stared at the young face fronting him; then slowly he held out his hand.

"Keith—Keith," he repeated, as though bringing back the name with an effort. "By God, that's so—old Jefferson Keith's boy—killed at Antietam. And you know Hope?"

"Yes, General."

He looked about as though dazed, and the sheriff broke in not unkindly. "Well, Waiter, if we are going to search for your daughter we better be at it. Come on, all of you; Miss Maclaire will be safe enough here

alone."

He took hold of Keith's arm, questioning him briefly as they passed down the hall. On the stairs the latter took his turn, still confused by what he had just heard.

"Who is Miss Maclaire?" he asked "Phyllis Gale."

"Of course, but who is Phyllis Gale? What has she to do with General Waiter? His daughter has told me she never heard of any one by that name."

"Well, Keith, the old man has never told me very much; he's pretty close-mouthed, except for swearing, but I've read his papers, and picked up a point or two. I reckon the daughter, Miss Hope, maybe never heard a word about it, but the boy—the one that was shot—must have told her to Hawley. That's what set that fellow going. It seems Mrs. Waiter's maiden name was Pierpont, and when she was seventeen years old she was married to the son of a rich North Carolina planter. The fellow was a drunken, dissolute, good-for-nothing. They had a daughter born—this Phyllis—and when the child was three years old her father, in a fit of drunken rage, ran away, and to spite his wife took the little girl with him. All efforts to trace them failed, and the mother finally secured a divorce and, two years later, married Willis Waiter. Waiter, of course, knew these facts, but probably they were never told the children. When the father of Mrs. Waiter's first husband died, he left all his large property to his grandchild, providing she could be found and identified within a certain time, falling which the property was to be distributed among certain designated charities. Waiter was named sole administrator. Well, the old man took as much interest in it as though it was his own girl, but made mighty little progress. He did discover that the father had taken the child to St. Louis and left her there with a woman named Raymond, but after the woman died the girl completely disappeared."

"Then Miss Maclaire is Hope Waiter's half-sister?"

"That's the way it looks now."

"And Hawley merely happened to stumble on to the right party?"

"Sure; it's clear enough how that came about. The boy told him about the lost heiress his father was searching after, and showed him his sister's picture. 'Black Bart' instantly recognized her resemblance to Christie Maclaire, and thought he saw a good chance for some easy money. He needed the papers, however, to ascertain exactly the terms of the will, and what would be necessary for the identification. He never intended to go into court, but hoped to either get Waiter out of the way, or else convince him that Christie was the girl, relying on her gratitude for his profits. When Waiter played into his hands by coming to Carson City the chance was too good to be lost. I'm not sure he meant to kill him, but he did mean to have those papers at any cost. Probably you know the rest—the girl was easy, because she was so ignorant of her parentage, and nothing prevented Hawley from winning except that Waiter got mad and decided to fight."

"That knocked over the whole thing."

"They were outside now, and the first touch of the cool night air, the first glance up and down the noisy street, brought Keith to himself, his mind ready to grapple with the problem of Hope's disappearance. It seemed to him he had already looked everywhere, yet there was nothing to do except to continue the search, only more systematically. The sheriff assumed control—clear headed, and accustomed to that sort of thing—calling in Hickey and his deputies to assist, and fairly combing the town from one end to the other. Not a rat could have slipped unobserved through the net he dragged down that long street, or its intersecting alleys—but it was without result; nowhere was there found a trace of either the gambler or his companion."

They dug into saloons, bagnios, dance-halls, searching back rooms and questioning inmates; they roused out every occupant of the hotel, invaded boarding houses, and explored shacks and tents, indifferent to the protests of those disturbed—but without result. They found several who knew Hawley, others who had seen the two together passing by the lighted windows of the Trocadero, but beyond that—nothing. Convinced, at last, that the parties sought were not alive in Sheridan, and beginning to fear the worst, the searchers separated, and began spreading forth over the black surrounding prairie, and by the light of lanterns seeking any semblance of trail. There was no lack of volunteers for this work, but it was easy light before the slightest clue presented itself. Keith, with the sheriff and two or three others, had groped their way onward until, with the first flush of dawn, they found themselves at the opening of a small rocky ravine, near the foot of "Boots Hill."

Peering down into its still shadowed depths, they discerned what appeared like a body lying there motionless. Keith sprang down beside it, and turned

the rigid form over until the dead face was revealed in the wan light—it was that of the red moustached Scott. He staggered back at the recognition, barely able to ejaculate.

"Here, Sheriff! This is one of Hawley's men!"

The sheriff was bending instantly above the corpse, searching for the truth.

"You know the fellow?"

"Yes, his name was Scott."

"Well, he's been dead some hours, at least six I should say; shot just above the eye, and good Heavens! look here, Keith, at the size of this bullet wound; that's no man's gun in this country—no more than a '32' I'd say."

"Miss Waiter had a small revolver. She must have shot the fellow. But why did they leave the body here to be discovered?"

The sheriff arose to his feet, prowling about in the brightening glow of the dawn.

"They were in a hurry to get away, and knew he wouldn't be found before morning. A six hours' start means a good deal. They did drag him back out of sight—look here. This was where the struggle took place, and here is where the man fell," tracing it out upon the ground. "The girl put up a stiff fight, too—see where they dragged her up the path. From the footprints there must have been half a dozen in the party. Get back out of the way, Sims, while I follow their trail."

It was plain enough, now they had daylight to assist them, and led around the edge of the hill. A hundred feet away they came to where horses had been standing, the trampled sod evidencing they must have been there for some considerable time. Keith and the sheriff circled out until they finally struck the trail of the party, which led forth southwest across the prairie.

"Seven horses, one being led light," said the former. "That was Scott's, probably."

"That's the whole story," replied the sheriff, starting off toward the bare horizon, "and the cusses have at least six hours the start with fresh horses." He turned around. "Well, boys, that takes 'em out of my ball-wick, I reckon. Some of the rest of you will have to run that gang down."

CHAPTER XXXII.

Fairbairn and Christie.
Dr. Fairbairn had originally joined the searching party, fully as eager as Keith himself to run down the renegade Hawley, but after an hour of fruitless effort, his entire thought shifted to the woman they had left alone at the hotel. He could not, as yet, fully grasp the situation, but he remained loyal to the one overpowering truth that he loved Christie Maclaire. Fairbairn's nature was rough, original, yet loyal to the core. He had lived all his life long in army camps, and upon the frontier, and his code of honor was extremely simple. It never once occurred to him that Christie's profession was not of the highest, or that her life and associations in any way unfitted her for the future. To his mind she was the one and only woman. His last memory of her, as the little party of men filed out of that room, haunted him until he finally dropped out of the search and drifted back toward the hotel.

It was a late hour, yet it was hardly likely the woman had retired. Her excitement, her interest in the pursuit, would surely prevent that; moreover, he was certain he saw a light still burning in her room, as he looked up from the black street below. Nevertheless he hesitated, uncertain of his reception. Bluff, emphatic, never afraid to face a man in his life, his heart now beat fiercely as he endeavored to muster the necessary courage. Far down the dark street some roysterer fired a shot, and sudden fear lest he might be sought after professionally sent the doctor hurriedly within, and up the stairs. He stood, just outside her door, quaking like a child, the perspiration beading his forehead, but a light streamed through the transom, and he could plainly hear movements within. At last, in a sudden spasm of courage, he knocked softly. Even in that noisy spot she heard instantly, opening the door without hesitation, and standing fully dressed within. She was no longer a discouraged, sobbing girl, but an aroused, intent woman, into whose pathetic, lonely life there had come a new hope. She appeared younger, fairer, with the light shimmering in her hair and her eyes smiling welcome.

"Oh, Doctor," and her hands were thrust out towards him, "I am glad you have come. Somehow, I thought you would, and I have wanted so to talk to some one—to you."

"To me! Do you really mean that, Miss Christie?"

"Yes, I really mean that, you great bear of a man," and the girl laughed lightly, dragging him into the room and closing the door. "Why, who else could I expect to come to-night? You were the only one really good to me. You—you acted as if you believed in me all the time—"

"I did, Christie; you bet I did," broke in the delighted doctor, every nerve tingling. "I'd cleaned out that whole gang if you'd only said so, but I reckon now it was better to let them tell all they knew. It was like a thunder storm clearing the atmosphere."

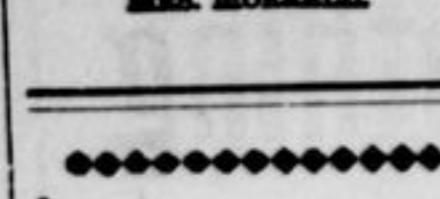
"Oh, it was, indeed! Now I know who I am—who I am! Isn't that simply glorious? Sit down, Doctor Fairbairn, there in the big chair where I can see your face. I want to talk, talk; I want to ask questions, a thousand questions; but it wouldn't do any good to ask them of you, would it? You don't know anything about my family, do you?"

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BLAMING THE TOWN.

"Not very much, I am afraid, only that you have got an almighty pretty half-sister," admitted the man, emphatically, "and old Waiter possesses the vilest temper ever given a human being. He's no blood kin to you, though."

"No, but he is awfully good underneath, isn't he?"

"Got a heart of pure gold, old Waiter. Why, I've seen him cry like a baby over one of his men that got hurt."

"Have you known him, then, for a long while?"

"Ever since the Spring of '61. I was brigaded with him all through the war, and had to cut a bullet or so out of his hide before it ended. If there was ever a fight, Willis Waiter was sure to get his share. He could swear some then, but he's improved since, and I reckon now he could likely claim the championship."

"Did—did you know my mother also?" and Christie leaned forward, her eyes suddenly grown misty. "I haven't even the slightest memory of her."

The doctor's heart was tender, and he was swift to respond, reaching forth and grasping the hand nearest him. He had made love before, yet somehow this was different; he felt half afraid of this woman, and it was a new sensation altogether, and not unpleasant.

"I saw her often enough in those days, but not since. She was frequently in camp, a very sweet-faced woman; you have her eyes and hair, as I remember. Waiter ought to have recognized her."



"You Know What I Mean—That I Love You."

ognized you at first sight. By Heavens! that was what made me so infernally mad. The molar obstinacy of the old fool. Your mother used to come to the hospital tent, too; one of the best nurses I ever saw. I thought she was a beauty then, but she's some older by this time," he spoke regretfully. "You see, I'm no spring chicken, myself."

Her eyes were upon his face, a slight flush showing in either cheek, and she made no effort to withdraw her imprisoned hand.

"You are just a nice age," with firm conviction. "Boys are tiresome, and I think a little gray in the hair is an improvement. Oh, you mustn't imagine I say this just to please you—I have always thought so, since—well, since I grew up. Besides, fleshy men generally look young, because they are so good natured, perhaps. How old are you, Doctor?"

"It isn't the gray hairs I mind, either," he admitted heartily. "But I've earned 'em. Oh, I am not so old, for I was only thirty-five when the war broke out. I was so thin, then I could hardly crest a shadow. I've changed some since."

"I don't know anything about my family, do you?"

DIED IN WINNIPEG.

A sad death was reported from Winnipeg this week that Mr. William Johnston, late of Lamash, son of the late James C. Johnston, had died the previous Saturday in a hospital there of typhoid fever. Deceased, who was a bachelor, was about forty-six years of age, and had lived in this vicinity, all his life, where he was highly esteemed. He was a strong healthy man six feet in height, and broad in proportion, and the announcement of his passing came as a shock to his friends here. He went west on March 8th and made a visit of some three weeks with his sister, Mrs. W. J. Earls there and then went to Edmonton where he stayed until August 15th last when he returned to Winnipeg. He took typhoid at his sister's home two weeks after arriving at Winnipeg, and was removed to the hospital on Tuesday, Sept. 3rd. Put in spite of medical attention and attentive nursing the final summons came, and Mr. Johnston went out at an early age. The remains are being brought to Hanover for burial.—Post.

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Solely in Ontario 19-56

Continued on page 7.