



KEITH OF THE BORDER

A TALE OF THE PLAINS
By RANDALL DARRISH
AUTHOR OF MY LADY OF THE SOUTH
WHEN WILDERNESS WAS KING, ETC.
ILLUSTRATIONS BY DEARBORN MELVILLE

(Copyright, A. C. McClurg & Co., 1918.)

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 arrangements 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 would result when the man discovered his mistake? Such a discovery could not be delayed long, although the girl was quick-witted, and would surely realize that her personal safety depended upon keeping up the deception to the last possible moment. Yet the discovery must finally occur, and there was no guessing what form Hawley's rage would assume when he found himself baffled, 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 Fairbairn, 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, the forces augmented by two volunteers—both men of experience—Keith, Waite, Fairbairn 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

snuff out his 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, that ain't no Infjuns a rangin' that way jist now. They're too blame busy out on the Arickaree. Maybe them fellers heard the same story, an' that's what makes 'em so bold."

"What story? I've heard nothing."

"Why, it's like this, Cap," drawing out the words, "leastways, that's how it come Inter Sheridan; 'Sandy' Forsythe an' his outfit, mostly plainsmen, started a while ago across Solomon River an' down Beaver Crick, headin' fer Fort Wallace. Over on the Arickaree, the whole damned Infjun outfit jumped 'em. From all I heard, that must a bin nigh on three thousand o' the varmints, droppin' on 'em all at once, hell-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 Infjuns 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 sopers they sent out ter help ever git thar. So thar won't be no Infjuns 'long this route we're travellin', fer the whole kit an' caboodle are up thar yit after 'Sandy.'"

"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 Infjuns. I don't know what they're bound, no morn' you do, but I reckon they're reasonably sure they've got a clear 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 him self out of the saddle, and bent over to study the tracks. There was no doubting the evidence—a single horse—the only one shod 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

man who was with him, what do you say, Ben?"

"That's the way it looks up ter me, Cap; most likely 'twas the loss 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 perceive the faintest trace to follow. Already half-convinced that he knew 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 dinnness 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.

By this time Keith had reached a definite decision as to his course. If the fugitives received a fresh relay of horses down there somewhere, and crossed the Arkansas, he felt positively sure as to their destination. But it would be useless pushing on after them in the present shape of his party—their horses worn out, and Waite reeling giddily in the saddle. If Hawley's outfit crossed the upper ford, toward which they were evidently heading, and struck through the sand hills, then they were making for the refuge of that lone cabin on Salt Fork. Should this prove true, then it was probable the gambler had not even yet discovered the identity of Hope, for if he had, he would scarcely venture upon taking her there, knowing that Keith would naturally suspect the spot. But Keith would not be likely to personally take up the trail in search for Christie MacLaire. It must have been Hawley then who had left the party and ridden east, and up to that time he had not found out his mistake. Yet if he brought out the fresh animals the chances were that Hope's identity would be revealed. Bristoe, who had turned aside to examine the straying horse, came trotting up.

"Belonged to their outfit all right, Cap," he reported, "carries the double cross brand and that shebang is upon the Smokey; saddle galls still bleeding."

Waite was now suffering so acutely they were obliged to halt before gaining sight of the river, finding, fortunately, a water-hole fed by a spring. As soon as the sick man could be made comfortable, Keith gave to the others his conclusions, and listened to what they had to say. Bristoe favored clinging to the trail, even though they must travel slowly, but Fairbairn insisted that Waite must be taken to some town where he could be given necessary care. Keith finally decided the matter.

"None can be more anxious to reach those fellows that I am," he declared, "but I know that country out south, and we'll never get through to the Salt Fork without fresh horses. Besides, as the doctor says, we've got to take care of Waite. If we find things as I expect we'll ride for Carson City, and re-outfit there. What's more, we won't lost much time—it's a shorter ride from there to the cabin than from here."

By morning the General was able to sit his saddle again, and leaving him with Neb to follow slowly, the others spurred forward, discovered an outlet through the bluff into the valley, and crossed the Santa Fe Trail. It was not easy to discover where those in advance had passed this point, but they found evidence of a late camp in a little grove of cottonwoods beside the river. There were traces of two trails leading to the spot, one being that of the same five horses they had been following so long, the other not so easily read, as it had been traversed in both directions, the different hoof marks obliterating each other. Bristoe, creeping about on hands and knees, studied the signs with the eyes of an Indian.

"You kin see the difference yere whar the ground is soft, Cap," he said, pointing to some tracks plainer than the others. "This yere hoss had a rider, but the rest of 'em was led; that's why they've bungled up their trail so. An' it wa'n't ther same bunch that went back east what come from thar—see that split hoof? thar ain't no split hoof platin' ther other way—but yere is the mark of the critter that puts her foot down so fur outside that we've been a trallin' from Sheridan, an' she's platin' east, an' being led. Now, let's see whar the bunch went from yere with that split hoof."

This was not so easily accomplished owing to the nature of the ground, but at last the searchers

stumbled onto tracks close in under the bank, and one of these revealed the split hoof.

"That makes it clear, Ben," exclaimed Keith, decidedly, starting out across the river at the white sandhills. "They have kept on the edge of the water, making for the ford, which is yonder at the bend. They are out in the sand desert by this time riding for the Salt Fork. Whoever he was, the fellow brought them five horses, and the five old ones were taken east again on the trail. The girl is still with the party, and we'll go into Carson City and reoutfit."

(To Be Continued.)

The Christmas GIRL

She is Thinking of You now—Perhaps She has Your Present Already Purchased. What is Her Gift to be? Something not too costly—Something of Real Service—A Permanent Reminder of the Giver.

Some Appropriate Christmas Gifts:

Furs \$3.50 to \$35.00; Hand Bags \$1.00 to \$10.00; Gloves \$1.00 to \$3.50; Scarfs 50c to \$2.25; Handkerchiefs 10c to \$1.75; Toilet Sets \$1.50 to \$6.00; Silk Hose 50c to \$2.00; Back Combs 25c to \$1.50; Manacure Sets 85c to \$3.50; Fancy Aprons 25c to \$1.25; Neckwear 25c to \$1.75; Silk Waist Patterns \$3.00 to \$5.00; Silk Dress Patterns 50c to \$1.50 per yard; Wool Dress Patterns 50c to \$3.00 per yard; Jewel Boxes 25c to 75c; Pin Cushions 25c to \$1.00; Rugs 75c to \$26.00; Umbrellas \$1.00 to \$5.00; Box Stationary 25c to \$2.50; Kimonos \$1.50 to \$4.00. Hat Pins 25c to \$1.50. We have many other gifts suitable for Christmas.

THE MORNING IS A GOOD TIME TO SHOP!

E. G. DOVEY & SON

It's Good Sense

to take good care of a good car. Have your

AUTOMOBILE

Painted or Varnishd each season. It will lengthen its life and improve its appearance.

MAKE IT AS GOOD AS NEW!

You take no chances with us. We are experts in our line and do only first-class work.

FRANK GOBELMAN,

AUTO, CARRIAGE AND SIGN PAINTER

December Travel Bulletin

TO THE PACIFIC COAST. Inquire about the personally conducted through tourist excursions to Los Angeles, via Denver-Santa Fe Route—a route of sunshine and mild climate. From Omaha and Lincoln every Tuesday night; from Denver Wednesdays.

WINTER TOURIST TICKETS. The attractive south-land is claiming its own in winter tourist patronage. From the Missouri Valley the winter excursion fares to southern resorts are extremely favorable and involve but a modest outlay for a tour of the south.

HOMESEEKERS' EXCURSION TICKETS on the first and third Tuesdays of each month to the Big Horn Basin, the Northwest, West and the South.

AMERICAN LIVE STOCK MEETING, Denver, December 12th and 13th, 1911.

NATIONAL SHEEP SHOW AND WOOL GROWERS' CONVENTION, Omaha, December 14th to 16th, 1911.

R. W. CLEMENT, Ticket Agent.

L. W. WAKELY, General Passenger Agent, Omaha, Neb.

John Hopkins and wife, from the western part of the state, who have been guests of Isaac Hopkins and wife for a short time, departed for St. Joseph's hospital, Omaha, this morning, where they have a daughter taking treatment.

Dr. B. F. Brendel and T. W. Fleming of Murray were passengers to Omaha on the fast mail this afternoon, where Mr. Fleming went to consult a specialist relative to an operation for appendicitis, which he underwent some time ago.

C. Beidon Hall, Nehawka, Neb.