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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 raiders 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 be-ing a rutfian 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 Walte, 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 induced her 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. Kelth 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. Why not? If she had been convinced, Keith meets the brother of Hope Waite. under the assumed name of Fred Wilif she really believed that these paloughby, 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 advanlage. 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.

## CHAPTER XXV.—(Continued.)

"Was that all?"

"De ol' gin'rai he didn't seem ter bnow what ter say; he done set dar bokin' off ober de prairie like he was ar flumegasted. He sho' did look ske dat black debble hed hit him righty hard. Den he says slow like, turnin' his hoss 'round: 'Bartlett, yo' am puttin' up a good bluff, but, by Gawd, I'm goin' ter call yo'. Yo' don't set a cent ob dat money 'less yo' put de proof. I'll meet yo' whar yo' say, but ef I can git hol' ob some papers dat's missin' I'll take dat grin off vo' face.' De odder one laughed, an' de of gin'ral started fo ter ride away, den he pull up he's hoss, an' look back. Yo' sorter herd wid dat kind ob cattle, Bartlett,' he say, sharp like, 'maybe yo' know a gambler roun' yere called Hawley?' De black debble nebber eben lose he's grin. 'Do yo' mean Black Bart Hawley?" 'Dat's the man, where is he?' 'Dealin' faro fo' Mike Kenna in Topeka a week agofriend ob yours?' 'Dat's none ob yo' damned business,' snorted de ol' gin'ral, givin' his hoss de spur. Sho'. Massa Jack, he nebber knowed he was talkin' ter dat same Hawley, an' dat black debble jest laughed as he rode

"When was all this, Neb?" "Bout de time yo' all went up on

de hill, I reck'n. I done come right yere, and waited."

Keith walked across the room, selected a cigar, and came back, his mind busy with the problem. Hawley had in some manner, then, got into communication with Waite, and was threatening him. But Waite evidently knew the man under another namehis given name-and the gambler had sent him off on a false trail. The lost papers apparently contained the solution to all this mystery. Waite believed Hawley possessed them, but did not suspect that Bartlett and Hawley were the same person. What would he most naturally do now? Seek Hawley in Topeka probably; seize the first opportunity of getting there. Keith turned impatiently to the clerk.

"Any train running east?"

Well, they generally start one out every day," with a glance toward the clock, "'long 'bout this time. Maybe it's gone, and maybe it hasn't."

It was already nearly dark outside as the two men hastened toward the depot. They arrived there barely in time to see the red lights on the last car disappear. No inquiries made of those lounging about brought results -they had been interested in a lot of guard—and not one could tell whether any man answering Waite's description was in the single passenger coach. Convinced, however, that the General would waste no time in prosecuting his search, Keith believed him siready on his way east, and after dismissing Neb, with instructions to Miss Maclaire. There are those whose has only thought of what was rightfulwatch out closely for Hawley, he made his own way back to the hotel.

It seemed strange enough how completely he was blocked each time, just as he thought the whole baffling mystery was about to be made clear. Hawley was playing in rare luck, all the cards running easily to his hand, thus. at least, gaining time, and strengthening his position. There could no longer be any doubt that the gambler possessed some knowledge which made of that as you do," he returned honest will be hard to convince me that him a formidable adversary. From ly. "I would then have every tempta- Black Bart' is the paragon of virtue Waite's statement it was the loss of tion to meddle further taken away you describe. I wish I might believe the papers which left him helpless to from me. Do you realize that my in- for your sake. Did he also explain spenly resist the claim being made terest is very largely upon your ac- how he came into possession of these upon him on behalf of the mysterious | count?" Phyllis. Fis only hope, therefore, lay "Oh, no," laughing, "I couldn't be- "Oh, yes, indeed; there is no secret

wild goose chase, while Keith alone girl." knew, with any degree of positiveness, where those documents really were. Hawley certainly had them in his possession the day before, for he had taken them to Miss Maclaire to thus convince her as to the truth of his statements. And Hawley was still in Sheridan. However, it was not likely the man would risk carrying documents of such value, and documents connecting him so closely with Black Bart must possess enemies in day." plenty. Yet if not on his personwhere? Scott was only a tool, a mere ignorant desperado, not to be trusted to such a degree—yet apparently he was the only one working with the gambler in this deal, the only one cognizant as to his plans. Christie-Keith came to a stop in the street at the recurrence of the woman's name.

pers proved her right to both property and parentage, then she would guard them as a tigress does her young. And Hawley would know that, and must realize they would be far safer in her hands than in his pocket. She could not use them without his aid and guidance, and yet, whatever happened to him they would still be safely beyond reach. True, this might not have been done; the gambler might not yet have felt that he had sufficient hold upon the woman to trust her thus far, but it was, at least, a possibility to be

considered, and acted upon. Still wrestling with the intricate problem, Keith entered the diningroom, and weaved his way, as usual, through the miscellaneous crowd, toward the more exclusive tables at the rear. A woman sat alone at one of these, her back toward the door. His first thought was that it must be Hope, and he advanced toward her, his heart throbbing. She glanced up, a slight frown wrinkling her foreheal, and he bowed, recognizing Christie Maclaire.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

A Chance Conversation.

The opportunity thus so unexpectedly afforded was not one to be wasted, and Keith accepted it with swift determination. The expression in the woman's face was scarcely one of welcome, yet his purpose was sufficiently serious to cause him to ignore this with easy confidence in himself.

"I am, indeed, most fortunate to discover you alone, Miss Maclaire," he said, avoiding her eyes by a swift glance over the table, "and evidently at a time when you are only beginning your meal. May I join you?"

She hesitated for an instant, debating with herself, and as quickly deciding on disagreeable tactics.

"I presume this is a public table, and I consequently have little choice in the matter, if you insist," she replied, her voice more civil than her words. "Still, Mr. Keith, I am not accustomed to associating with criminals.'

He smiled, holding his temper in prudence." check, more than ever determined to

"Then, possibly, you may rather welcome a new diversion. I can assure you our criminals out here are the most interesting portion of our population. I wish I might have your permission."

headed, his slightly tanned face strong man who is my friend. I know you and man'y, his gray eyes filled with have some cause, for he has told me humor, Miss Maclaire recognized the entire story, yet I am sure he did again that he was not of the com- no more than his actual duty. He let mon herd, and the innate coquetry of | me realize how very sorry he was that her nature obtained mastery. What the marshal at Carson City had called harm could it do for her to chat with upon him for assistance." him for half an hour? It was better than eating a lonely meal, and, besides, she might learn something of value to report to Hawley. Her own eyes brightened, the slight frown ulsappearing

cars by force, and sent out under not suppose you would enjoy being naturally drifted into evil company. ranked among that class."

upon the intervening table.

good opinion I do not seek, and you ly mine." should not form your decisions on the unsupported testimony of a personal woman's earnestness, the impossibilienemy."

"Oh, indeed," rather resenting the words, and already regretful of her well in fruitful soil. compliance. "Surely I have as much reason to trust my informant as I have you. He, at least, has proven feeling the necessity of saying some-

himself a friend."

in recovering these; but, with time | lieve that. I-I have heard it whis- | about that. They were entrusted to limited, he had been sent back on a pered it might be because of the other

> "The other girl!" in complete surprise at this swift return.

> "Yes, sir." conscious of having at-

"Some more of Mr. Hawley's fancles," he retorted, perplexed that so much should be suspected. "Have you seen her?" "Why, of course. I am a woman,

Mr. Keith, with all the natural curithat murder on the Santa Fe Trail, osity of my sex. In this case I had about upon his person. At best, life special reason to be interested. One was cheap in that community, and does not meet her counterpart every you are fully convinced of the justice

certainly most striking."

her eyes on his face, "to abundantly retain your friendship, but I cannot confirm in my mind the truth of all do so if the cost includes faith in that has been told me."

ders, and the two remained in silence | alias?" until he had deposited his load upon the table, and departed. She was but Keith was first to break the still-

"I wish I might be told what that

"To what do you refer?" apparently forgetful as to where their conversation had been broken.

"To Hawley's proposition." "No doubt," her lips smiling, "but you have come to the wrong market,

"Yet," he insisted earnestly, "if this is all straight, with no fraud concealed anywhere, if you have the proofs in your hands, why are you afraid to talk openly? The very manner in which Hawley works should convince you

he is himself afraid to face the truth." "No, you are wrong. There are perfectly satisfactory reasons why we should for the present keep our plans



I Like Many People Whom Perhaps Ought Not, Including You, Mr. Jack Keith."

secret. There are details yet to be decided upon, and Mr. Hawley's present objection to publicity is only ordinary

She leaned toward him, her fingers playing nervously with a knife.

"Mr. Keith, I cannot help but like you, and I also feel most kindly disposed toward Mr. Hawley. I wish in this I was no longer compelled to consider you an enemy of us both. There is no reason why I should, except for Standing there before her, bare- your blind prejudice against this other

"Who? Hawley?" Keith questioned, hardly trusting his own ears.

"Yes; indeed he is a very different man from what you have been led to believe. I know he is a gambler, and all that, but really it is not altogether "You are certainly an illustration of his fault. He told me about his life. your theory," she said pleasantly. "I and it was very sad. He was driven drunken graders loaded on the flat shall have to say yes, but, really, I did from home when only a boy, and His one ambition is to break away, He drew out a chair, and sat down and redeem himself. I am so anxious facing her, leaning slightly forward to help him, and wish you could realize his purpose, as I do, and become "Nor would I, only I recognize you his friend. Won't you, for my sake? do not comprehend. The source of Why, even in this affair he has not your information is a bit polluted, the slightest mercenary purpose—he

Kelth listened, feeling to the full the ty of changing her fixed conviction. Hawley had planted his seed deep and

"You make a strong and charming advocate. Miss Maclaire," he returned. thing. "I should like to have you "I wish I could feel as fully assured equally earnest on my side. Yet it

papers?"

him by an old man whom he discovered sick in Independence, and who died in his rooms three years ago. Mr. Hawley has been searching ever since for the old man's granddaughter. tained the upper hand. "Miss Hope It is remarkable how he was finally convinced that I was the one."

"A photograph, was it not?" A gleam of sudden suspicion appeared in the brown eyes, a slight change in facial expression.

"That was a clue, yes, but far from being all. But why should I tell you this?-you believe nothing I say."

"I believe that you believe; that of your claim. Perhaps it is just, but "The resemblance between you is I am suspicious of anything which Bart Hawley has a hand in. Miss "Sufficiently so," she said slowly, Christie, you really make me wish to Hawley. Do you know that is not The waiter approached with the or- even his name-that he lives under an

"Is there anything strange in that out here?" she asked stoutly. "I told watching the face opposite through you how deeply he regretted his life; lowered lashes that veiled her eyes, that alone would be sufficient cause for him to drop his family name. Did you ever learn his true name?"

> He was not sure-only as Neb had reported what Waite had called the man, yet ventured a direct reply. "Bartlett, I believe-he uses it now

as a prefix." "Bartlett!-Bartlett!" her hands clasping, and unclasping nervously.

"Why, what a strange coincidence!" "How? What do you mean?" "Oh, nothing-nothing," bitting her lips in vexation. "The name merely recalled something. But really, I must

go, Mr. Keith, or I shall be late at the theater. You have not attended since I came?" "No," arising from the table with her. "However, I have heard you sing before, and hope I may again."

"How tenderly you dwell on that word 'hope.' " she said banteringly. "it almost makes me envious."

"Your resemblance almost makes me forget.'

"But not quite?" "No, not quite," he confessed, smiling back into her quizzing eyes. They went out into the hall together, only to meet with Doctor Fairbainat the door. The latter stared at the two with some embarrassment, for a moment forgetful of his purpose. His

gaze settled on the face of the lady. "Always getting you two mixed," he blurted forth. "Never saw such resemblance—positively uncanny—same hotel too means trouble—this Miss

"No, Doctor; I am Miss Maclaire." "Ought to have known it-if I knew as much about faces as I do about anatomy never would make such mistake-very sorry-what fooled me was seeing you with Keith-thought he was after the other one-gay dog though-never satisfied-was hunting after you."

"After me?" evidently amused.

"Certainly-you-went to the room -then to the clerk-said you were in at supper-just occurred to me streets here bad at night-thought I'd ask you to let me escort you to theater and back-a bit of lunch later-" he glanced suspiciously at Keith-"probably got here too late."

"Well, really, you have, Doctor, she replied sweetly, veiling her eyes to hide their laughter. "But I can assure you it is not Mr. Keith," courtesying slightly to the latter, "for he has not honored me; we merely met by chance at the table. I am sure i should enjoy your company exceedingly, but to-night I must plead a previous engagement."

"Ah-ah, some other night?" "With pleasure, yes."

The doctor faded away into the office, not wholly satisfied because Keith still lingered. Miss Christie extended her hand.

"Isn't he a funny man? But I do like him-someway. I like so many people whom perhaps I ought not, including you, Mr. Jack Keith. Please think over what I told you about Mr. Hawley, won't you?"

"Certainly; you have given me food for thought. I presume he is to be your escort?"

She bowed, evidently resenting the "Yes, and it may interest you to know that he has something of the ut-

most importance to tell me to-nighthe has actually seen my guardian. Don't you wish you could be there?" She gave him a tantalizing smile. withdrawing her hand, and running up the stairs before he could answer.

Over the railing of the landing she glanced down, and then disappeared, (TO BE CONTINUED.)

His Worth.

"You want \$50 for that dog? It's preposterous."

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