



## CHAPTER XXIX.

### By Force of Arms.

With her heart throbbing fiercely, Hope clung to the outer door of the vestibule endeavoring to see a little of what was transpiring without. About her was dense darkness, and she dare not explore the surroundings. Behind could be heard, through what must have been a thin partition, the various distractions of the stage, shifting scenery, music, shuffling feet, voices, and the occasional sound of applause. The girl had nerved herself to the encounter with Hawley, but this waiting here in darkness and uncertainty tried her to the uttermost. If some one should venture out that way how could she excuse her presence or explain her purpose? She found herself trembling in every limb from nervous fear, startled by every strange sound. Would the man never come? Surely Christie herself must be ready to depart by this time.

Almost prepared to flee before the terrors thus conjured up within her mind, they left her as if by magic the moment her straining eyes distinguished the approach of a dim figure without. She could not tell who it was, only that it was the unmistakable form of a man, and that he was whispering softly to himself. It might not prove to be the gambler, but she must catch the chance, for flesh and blood could stand the strain of waiting no longer. Yet she was not conscious of fear, only of exultation, as she stepped forth into the open, her blood again circulating freely in her veins. At the slight creak of the door the man saw her, his whistle ceasing, his hat lifted. Instantly she recognized him as Hawley, her heart leaping with the excitement of encounter.

"Why, hullo, Christie," he said familiarly. "I thought I was early, and expected a ten minutes' wait. I came out as soon as you left the stage."

"Oh, I can dress in a jiffy when there is any cause for hurry," Hope responded, permitting herself to drift under his guidance. "Are you disappointed? Would you prefer to commune with nature?"

"Well, I should say not," drawing her hand through his arm, and then patting it with his own. "I have seen about all I care to of nature, but not of Christie MacLaird."

"You may learn to feel the same regarding her," Hope answered, afraid to encourage the man, yet eagerly fearful lest she fail to play her part aright.

"Not the slightest danger," laughing lightly, and pressing her arm more closely against his body. "Although I must confess you exhibited some temper when I was late to-night."

"Did I not have occasion to? A woman should never be kept waiting, especially if her engagement be imperative."

"Oh, I am not finding any fault, you little spit-fire. I like you all the better because you fight. But the trouble was, Christie, you simply jumped on me without even asking how it occurred. You took it for granted I was late on purpose to spite you."

"Well, weren't you?" and the girl glanced inquiringly up into his face, as they passed out of the alley into the light of the Trocadero's windows. "You certainly acted that way."

"No, I did not; but you wouldn't listen, and besides I had no time then to explain. There's a lot happened this afternoon I want to tell you about. Will you give me time to talk with you?"

"Why, of course," surprised at the question, yet full of eagerness. "Why should you ask that?"

"Because I want you alone where no one can overhear a syllable. I'm afraid of that damned hotel. You never know who is in the next room, and the slightest whisper travels from one end to the other. That is one way in which Keith got onto our deal—he had a room next to Willoughby and Scott, and overheard them talking. I'm not going to take any more chances. Will you go to 'Sheeny Joe's' with me?"

She drew back from him. "Sheeny Joe's? You mean the saloon near the depot?"

"Sure; what's the use of being so squeamish? You sing and dance to a saloon crowd, don't you? Oh, I know you're a good girl, Christie, and all that. I'm not ranking you with these fly-by-nights around here. But there's no reason that I can see why you should shy so at a saloon. Besides, you won't see any one. Joe has got some back room where we can be alone, and have a bite to eat while we're talking. What do you say?"

"Oh, I would rather not," Hope faltered, bewildered by this unexpected request, already half-tempted to break away and run. "Really I—I don't want to go there."

Hawley was evidently surprised at this refusal, naturally supposing from her life that Miss MacLaird's scruples would be easily overcome. This obstinacy of the girl aroused his anger. "You women beat the devil," he



Mad With Terror, She Pulled the Trigger.

ejaculated, gruffly, "pretending to be so damn particular. Maybe you'd rather stand out there on the prairie and talk?" with a sweep of his hand around the horizon.

"Yes, I would," catching desperately at the straw. "I'm not afraid of you; I'm not blaming you at all, only I—I don't want to go to 'Sheeny Joe's.'"

He looked at her, puzzled at her attitude, and yet somewhat reassured by her expression of confidence. Oh, well, what was the difference? It might be better to let her have her own way, and the change would not materially interfere with his plans. Of course, it would be pleasant sitting together at one of Joe's tables, but he could talk just as freely out yonder under the stars. Besides, it might be as well now to humor the girl.

"All right, Christie," his voice regaining its pleasant tone. "You shall have your way this time. There is too much at stake for us to quarrel over this."

Frightened, yet not daring to resist or exhibit the least reluctance, she clung to his arm, and permitted him to lead her to the right down a dark passage and out into the open land beyond. He had to feel his way carefully, and scarcely spoke, yet proceeded as though the passage was reasonably familiar and he had some definite point in view. She answered in monosyllables, now thoroughly regretful of having permitted herself to drift into this position, yet not in the least knowing how to extricate herself. Hawley took everything for granted, her very silence convincing him of her acquiescence. With throbbing pulse, rope rent the small revolver hidden within her dress, undoing a button so that, in emergency, she might grasp it more quickly. Hawley felt the movement, the trembling of her arm.

"You are afraid, just the same," he said, pressing her to him lover-like. "Darkness always gets on a woman's nerves."

"Yes, that and loneliness," resenting his familiarity. "Do we need to go any farther? Surely, we are alone here."

"Only a few steps; the ravine is yonder, and we can sit down on the rocks. I want to smoke, and we will be entirely out of sight there."

He helped her down the rather sharp declivity until both were thoroughly concealed below the prairie level. Feeling about with his hands he found the surface of a smooth rock, and seated her upon it. Then a match flared, casting an instant's gleam across his face as he lighted his cigar. Blacker than ever the night shut down about them, and he groped for a seat beside her. She could perceive just one star peering through a rift of cloud, and in her nostrils was the pungent odor of tobacco. With a little shiver of disgust she drew slightly away from him, dreading what was to come. One thing alone she felt was in her favor—However familiar Hawley attempted to be, he was evidently not yet sufficiently sure of Miss MacLaird to become entirely offensive. She might not have frowned at his love-making, but apparently he had not yet progressed sufficiently far in her good graces to venture to extremes. Hope pressed her lips together, determined to resist any further approach of the man. However, his earliest words were a relief.

"I reckon, Christie," he said slowly, between puffs on his cigar, the lighted end of which faintly illumined his face, "you've got the idea I have brought you out here to make love. Lord knows I'd like to well enough, but just now there's more important matters on hand. Fact is, my girl, we're up against a little back-set, and have got to make a shift in our plans—a mighty quick shift, too," he added almost savagely.

"I—I don't think I understand."

"No, of course, you don't. You imagine all we've got to do in a matter of this kind is to step into the nearest

est court, and draw the money. One trouble is, our evidence isn't complete—we've got to find that woman who brought you up."

"Oh!" said Hope, not knowing what else to say.

"Yes," he went on, apparently satisfied with her exclamation. "Of course, I know she's dead, or at least, you say so, but we haven't got enough proof without her—not the way old Walte promises to fight your claim—and so we've got to hunt for a substitute. Do you happen to know any old woman about the right age who would make affidavit for you? She probably wouldn't have to go on the stand at all. Walte will cave in as soon as he knows we've got the evidence."

He waited for an answer, but she hardly knew what to say. Then she remembered that Keith insisted that Miss MacLaird had no conception that there was any fraud in her claim.

"No, I know no one. But what do you mean? I thought everything was straight? That there was no question about my right to inherit?"

"Well, there isn't, Christie," pulling fiercely on his cigar. "But the courts are particular; they have got to have the whole thing in black and white. I thought all along I could settle the entire matter with Walte outside, but the old fool won't listen to reason. I saw him twice to-day."

"Twice?" surprise wrung the word from her.

"Yes; thought I had got him off on a false scent and out of the way, the first time, but he turned up again like a bad penny. What's worse, he's evidently stumbled on to a bit of legal information which makes it safer for us to disappear until we can get the links of our chain forged. He's taken the case into court already, and the sheriff is here tryin' to find me so as to serve the papers. I've got to skip out, and so've you."

"I?" rising to her feet, indignantly. "What have I done to be frightened over?"

He laughed, but not pleasantly.

"Oh, hell, Christie, can't you understand? Old Walte is after you the same way he is me. It'll knock our whole case if he can get you into court before our evidence is ready. All you know is what I have told you—that's straight enough—but we've got to have proof. I can get it in a month, but he's got hold of something which gives him a leverage. I don't want what it is—maybe it's just a bluff—but the charge is conspiracy, and he's got warrants out. There is nothing for us to do but skip."

"But my clothes; my engagement!" she urged, feeling the insistent earnestness of the man, and sparring for delay. "Why, I cannot go. Besides, if the sheriff is hunting us, the trains will be watched."

"Do you suppose I am fool enough to risk the trains?" he exclaimed, roughly, plainly losing patience. "Not much; horses and the open plains for us, and a good night the start of them. They will search for me first, and you'll never be missed until you fail to show up at the Trocadero. Never mind the clothes; they can be sent after us."

"To-night!" she cried, awakening to the immediate danger, and rising to her feet. "You urge me to fly with you to-night?—now?"

"Sure, don't be foolish and kick up a row. The horses are here waiting just around the end of the ravine."

She pressed her hands to her breast, shrinking away from him.

"No! No! I will not go!" she declared, indignantly. "Keep back! Don't touch me!"

Hawley must have expected the resistance, for with a single movement he grasped her even as she turned to fly, pinning her arms helplessly to her side, holding her as in a vise.

"Oh, but you will, my beauty," he growled. "I thought you might act up and I'm ready. Do you think I am fool enough to leave you here alone to be pumped dry? It is a big stake I'm playing after, girl, and I am not going to lose it through the whims of a woman. If you won't go pleasantly, then you'll go by force. Keep still, you tigriss! Do you want me to choke you?"

She struggled to break loose, twisting and turning, but the effort was useless. Suddenly he whistled sharply. There was the sound of feet scrambling down the path, and the frightened woman perceived the dim outlines of several approaching men. She gave one scream, and Hawley released his grip on her arms to grasp her throat.

She jerked away, half-stumbling backward over a rock. The revolver, carried concealed in her dress, was in her hand. Mad with terror, scarcely knowing what she did, she pulled the trigger. In the flash she saw one man throw up his hands and go down. The next instant the others were upon her.

(To Be Continued.)

John Busche drove in from the farm near Cedar Creek this morning and looked after business matters at the county seat and also called on the Journal in his rounds.

Mrs. Lee Fickler and her mother-in-law, Mrs. G. Fickler, drove up from the farm today and did the week-end shopping.

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## Thanksgiving Celebration.

The ladies of the K. N. K. are making preparation for a grand Thanksgiving celebration at the Kenosha church. There will be services at 11 a. m. by the Rev. W. A. Taylor of Union, which will be followed by a delicious Thanksgiving dinner. The afternoon will be spent in the sale of plain and fancy needle work, also two fine bed quilts made by the K. N. K. will be offered for sale. We wish to invite you, one and all, through the columns of this paper to come and bring something to eat and to sell. Anyone wishing to donate please call the president, Mrs. Bertha Klauren, or Mrs. John Hendricks, secretary. Come; you will be welcome. The following is the menu:

Dessert—Pie, cake, cranberries.  
Meats—Goose, chicken, beef roast, pork roast.  
Vegetables—Potatoes, turnips, cabbage.  
Drinks—Coffee and tea.  
Relishes—Potato salad; pickles, beet, cucumber, sweet or sour; peaches.

Supper—Fresh oysters, cake, coffee.

## Men to Be Hosts.

At the meeting of the Knights and Ladies of Security next Tuesday evening at their hall the gentlemen are to be the hosts and serve the refreshments. An air of mystery surrounds the menu of the men, and the ladies may be surprised at the dexterity of the new cooks.

## Laid Up With Sore Leg.

Mike Sedlak, an employee of the Burlington at the local shops, has been laying off this week suffering from a sore leg. Mike had a similar trouble with his leg two years ago. The doctor thinks it will not be serious, but will probably prevent him from performing his regular work for a time.

A. O. Pearsley and wife, E. W. Midliff and wife and Jesse L. Pell and wife drove up from their homes near Union today and transacted business at the county seat.

## Dragging Cases.

Tardiness requires a stimulant, but at the same time also a strengthener. Dragging cases of convalescence call for a remedy which contains both a healthy, mild stimulant and an energetic tonic. One of the best remedies in this respect is Triner's American Elixir of Bitter Wine, which is composed of strengthening herbs and of stimulating red wine. It will first clean out the digestive organs and keep them clean, by removing from the body all waste matter fermenting in the intestines. This will create a new, healthy appetite, a correct digestion, rich blood and regular circulation. It will make the nerves strong and will encourage all organs to activity. You should take a few doses every time you need a stimulating tonic, or you feel indisposed, tired out, constipated. At drug stores, Jos. Triner, 1333-1339 So. Ashland Ave., Chicago, Illinois.

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