KEITH OF THE BORDER

A TALE OF THE PLAINS

By RANDALL PARRISH.

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Illustrations by Dearborn Melville.

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SYNOPSIS.

Jack Keith, a Virginian, now a border plainsman, is looking for roaming war parties of savages. He sees a wagon team at full gallop pursued by men on ponies. When Keith reaches the wagon the riders have massacred two men and departed. He searches the victims finding papers and a locket with a woman's portrait. Keith is arrested at Carson City, charged with the murder, his accuser being a ruffian named Black Bart. A negro companion in his cell named Neb tells him that he knew the Keiths in Virginia. Neb says one of the murdered men was John Sibley, the other Gen. Willis Waite, formerly a Confederate officer. The plainsman and Neb escape, and later the fugitives come upon a cabin and find its occupant to be a young girl, whom Keith thinks he saw at Carson City. The girl explains that she is in search of a brother, who had deserted from the army, and that a Mr. Hawley indeed came to come to the cabin while he sought her brother. Hawley appears, and Keith in hiding recognizes him as Black Bart. There is a terrific battle in the darkened room in which Keith is victor. Horses are appropriated, and the girl who says that her name is Hope, joins in the escape. Keith explains his situation and the fugitives make for Fort Larned, where the girl is left with the hotel landlady. Miss Hope tells that she is the daughter of General Waite. Keith and Neb drift into Sheridan, where Keith meets an old friend, Dr. Fairbain. Keith meets the brother of Hope Waite, under the assumed name of Fred Willoughby, and becomes convinced that Black Bart has some plot involving the two. Hope learns that Gen. Waite, who was thought murdered, is at Sheridan, and goes there, where she is mistaken for Christie Maclaire, the Carson City singer. Keith meets the real Christie Maclaire and finds that Black Bart has convinced her that there is a mystery in her life which he is going to turn to her advantage. The plainsman tells Hope Waite of her resemblance to Christie Maclaire. They decide that Fred Willoughby may hold the key to the situation. Keith finds Willoughby shot dead. Hope is told of the death of her brother. Keith fails to learn what representations Black Bart has made to Christie Maclaire. Hope suggests that in order to learn the secret she must briefly impersonate the stage singer. Dr. Fairbain is in love with Christie Maclaire and Keith induces him to detain her from the stage while Hope goes to the theater where she meets Black Bart, who, thus deceived, tells Hope that General Waite has suspected his plans and that they must fly. Hope, greatly alarmed, demurs. General Waite appears and says Black Bart has stolen papers from him regarding an inheritance. Keith is informed that Christie Maclaire's real name is Phyllis Gale and that she is the half sister of Hope. The latter has been carried away by Black Bart and his gang. Dr. Fairbain avows his love for Phyllis and she accepts him.

Keith Bent Over to Study the Tracks.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Following the Trail.

The withdrawal of the sheriff merely stimulated Keith to greater activity. It was clearly evident the fugitives were endeavoring with all rapidity possible to get beyond where the hand of law could reach them—their trail striking directly across the plains into the barren southwest was proof of this purpose. Yet it was scarcely likely they would proceed very far in that direction, as such a course would bring them straight into the heart of the Indian country, into greater danger than that from which they fled. Keith felt no doubt that Hawley intended making for Carson City, where he could securely hide the girl, and where he possessed friends to rally to his defence, even an influence over the officers of the law. The one thing which puzzled him most was the man's object in attempting so desperate a venture. Did he know his prisoner was Hope Waite? or did he still suppose he was running off with Christie Maclaire? Could some rumor of Waite's appeal to the courts have reached the gambler, frightened him, and caused him to attempt this desperate effort at escape? and did he bear Miss Maclaire with him, hoping to keep her safely concealed until he was better prepared to come out in open fight? If this was the actual state of affairs then it would account for much otherwise hard to explain. The actress would probably not have been missed, or, at least, seriously sought after, until she failed to appear at the theater the following evening. This delay would give the fugitives a start of twenty hours, or even more, and practically assure their safety. Besides, in the light of Waite's application to the sheriff for assistance, it was comparatively easy to conceive of a valid reason why Hawley should vanish, and desire, likewise, to take Miss Maclaire with him. But there was no apparent occasion for his forcible abduction of Hope. Of course, he might have done so from a suddenly aroused fit of anger at some discovery the girl had made, yet everything pointed rather to a deliberate plan. Both horses and men were certainly waiting there under orders, Hawley's adherents in charge, and every arrangement perfected in advance. Clearly enough the gambler had planned it all out before he ever went to the Trocadero—no doubt the completion of these final details was what delayed his appearance at the hotel. If this was all true, then it must have been Christie, and not Hope, he purposed bearing away with him, and the latter was merely a victim of her masquerade.

What could mask when the mask discovered his identity? Such a discovery could not be delayed long, although the girl was quick-witted, and would surely realize that her personal safety depended upon holding up the deception to the last possible moment. Well, she would need every ounce of her wits, and the chances were that Hawley's sole object would become when he found himself baited, and all his plans for a fortune overturned. Keith fully realized Hope's peril, and his own helplessness to serve her in this emergency was agony. As they hurried back to the town, he briefly reviewed these conclusions with Waite and Fairbain, all alike agreeing there was nothing remaining for them to do except to take up the trail. The fugitives had already gained too great an advantage to be overhauled, but they might be traced to whatever point they were heading for. In spite of the start being so far to the west, Keith was firmly convinced that their destination would prove to be Carson City.

Procuring horses at the corral, their forces augmented by two volunteers—both men of experience—Keith, Waite, Fairbain and Neb departed without delay, not even pausing to eat but taking the necessary food with them. The sun had barely risen when they took up the trail, Keith, and a man named Bristoe, slightly in advance, their keen eyes marking every slight sign left for guidance across the bare plain. It was a comparatively easy trail to follow, leading directly into the southwest, the pony tracks cutting into the sod as though the reckless riders had bunched together, their horses trotting rapidly. Evidently no attempt had been made at concealment, and this served to convince the pursuers that Hawley still believed his captive to be Miss Maclaire, and that her disappearance would not be suspected until after nightfall. In that case the trail could not be discovered before the following morning, and with such a start, pursuit would be useless. Tireless, steadily, scarcely speaking except upon the business in hand, the pursuers pressed forward at an easy trot, Keith, in spite of intense anxiety, with the remembrance of old cavalry days to guide him, insisting upon sparing the horses as much as possible. This was to be a stern chase and a long one, and it was impossible to tell when they could procure remounts. The constant swerving of the trail westward seemed to shatter Kin' earlier theory, and, brought him greater uneasiness. Finally he spoke of it to the old plainsman beside him.

"What do you suppose those fellows are heading so far west for, Ben? They are taking a big risk of running into hostiles."

"Oh, I don't know," returned the other gravely, lifting his eyes to the far-off sky line. "I reckon from the news that come in last night from Hays, thar ain't no Injuns a rangin' thet way jest now. They're too blame busy out on the Arkansas. Maybe those fellers heard the same story, an' that's what makes 'em so bald."

"What story? I've heard nothing."

"Why, it's like this, Cap," drawing out the words, "leastways, thet's how it come into Sheridan; 'Randy' Forsythe an' his outfit, county plainsmen, scouted while ago down Solomon River an' down Beaver Creek, clear for Fort Wallace. Over on the Arkansas, the whole damned injun outfit jumped 'em. From all I heard, thar must a bin nigh onto three thousan' o' the varmints, droppin' on 'em all at oncet, bell-bent-fer-election, with ol' Roman Nose a leadin' 'em. It was shore a good fight, fer the scouts got onto an island an' stopped the bucks. Two of the fellers got through to Wallace yist'day, an' a courier brought the news in ter Hays. The Injuns had them boys cooped up thar fer eight days before them fellers got out, an' I reckon it'll be two or three days more 'fore the nigger sogers they sent out ter help ever git thar. So thar won't be no injuns 'long this route we're travelin', fer the whole kit an' caboodle are up thar yit after 'Randy.'"

"And you suppose Hawley knew about this?"

"Why not, Cap? He was hangin' 'round till after ten o'clock las' night, an' it was all over town by then. Tain't likely he's got an outfit 'long with him thet's lost any injuns. I don't know what they're bound, no mor'n you do, but I reckon they're reasonably sure they've got a clar road."

They pulled up on the banks of a small stream to water their horses, and ate hastily. The trail led directly across, and with only the slightest possible delay they forded the shallow water, and mounted the opposite bank. A hundred yards farther on Bristoe reined up suddenly, pointing down at the trail.

"One hoss left the bunch here," he declared positively. Keith swung himself out of the saddle, and bent over to study the tracks. There was no doubting the evidence—a single horse—the only one shed in the bunch—with a rider on its back, judging from the deep imprint of the hoofs, had swerved sharply to the left of the main body, heading directly into the southeast. The plainsman ran forward for a hundred yards to assure himself the man had not circled back; at that point the animal had been spurred into a lope. Keith rejoined the others.

"Must have been about daylight they reached here," he said, picking up his dangling rein, and looking into the questioning faces about him. "The fellow that rode out yonder alone was heading straight toward Carson City. He is going for fresh horses, I figure it, and will rejoin the bunch some place down on the Arkansas. The others intend to keep farther west, where they won't be seen. What do you say, Ben?"

"That's the way it looms up for me, Cap; most likely 'twas the boss himself."

"Well, whoever it was, the girl is still with the others, and their trail is the easiest to follow. We'll keep after them."

They pushed on hour after hour, as long as daylight lasted or they could see the dark outline ahead to follow. Already, half-unstrung, that to have the ultimate destination of the fugitives, Keith yet dare not venture on pressing forward during the night, thus possibly losing the trail and being compelled to retrace their steps. It was better to proceed slow and sure. Besides, judging from the condition of their own horses, the pursued would be compelled to halt somewhere to rest their stock also. Their trail even revealed the fact that they were traveling far less rapidly than at first, although evidently making every effort to cover the greatest possible distance before stopping. Just as the dusk shut in close about them they rode down into the valley of Shawnee Fork, and discovered signs of a recent camp at the edge of the stream. Here, apparently, judging from the camp-fire ashes, and the trampled grass along the fork, the party must have halted for several hours. By lighting matches Keith and Bristoe discerned where some among them had laid down to sleep, and, through various signs, decided they must have again departed some five or six hours previous, one of their horses limping as if lame. The tired pursuers went into camp at the same spot, but without venturing to light any fire, merely snatching a cold bite, and dropping off to sleep with heads pillowed upon their saddles.

They were upon the trail again with the first dimness of the gray dawn, wading the waters of the Fork, and striking forth across the dull level of brown prairie and white alkali toward the Arkansas. They saw nothing all day moving in that wide vista about them, but rode steadily, scarcely exchanging a word, determined, grim, never swerving a yard from the faint trail. The pursued were moving slower, hampered, no doubt, by their lame horse, but were still well in advance. Moreover, the strain of the saddle was already beginning to tell severely on Waite, weakened somewhat by years, and the pursuers were compelled to halt oftener on his account. The end of the second day found them approaching the broken land bordering the Arkansas valley, and just before nightfall they picked up a lame horse, evidently discarded by the party ahead.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

The King's "Easy Money."

The curious powers and duties of the coroner, under traditional law, are illustrated by a recent incident at Southgate, England, says the New York Sun. Some workmen digging in the Amberley road found a large number of ancient coins. Immediately the coroner was called and he impanneled a jury. An expert numismatist testified that the coins were "Long Cross" pennies of the reign of Henry III. 1207 to 1272. The jury then found a verdict that the coins were ancient, that they had been concealed and that their depositor was unknown. "Then I seize the coins as the king's treasure trove," said the coroner—and he did.

Paper Bottles for Milk.

Some of the milk companies are trying out new paper bottles, stiffened and made air and milk-tight with refined paraffin, white wax. Paper impregnated with paraffin looks and feels oily and greasy, but handlers of such paraffined paper need have no fear of getting grease even on the most delicate fabric. Of course, if paraffin is heated and melted cloth will take it up, and then it is difficult to get out. Nothing is cleaner or freer from germs than pure paraffin, and it may be injected right under a man's skin without causing any trouble.—New York Press.

Was Samson So Mean?

Samson was one of the early strong men. He had so much muscle that he had to play practical jokes all the time. No doubt, like other husky folk, he had the idea that it was humorous to slip up behind a friend and hit him between the shoulder blades so hard that he couldn't breathe for a week. Or he would grip the friend's hand and squeeze it until the fingers were glued together in pain. Like as not he strolled about the streets in his track suit every chance he got.

Woman Enters Police School.

One of the two policewomen recently appointed for Christiania, Norway, has entered the police school. During her two months' course she will receive instruction in such laws as police officers are required to be acquainted with, in general police duties and in writing reports. After she begins active service she will have charge of the social purity department of the force.

True Economy.

A Servian member of parliament has discovered the possibilities of free traveling. He is paid a salary for attendance. And he has a railway pass. So why pay a hotel for a bed? At eventide he sleeps into the express from Belgrade to Lagrev, and arises freely and well. In the morning he comes to his duties by the express.

Feeling the Lord.

"Mother," voiced a little boy of five, "does God know everything that I'm going to do before I do it?"

"Yes, dear, everything," she said.

"Well, does he know that I'm going upstairs in a minute and put on my pajamas and say my prayers and get into bed?"

"Yes, dear, he knows everything."

"Well, tonight he's going to get fooled, for I'm not going to say my prayers."—St. Louis Republic.

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