



# KEITH OF THE BORDER

## A TALE OF THE PLAINS

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AUTHOR OF MY LADY OF THE SOUTH  
WHEN WILDERNESS WAS KING, ETC.  
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 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 of a woman, his companion in his cell named Ned, a negro who he knew the Keiths in Virginia. Ned says one of the murdered men was John Biddle, the other Gen. Willis Walte, formerly a Confederate officer. The plainsman and Ned escape, and later the fugitives come upon a cabin and find it occupied to be a young girl, whom Keith thinks he saw at Carson City. The girl explains that she is in search of a brother, 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. 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 Walte, Keith and Ned drift into Sheridan, where Keith meets an old friend, Dr. Fairbain. Keith meets the brother of Hope Walte, under the assumed name of Fred Willoughby, and becomes convinced that Black Bart has some plot involving the two. Hope learns that Gen. Walte, 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 Walte 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 deceives her. Hope that General Walte has suspected his plans and that they must fly. Hope, greatly alarmed, denurs. General Walte 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 and his friends strike the trail of Black Bart. They find Hope has been taken back to the old cabin. The wilderness cabin is the scene of a fight in which Keith and his friends are victorious and outlaw enemies. Black Bart and the plainsman meet in a duel for final accounting.

### CHAPTER XXXVI.—(Continued.)

Keith wet his dry lips and spoke shortly:

"I reckon you know what this means, Hawley, and why I am here. We're Southerners both of us, and we settle our own personal affairs. You've got to fight me now, man to man."

The gambler glanced about him, and down at his horse. If he thought of flight it was useless. His lip curled with contempt.

"Damn you talking, Keith," he returned savagely. "Let's have it over with," and spurred his horse. The gun of the other came up.

"Wait!" and Hawley paused, dragging at his rein. "One of us most likely is going to die here; perhaps both. But if either survives he'll need a horse to get out of this alive. Dismount; I'll do the same; step away so the horses are out of range, and then we'll fight it out—is that square?"

Without a word, his eyes gleaming with cunning hatred, the gambler swung down from his saddle onto the sand, his horse interposed between him and the other. Keith did the same, his eyes peering across the back of his animal.

"Now," he said steadily, "when I count three drive your horse aside, and let go—are you ready?"

"Damn you—yes!"

"Then look out—one! two! three!"

The plainsman struck his horse with the quirt in his left hand and sprang swiftly aside so as to clear the flank of the animal, his shooting arm flung out. There was a flash of flame across Hawley's saddle, a sharp report, and Keith reeled backward, dropping to his knees, one hand clutching at the sand. Again Hawley fired, but the horse, startled by the double report, leaped aside, and the ball went wild. Keith wheeled about, steadying himself with his outstretched hand, and let drive, pressing the trigger, until, through the haze over his eyes, he saw Hawley go stumbling down, shooting wildly as he fell. The man never moved, and Keith endeavored to get up, his gun still held ready, the smoke circling about them. He had been shot treacherously, as a cowardly cur might shoot, and he could not clear his mind of the thought that this last act hid treachery also. But he could not raise himself, could not stand; red and black shadows danced before his eyes; he believed he saw the arm of the other mere. Like a snake he crept forward, holding himself up with one hand, his head dizzily reeling, but his gun held steadily on that black, shapeless object lying on the sand. Then the revolver hand began to quiver, to shake, to make odd circles; he couldn't see; it was all black, all nothingness. Suddenly he went down face first into the sand.

They both lay motionless, the thirsty sand drinking in their life blood, Hawley huddled upon his left side, his head still shading the glazing eyes,



"Hope—Hope!"

Keith lying flat, his face in the crook of an arm whose hand still gripped a revolver. There was a grim smile on his lips, as if, as he pitched forward, he knew that, after he had been shot to death, he had gotten his man. The riderless horses gazed at the two figures, and drifted away, slowly, reverently, still held in mute subjection to their dead masters by dangling reins. The sun blazed down from directly overhead, the heat waves rising and falling, the dead, desolate desert stretching to the sky. An hour, two passed. The horses were now a hundred yards away, nose to nose; all else was changeless. Then into the far northern sky there rose a black speck, growing larger and larger; others came from the east and west, beating the air with widely outspread wings, great beaks stretched forward. Out from their nests of foulness the desert scavengers were coming for their spoil.

### CHAPTER XXXVII.

#### At the Water-Hole.

Up from the far, dim southwest they rode slowly, silently, wearied still by the exertions of the past night, and burned by the fierce rays of the desert sun. No wind of sufficient force had blown since Keith passed that way, and they could easily follow the hoof prints of his horse across the sand waste. Bristoe was ahead, hat brim drawn low, scanning the horizon line unceasingly. Somewhere out in the midst of that mystery was hidden tragedy, and he dreaded the knowledge of its truth. Behind him Fairbain and Hope rode together, their lips long since grown silent, the man ever glancing uneasily aside at her, the girl drooping slightly in the saddle, with pale face and heavy eyes. Five prisoners, lashed together, the binding rope fastened to the pommels of the two "Bar X" men's saddles, were bunched together, and behind all came Ned, his black face glistening in the heat.

Suddenly Bristoe drew rein, and rose to the full length in the stirrups, shading his eyes from the sun's glare, as he stared ahead. Two motionless black specks were visible—yet were they motionless? or was it the heat waves which seemed to yield them movement? He grove in his spurs, driving his startled horse to the summit of a low sand ridge, and again halted, gazing intently forward. He was not mistaken—they were horses. Knowing instantly what it meant—those riderless animals drifting dervish in the heart of the desert—his throat dry with fear, the scout wheeled, and spurred back to his party, quickly resolving on a course of action. Hawley and Keith had met; both had fallen, either dead or wounded. A moment's delay now might cost a life; he would need Fairbain, but he must keep the girl back, if possible. But could he? She straightened up in the saddle as he came spurting toward them; her eyes wide open, one hand clutching at her throat.

"Doctor," he called as soon as he was near enough, his horse circling, "thar is somethin' showin' out yon-

der I'd like ter take a look at, an' I reckon you better go 'long. The nigger kin com' up ahead yere with Miss Walte."

She struck her horse, and he plunged forward, bringing her face to face with Bristoe.

"What is it? Tell me, what is it?"

"Nothin' but a loose hoss, Miss."

"A horse! here on the desert?"

Looking about, her eyes dark with horror. "But how could that be? Could—could it be Captain Keith's?"

Bristoe cast an appealing glance at Fairbain, mopping his face vigorously, not knowing what to say, and the other attempting to turn the tide.

"Not likely—not likely at all—no reason why it should be—probably just a stray horse—you stay back here, Miss Hope—Ben and I will find out, and let you know."

"No, I'm going," she cried, stifling a sob in her throat. "It would kill me to wait here."

She was off before either might raise hand or voice in protest, and they could only urge their horses in effort to overtake her, the three racing forward fetlock deep in sand. Mounted upon a swifter animal Fairbain forged ahead; he could see the two horses now plainly, their heads uplifted, their reins dangling. Without perceiving more he knew already what was waiting there on the sand, and swore fiercely, spurring his horse mercilessly, forgetful of all else, even the girl, in his intense desire to reach and touch the bodies. He had begged to do this himself, to be privileged to seek this man Hawley, to kill him—but now he was the physician, with no other thought except a hope to save. Before his horse had even stopped he flung himself from the saddle, ran forward and dropped on his knees beside Keith, bending his ear to his chest, grasping the wrist in his fingers. As the others approached, he glanced up, no conception now of aught save his own professional work.

"Water, Bristoe," he exclaimed sharply. "Dash some brandy in it. Quick now. There, that's it; hold his head up—higher. Yes, you do it, Miss Hope; here, Ben, take this, and pry his teeth open—well, he got a swallow anyhow. Hold him just as he is—can you stand it? I've got to find where he was hit."

"Yes—yes," she answered, "don't—don't mind me."

He tore open the woolen shirt, soaked with blood already hardening, felt within with skilled fingers, his eyes keen, his lips muttering unconsciously.

"Quarter of an inch—quarter of an inch too high—scraped the lung—Lord, if I can only get it out—got to do it now—can't wait—here, Bristoe, that leather case on my saddle—run, damn you—we'll save him yet, girl—there, drop his head in your lap—yes, cry if you want to—only hold still—open the case, will you—down here, where I can reach it—now water—all our canteens—Hope, tear me off a strip of your under-skirt—what am I going to do?—extract the ball—got to do it—blood poison in this sun."

She ripped her skirt, handing it to him without a word; then dropped her white face in her hands, bending,

with closed eyes, over the whiter face resting on her lap, her lips trembling with the one prayer, "Oh, God! Oh, God!" How long he was at it, or what he did, she scarcely knew—she heard the splash of water; caught the flash of the sun on the probe; felt the half-conscious shudder of the wounded man, whose dead was in her lap, the deft, quick movements of Fairbain, and then—

"That's it—I've got it—missed the lung by a hair—damn me I'm proud of that job—you're a good girl."

She looked at him, scarce able to see, her eyes blinded with tears.

"Will—will he live? Oh, tell me!"

"Live! Why shouldn't he?—nothing but a hole to close up—nature'll do that, with a bit of nursing—here, now don't you keel over—give me the rest of that skirt."

He bandaged the wound, then glanced about suddenly.

"How's the other fellow?"

"Dead," returned Bristoe, "shot through the heart."

"Thought so—have seen Keith shoot before—I wonder how the cuss ever managed to get him."

As he arose to his feet, his red face glistening with perspiration, and began strapping his leather case, the others rode up, and Bristoe, explaining the situation, set the men to making preparations for pushing on to the water-hole. Blankets were swung between ponies, and the bodies of the dead and wounded deposited therein, firm hands on the bridles. Hope rode close beside Keith, struggling to keep back the tears, as she watched him lying motionless, unconscious, scarcely breathing. So, under the early glow of the desert stars, they came to the water-hole, and halted.

The wounded man opened his eyes, and looked about him unable to comprehend. At first all was dark, silent; then he saw the stars overhead, and a breath of air fanned the near-by fire, the ruddy glow of flame flashing across his face. He heard voices faintly, and thus, little by little, consciousness asserted itself and memory struggled back into his bewildered brain. The desert—the lonely leagues of sand—his fingers gripped as if they felt the stock of a gun—yet that was all over—he was not there—but he was somewhere—and alive, alive. It hurt him to move, to breathe even, and after one effort to turn over, he lay perfectly still, staring up into the black arch of sky, endeavoring to think, to understand—where was he? How had he come there? Was Hawley alive also? A face bent over him, the features faintly visible in the flash of freelight. His dull eyes lit up in sudden recollection.

"Doc! is that you?"

"Sure, old man," the pudgy fingers feeling his pulse, the gray eyes twinkling. "Narrow squeak you had—going to pull through all right, though—no sign of fever."

"Where am I?"

"At the water-hole; sling you in a blanket, and get you into Larned to-morrow."

There was a moment's silence. Keith finding it hard to speak.

"Hawley?" he whispered at last.

"Oh, don't worry; you got him all right. Say," his voice sobering, "may be it was just as well you took that job. If it had been me I would have been in bad."

The wounded man's eyes questioned.

"It's a bad mix-up, Keith. Walte never told us all of it. I reckon he didn't want her to know, and she never shall, if I can help it. I've been looking over some papers in his pocket—he'd likely been after them this trip—and his name ain't Hawley. He's Bartlett Gale, Christie's father."

Keith could not seem to grasp the thought, his eyes half-closed.

"Her—her father?" he questioned weakly. "Do you suppose he knew?"

"No; not at first, anyhow; not at Sheridan. He was too interested in his scheme to even suspicion he had actually stumbled onto the real girl. I think he just found out."

A coyote howled somewhere in the darkness, a melancholy chorus joining in the with long-drawn cadence. A shadow swept into the radius of dancing freelight.

"Is he conscious, Doctor?"

Fairbain drew back silently, and she dropped on her knees at Keith's side, bending low to look into his face.

"Hope—Hope."

"Yes, dear, and you are going to live now—live for me."

He found her hand, and held it, clasped within his own, his eyes wide open.

"I have never told you," he said, softly, "how much I love you."

She bent lower until her cheek touched his.

"No, Jack, but you may now."

THE END.

Spoken by the Card.

When women call they leave their cards. When men call they are apt to leave their chips.

No worthy enterprise can be done by us without continual plodding and wearisomeness to our abilities.—MILTON.

### HIS SERMON IN A NUTSHELL

Comprehensive and Succinct Report of What Was Said in the Funeral Oration.

A popular Irishman, beloved for many a mile around his home town, died suddenly. He belonged to several organizations, and the A. O. H. of Bloomville decided to send a representative to his funeral.

The church was packed and the clergyman most sympathetic. In expressing his certainty of immortality he went in for simile.

"We will say," he observed for illustration, "that here is a beautiful watch. The case is good and is studded with diamonds. It looks like the valuable part of the watch, but you can remove the works and they will keep."

The delegate returned to his home on ticking.

Town and was sounded on the topic of the funeral sermon.

"Well," he reported, "the father said that Pat was no Waterbury."

### Missing the Point.

Representative Rucker of Colorado, apropos of a tariff argument about sugar, said to a Washington correspondent: "Oh, well, those men don't see my point. They miss it as badly as the old lady missed her son's."

"Mother," a young man said, looking up from the Bulletin, "would you believe that it takes 5,000 elephants a year to make our piano keys and billiard balls?"

"Make our piano keys and billiard balls?" cried the old lady. "Well, I always understood elephants were intelligent creatures, but I never knew before that they'd been trained to make piano keys and billiard balls."

### The Ruling Passion.

Little Lydia was an embryo electrician. Anything relating to his favorite study possessed absorbing interest for him. One day his mother appeared in a new gray gown, the jacket of which was trimmed in flat black buttons showing an outer circle of the light dress material. Willie studied the gown critically for a moment, then the light of strong approval dawned in his eyes.

"Oh, mamma," he cried, "what a pretty new dress! It's all trimmed in push buttons."—Judge.

### Boy's Idea.

Willie was looking at the pictures in a magazine when suddenly he turned to his father and asked: "Pa, do coconuts really grow on trees?"

"Of course! Where did you think they grew?"

"Why, pa, I always thought the monkeys laid 'em."—Boston Transcript.

### Misunderstood.

"Your wife will be married twice. Her second husband will be handsome, wise and honorable, a man of simple tastes and refined habits with the manners of a courtier."

"Hang the old cat! She never told me she had been married before."

### They Draw Interest.

"A kiss," he said after just having had one, "is the most precious thing, and yet women give them away."

"You are mistaken," she said. "We never give them away, we merely invest them."—Fun.

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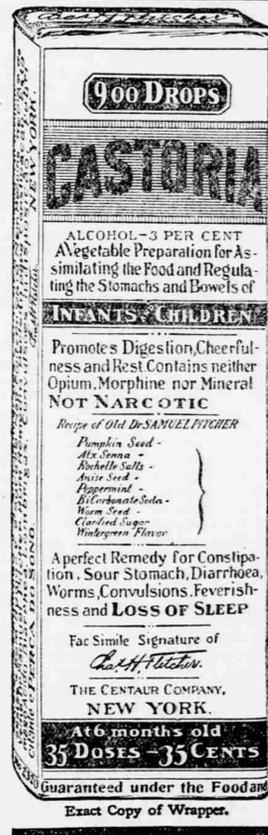
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