CHAPTER XXII.

An Interrupted Interview.

Miss Christie Maclaire, attired in a soft lounging robe, her luxuriant hair wound simply about her head, forming a decidedly attractive picture, gazed with manifest dissatisfaction on the bare walls of her room, and then out through the open window into the comparative quiet street below. The bar-tender at the "Palace," directly opposite, business being slack, was leaning negligently in the doorway. His roving eyes caught the fair face framed in the window, and he waved his hand encouragingly. Miss Christie's brown eyes stared across at him in silent disgust, and then wandered again about the room, her foot tapping nervously on the rag carpet.

"It's my very last trip to this town," she said decisively, her red lips pressed tightly together.

Miss Maclaire had indeed ample reason to feel aggrieved over her reception. She had written to have the best apartment in the house reserved for her, and then, merely because she had later been invited out to Fort Hays, and was consequently a day behind in arrival, had discovered that another woman—a base imposter, actually masquerading under her name—had been duly installed in the coveted apartment. Driving in from the fort that morning, accompanied by two of the more susceptible junior officers, conscious that she had performed most artistic work the evening before in the spacious mess-hall, and feeling confident of comfortable quarters awaiting her, it had been something of a shock to be informed by the perturbed clerk that "15" was already occupied by another. "A lady what come in last night, and I naturally supposed it was you."

In vain Miss Maclaire protested, ably backed by the worshipful officers who still gallantly attended her; the management was obdurate. Then she would go up herself, and throw the hussy out. Indeed, too angry for bantering further words, Christie had actually started for the stairs, intending to execute her threat, when the perspiring Tommy succeeded in stopping her, by plainly blurting out the exact truth.

"Don't you ever do it," he insisted. "The marshal brought her in here, and fired a fellow out o' the room so as to give it to her. He'd clean out this house if we ran in a cold deck on a friend o' his."

"What do I care for what your marshal does?"

"But he's Bill Hickock, Miss, 'Wild Bill.'"

Miss Maclaire leaned back against the stair-rail, her eyes turning from Tommy to her speechless supporters. Slowly the truth seemed to penetrate her brain.

"Oh," she gasped at last. "Then—then what else can you give me?"

The officers had long since departed, promising, however, to remain over in town and hear her again that night at the Trocadero, with hints as to a late supper; she had received a call from the manager of that most popular resort, and had rendered his life miserable by numerous demands; had passed half an hour practicing with the leader of the orchestra; but now was at last alone, tired, decidedly irritable, and still tempted to invade "15," and give that other woman a piece of her mind. Then some one rapped on the door. There was a decided accent of vexation in the voice which bade the one outside enter, but the lady's mood changed swiftly as her brown eyes perceived standing in the doorway the erect form of Keith, the light from the window revealing clearly his strong face. The man stood hat in hand, bowing slightly, unable to comprehend why he should have been sent for, yet marveling again at the remarkable resemblance between this woman and that other whom he had left at Fort Larned. As Miss Maclaire stood with back toward the window, she presented the same youthful appearance, the same slenderness of figure, the same contour of face.

"Miss Christie Maclaire?" he asked, as though in doubt.

"Yes," graciously, won instantly by the man's appearance and manner, "you wished to see me? Will you be seated?"

He crossed the narrow room to the stiff-backed chair indicated, and the lady sank negligently down into her own, resting her head against a pillow, and regarding him expectantly. He could view her now much more distinctly, observing the slight difference in age, the fuller lips, the darker shade of the hair, and the varied expression of the eyes. It was as if a different soul had locked forth from the same face. He had never before realized how little, apparently trifling details marked the human countenance, and, embarrassed by her own scrutiny, his glance swept about the room. Misunderstanding this shifting of eyes, Miss Christie sought to place the man more at ease.

"The room is a perfect fright," she observed briskly, "but what can one expect in these mushroom towns. Really I had never been here before or I shouldn't have come. They pay good money though for talent, and we all have to live, you know. Are—are you in professional work?"

He shook his head, smiling, somewhat perplexed at his reception.

"Really I didn't suppose you were," she went on, "you don't look it. But there are so many who come to me to help them that I have grown suspicious of every stranger. May I ask why you desired to see me?"

Another suspicion had taken possession of her mind, for the men of that section were never backward in exhibiting admiration, yet somehow this man did not seem exactly of that kind.

"I came merely because I was sent for, Miss Maclaire," he replied, his gray eyes once again upon her face "Doctor Fairbain gave me your message; I am Jack Keith."

She looked the complete astonishment she felt, sitting up in the chair, her eyes filled with questioning doubt.

"Doctor Fairbain! My message! Surely you are mistaken? I know no one of that name, and have sent no message."

"You did not express a desire to see me?"

She laughed, exhibiting a row of white teeth.

"Certainly not; not until this moment was I even aware of the existence of Mr. Jack Keith."

His own eyes smiled in response to challenge of hers.

"I can assure you the surprise was mine also," he hastened to inform her, now more at ease, as he grasped the situation. "I could not understand how I had become known to you, yet I pledge you my word the message was actually brought. Of course you may suspicion otherwise, for I have seen you on the stage, and being a normal man, have wished that I could devise some excuse for meeting you."

"Indeed!" her eye-brows slightly uplifted.

"Yes, I make that confession frankly, yet this call comes from no such desire. I had no question when I came, but what I had been sent for—you will believe this?"

"I suppose I must yet it seems very peculiar," she replied, feeling convinced that he was a gentleman, and troubled as to what she had best do. "Yet now that you have discovered your mistake—"

"I hope to take advantage of the opportunity," he broke in firmly, leaning slightly forward. "May I ask you a question?"

"I could hardly prevent it, and really I do not know that I have anything to conceal."

"Then I will risk the effort—do you know a man named Hawley?—Bartlett Hawley?"

Her eyes did not falter, although a red spot shot into her cheeks, and her lips pressed together.

"No; that is I have never met him," she acknowledged, just a little confused. "But I have received two letters signed by that name, and rather expected the gentleman would call upon me here in Sheridan during my engagement. Is that your mission? Were you sent by him? or are you Mr. Hawley?"

Keith Backed Into the Corner—His Hand in His Pocket.

"I disclaim all relation, Miss Maclaire, even friendship. You, of course, know who this individual is?"

"No," the short monosyllable was not encouraging. "His messages were of a business character."

"So I presumed, yet one likes to know something even of the person he does business with. I have been acquainted with Hawley for several years, and have never been aware of any honorable business he has ever engaged in. He is a professional gambler, known on the frontier as 'Black Bart;' last night he was running a faro game across there in the 'Palace.' I cannot help wondering what kind of business such a fellow could possibly have with you, Miss Maclaire."

The woman's eyes flashed, hardening in their brown depths.

"What right have you to ask?" she began indignantly. "I am capable of deciding my own affairs. As I have told you I have never met Mr. Hawley, but I am not to be influenced against him merely by the denunciation of an avowed enemy. He has written me of something he has discovered which is of deep personal interest to me, and has promised to tell me the details, as well as place within my hands certain necessary papers."

"I appreciate your feelings," he said gently, as she paused, "but would you mind telling me the nature of those papers?"

There was something in Keith's face which told of honesty, and inspired confidence. Miss Maclaire's worldly experience had given her deep insight into the character of men, and somehow, as she looked into the clear gray eyes, she felt impelled to answer, a vague doubt of the unknown Hawley in her mind.

"They—they were papers to establish identity. He had discovered them by accident; they have to do with an inheritance. Really that is all I know, for he wrote very briefly, stating it would be safer to confer with me personally—only I imagine there is a large sum involved."

"From whose estate?"

"My grandfather's."

"And his name was?"

"Why—why, Mr. Keith, actually I do not know. It may seem strange, but—but I cannot even tell the names of my parents; I cannot remember either my father or mother. Oh, I do not know why I should tell you all this! Who are you, really? Why do you ask me such questions?"

He leaned forward, touched by the woman's emotion.

"Miss Maclaire," he said gravely, "I am not prying into your life needlessly, but am endeavoring to serve you as well as others. Hawley may indeed possess papers of great value, but if so they were not found by accident, but stolen from the body of a murdered man. These papers may possibly refer to you, but if so Hawley himself does not believe it—he has simply chosen you to impersonate the right party because of your physical resemblance."

"Resemblance to whom?"

"To a young woman, a Miss Hope."

"But how do you know this? Why should you be interested? Are you a detective?"

"No, I am not a detective, but I cannot explain to you my interest. I am trying to serve you, to keep you from being drawn into a plot—"

"Rather to keep me from learning the truth, Mr. Jack Keith," she burst forth, rising to her feet indignantly. "You are here trying to prejudice me against Mr. Hawley. He is your enemy, and you have come to me stabbing him in the back for revenge. That is your interest. Well, I am going to see the man, and consider what he has to say. I don't care half so much about the money as I do to find out who I am. If he can throw any light on my early life, on my parentage, I shall be the happiest woman in the world. I am sorry I told you anything—but I am going to see him just the same. Perhaps he might tell me something about you."

They were both standing, the woman's eyes flashing angrily, defiantly, her hands clinched. Keith, realizing the false position into which he had drifted, hesitated to answer. He meant to tell her the whole story, and urge her to co-operate with him in learning the gambler's purpose. The woman impressed him as honest at heart, in spite of her life and environment; she was not one whom a swindler could easily dupe into becoming a tool.

"Miss Maclaire," he began, determined on his course, "listen to me for just a moment. I am—"

There was a rap at the door. The eyes of both turned that way, and then Keith backed slowly into the darkened corner beyond the window, his right hand thrust into the pocket of his coat. Miss Maclaire observed the movement, her lips smiling, a red flush on either cheek. Then she stepped across the room, and opened the door. Framed against the black background of the hall, his dark, rather handsome face clearly revealed as he fronted the window, his black, audacious eyes fixed appreciatingly upon the lady, stood "Black Bart" Hawley. He saw no one but her, realized no other presence, had no thought except to make a good impression. He was facing a beautiful woman, whom he sought to use, and he bowed low, hat in hand.

"Miss Maclaire," he said, pleasantly, "I trust you will pardon all that has occurred between us, and permit me to explain."

"I—I do not understand," she replied, puzzled by these unexpected words. "There has nothing occurred between us, I am sure, which requires explanation. Have we met before?"

The man smiled. Seeing the woman's face in the shadows he was still convinced she was the same he had last parted with on the Salt Fork. However, if she preferred to ignore all that, and begin their relations anew, it was greatly to his liking. It gave him insight into her character, and fresh confidence that he could gain her assistance. Anyhow, he was ready enough to play her game.

"Let us assume not," just the slightest trace of mockery in the tone, "and begin anew. At least, you will confess the receipt of my letters—I am Bartlett Hawley."

She cast a half-frightened glance toward Keith, and the man, following the direction of her eyes, perceived [illegible] leg went backward, his hand dropping to the belt, his form stiffening erect. Keith's voice, low but clear in the silence, seemed to cut the air.

"Not a motion, Hawley! I have you covered."

"Oh, gentlemen, please don't!"

"Have no fear, Miss Maclaire; this man and I will settle our difference elsewhere, and not in your presence." He stepped forth into the middle of the room, revolver drawn, but held low at the hip, his watchful eyes never deserting the gambler's face.

"Back up against the wall, Hawley," he commanded. "I hardly need to tell you how I shoot, for we, at least, have met before. Now, I'm going out, and leave you to your interview with Miss Maclaire, and I wish you happiness and success."

He moved across to the opening, keeping his face toward his adversary; then backed out slowly, closed the door with a snap, and sprang aside to avoid any possibility of a bullet crashing after him. No sound of movement from within reached his ears, however, and he walked silently to the head of the stairs.

(To Be Continued.)

BUYING AT HOME IN PREFERENCE TO OMAHA

A Couple of Incidents Which Demonstrates That Goods Are as Cheap or Cheaper.

Hayden Brothers of Omaha have flooded Cass county with circulars enclosing samples of goods and the prices per suit. A friend of the Journal received one of these "inducement" circulars, and he handed it to us that we might compare prices on such suits here in Plattsmouth and in Omaha, which we take great pleasure in doing, to show the folly of some people in going to Omaha because they are saving a dollar or two by going there. Now, Hayden Brothers are agents for certain grades of clothes in Omaha, and Wescott's Sons are agents for similar grades in Plattsmouth. There are four different shades of goods on the Hayden circular, any one of which they will furnish you a suit of for $12, as their advertised price. That looks cheap, because it is a firm in Omaha. But it is not, because Wescott's Sons have the same samples, and have already advertised that they will furnish a suit from either sample for $10, or $2 less than Hayden Brothers. Now is this not a saving to you?

While we are at it, we will give another illustration of Cass county ladies buying dress goods in Omaha. A lady, who requests us not to give her name because she does not want people to know that she was such a "sucker," went into one of the leading dry goods stores in Omaha, and after looking over the various patterns, bought one marked 99 cents per yard. She brought it home, of course, and she says herself that she thought she was getting "a bargain." A few days later she passed a certain store in Plattsmouth and in the show window she spied the same kind of pattern, in both quality of goods and color. She stepped in and examined it, and became anxious to know how much more the price was here than in Omaha. To her surprise, of course, she soon found out that she could buy it for 85 cents per yard, or 14 cents less than she paid the Omaha merchant.

Now, these are only two instances. We could give more, but it is not necessary to convince anyone with sound judgment that it is not possible to buy goods in Omaha, where they have to pay much higher rents, higher taxes and higher living in general, than here in Plattsmouth. There is a moral in this which people who go to Omaha to buy goods sooner or later learn—trade at home.

Don't trifle with a cold is good advice for prudent men and women. It may be vital in case of a child. There is nothing better than Chamberlain's Cough Remedy for coughs and colds in children. It is safe and sure. For sale by F. G. Fricke & Co.

Auto for Sale.

Two-passanger Ford Automobile, in good repair, just overhauled and repainted; will sell for $175.00, if taken within the next week. This is a snap.

J. E. Mason.

For Sale.

A number of thoroughbred Duroc-Jersey males.

Glen Perry.

The best plaster. A piece of flannel dampened with Chamberlain's Liniment and bound on over the affected parts is superior to a plaster and costs only one-tenth as much. For sale by F. G. Fricke & Co.

THE FIRST FRIDAY IN NOVEMBER IS TO BE "FIRE DAY" IN NEBRASKA

The Governor as Well as the State Deputy Fire Commissioner Call Upon All Citizens to Observe the Law, in Which All Public School Teachers are Interested.

One of the wisest laws passed by the last session of the legislature was that establishing a "Fire day," and providing a system of instruction to be carried out in the public schools of the state, setting apart one day in each month for such instruction and making it the duty of the chief deputy fire commissioner and the state superintendent of public instruction to prepare a book, conveniently arranged in chapters or lessons, such chapters or lessons to be in number sufficient to provide a different chapter or lesson for each month of the maximum school year. Such a text book has been prepared by C. A. Randall, fire commissioner for Nebraska, and is entitled the "Fire Prevention Text Book." The book is in phamplet form and consists of 47 pages of printed matter. A copy of this book should be in every home in the state.

On August 24 the governor issued a proclamation setting apart the first Friday in November as "Fire day," and specially requested all teachers of public, private and parochial schools of the state to appropriately observe the day. And the governor states that the school children of Nebraska should be an object of special solicitude, and nothing should be left undone to reduce to a minimum the danger from disaster by fire breaking out in school buildings.

The fire chief has provided that instrutcions be given to the children concerning the dangers from fire and on the following topics: September lesson lecture, "Matches;" October, "Chimneys and Flues;" November, "Stoves and Stovepipes;" December, "Christmas;" January, "Rubbish and Ashes;" February, "Kerosene;" March, "Gasoline and Naptha;" April, "Calcium Carbride and Acetylene Gas;" May, "Independence Day;" June, "Fire Insurance."

In the preface of his book the chief states that this law has been enacted in over half of the states in the Union and is materially reducing the loss by fire in the states where it is in operation, and doubtless the law will be enacted in every state in the Union as soon as its effectiveness is brought to their attention.

The law requires thirty minutes to be devoted to the subject of fire dangers each month. The plan of the little text book is to have every school in the state teach the same subject at the same time, making a uniform crusade against fire dangers.

Visits Plattsmouth Friends.

Frank Sabatka, who left Plattsmouth last July with Roy Pelton to go to North Platte to work on the government building, returned this morning for a few days' visit with friends. Ed Kinsey and William Rinker, who left at the same time and who worked on the postoffice building here last summer are with the "gang" yet, and are well and happy. The building at North Platte is to be a three-story structure, and the walls are not yet completed for the first story. Frank brought some pictures showing the building when the boys first arrived and at different stages of its progress since. Frank expects to return to North Platte next Sunday.

Moving the Dirt.

Mr. McEntee has again began to move the dirt from the McDaniel lots on the hill. A large number of wagonloads are being used by E. G. Dovey & Son in filling in about their wareroom and ice house. Yesterday afternoon he began to fill the south half of the residence lot of C. C. Parmele, and this will require many wagon loads of dirt to bring it up with the government lot on the east. The value of all these properties will be greatly enhanced when the fill is completed.

For Sale.

Fine Barred Rock Cockrels at 75c apiece if taken at once. Inquire of Mrs. N. H. Isbel.

10-23-1td-2tw.

All kinds of cool summer drinks at Bookmeyer & Maurer's.

Construct Ice House.

"Your Uncle Tom" Kennish and a force of men are working like beavers during Mr. Dovey's absence, converting the old smoke house adjacent to the warerooms of E. G. Dovey & Son into an ice house. The house will be twenty feet below the top of the ground, is walled with brick, and when the workmen are through with it the building will have a concrete floor, with drainage outlet in the center of the floor into the sewer and a concrete wall three feet up from the bottom all around to keep the moisture from the brick walls entering the ice room. The house will have a capacity of sixty tons and will be a fine convenience for the firm.