

BOB HAMPTON of PLACER

By RAY W. PARRISH AUTHOR OF
"WHEN WILDERNESS WAS KING" "MY LADY OF THE NORTH"
"HISTORIC ILLINOIS ETC."

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on there is a bad half-hour waiting for those two fellows. What was it that Murphy said?"

"That he knew the girl's real name."

"Was that all?"

"Yes; I tried to discover his meaning, but the fellow became suspicious and shut up like a clam. Is there anything in it?"

Hampton ignored the question. "Lieut. Brant," he said, "I am glad we have had this talk together, and exceedingly sorry that my duty has compelled me to say what I have said. Some time, however, you will sincerely thank me for it, and rejoice that you escaped so easily. I knew your father once, and I should like now to part on friendly relations with his son."

He held out his hand, and scarcely knowing why he did so, Brant placed his own within its grasp, and as the eyes of the two men met, there was a consciousness of sympathy between them.

CHAPTER XVIII. A Slight Interruption.

The young officer passed slowly down the dark staircase, his mind still bewildered by the result of the interview. His feelings toward Hampton had been materially changed. He found it impossible to nurse a dislike which seemingly had no real cause for existence.

Yet Brant was far from being satisfied. Hampton had not even advanced a direct claim; he had dodged the real issue, leaving the soldier in the dark regarding his relationship to Naida, and erecting a barrier between the other two. It was a masterpiece of defense, puzzling, irritating, seemingly impassable. From the consideration of it all, Brant emerged with but one thought clearly defined—whoever she might prove to be, whatever was her present connection with Hampton, he loved this dark-eyed, auburn-haired wail. He knew it now, and never again could he doubt it. He paused, half inclined to retrace his steps and have the matter out. He turned just in time to face a dazzling vision of fluffly lace and flossy hair beside him in the dimly lighted hall.

"Oh, Lieutenant Brant!" and the vision clung to his arm tenderly. "It is such a relief to find that you are unhurt. Did—did you kill him?"

Brant stared. "I—I fear I scarcely comprehend, Miss Spencer. I have certainly taken no one's life. What can you mean?"

"Oh, I am so glad; and Naida will be, too. I must go right back and tell the poor girl, for she is nearly distracted. Oh, Lieutenant, isn't it the most romantic situation that ever was? And he is such a mysterious character!"

"To whom do you refer? Really, I am quite in the dark."

"Why, Mr. Hampton, of course. Oh, I know all about it. Naida felt so badly over your meeting this morning that I just compelled her to confide her whole story to me. And didn't you fight at all?"

"Most assuredly not," and Brant's eyes began to exhibit amusement; "indeed, we parted quite friendly."

"I told Naida I thought you would. People don't take such things so seriously nowadays, do they? But Naida is such a child and so full of romantic notions, that she worried terribly about it. Isn't it perfectly delightful what he is going to do for her?"

"I am sure I do not know," she said. "Why, hadn't you heard? He wants to send her east to a boarding school and give her a fine education. Do you know, Lieutenant, I am simply dying to see him? He is such a perfectly splendid western character."

"It would afford me pleasure to present you," and the soldier's downcast face brightened with anticipation.

"Do—do you really think it would be proper? But they do things so differently out here, don't they? Oh, I wish you would."

Feeling somewhat doubtful as to what might be the result, Brant knocked upon the door he had just closed, and, in response to the voice within, opened it. Hampton sat upon the chair by the window, but as his eyes caught a glimpse of the returned soldier with a woman standing beside him, he instantly rose to his feet.

"Mr. Hampton," said Brant, "I trust I may be pardoned for again troubling you, but this is Miss Spencer, a great admirer of western life, who is desirous of making your acquaintance."

Miss Spencer swept gracefully forward, her cheeks flushed, her hand extended. "Oh, Mr. Hampton, I have so wished to meet with you ever since I first read your name in Aunt Lydia's letters—Mrs. Herndon is my aunt, you know—and all about that awful time you had with those Indians. You see, I am Naida Gillis's most particular friend, and she tells me so much about you. She is such a dear, sweet girl! She felt so badly this morning over your meeting with Lieut. Brant, fearing you might quarrel! It was such a relief to find him unhurt, but I felt that I must see you also, so as

to relieve Naida's mind entirely."

"I most certainly appreciate your frankly expressed interest, Miss Spencer," he said, standing with her hand still retained in his, "and am exceedingly glad there is one residing in this community to whom my peculiar merits are apparent."

Miss Spencer sparkled instantly, her cheeks rosy. "I do wish you would some time tell me about your exploits. Why, Mr. Hampton, perhaps if you were to call upon me, you might see Naida, too. I wish you knew Mr. Moffat, but as you don't, perhaps you might come with Lieut. Brant."

Hampton bowed. "I would hardly venture thus to place myself under the protection of Lieut. Brant, although I must confess the former attractions of the Herndon home are now greatly increased. From my slight knowledge of Mr. Moffat's capabilities, I fear I should be found a rather indifferent entertainer; yet I sincerely hope we shall meet again at a time when I can 'a tale unfold.'"

"How nice that will be, and I am so grateful to you for the promise. By the bye, only this very morning a man stopped me on the street, actually mistaking me for Naida."

"What sort of a looking man, Miss Spencer?"

"Large, and heavily set, with a red beard. He was exceedingly polite when informed of his mistake, and said he merely had a message to deliver to Miss Gillis. But he refused to tell it to me."

The glances of the two men met, but Brant was unable to decipher the meaning hidden within the gray eyes. Neither spoke, and Miss Spencer, never realizing what her chatter meant, rattled merrily on.

"You see there are so many who speak to me now, because of my public position here. So I thought nothing strange at first, until I discovered his mistake, and then it seemed so absurd that I nearly laughed outright. Isn't it odd what such a man could possibly want with her? But really, gentlemen, I must return with my news; Naida will be so anxious. I am glad to have met you both."

Hampton bowed politely, and Brant conducted her silently down the stairway. "I greatly regret not being able to accompany you home," he explained, "but I came down on horseback, and my duty requires that I return at once to the camp."

"Oh, indeed! how very unfortunate for me!" Even as she said so, some unexpected vision beyond flushed her cheeks prettily. "Why, Mr. Wynkoop," she exclaimed, "I am so glad you happened along, and going my way, too, I am sure. Good morning, Lieutenant; I shall feel perfectly safe with Mr. Wynkoop."

CHAPTER XIX. The Door Opens, and Closes Again.

In one sense Hampton had greatly enjoyed Miss Spencer's call. Her bright, fresh face, her impulsive speech, her unquestioned beauty, had had their effect upon him, changing for the time being the gloomy trend of his thoughts.

But gradually the slight smile of amusement faded from his eyes. Something, which he had supposed lay securely hidden behind years and distance, had all at once come back to haunt him—the unhappy ghost of an expiated crime, to do evil to this girl Naida. Two men, at least, knew sufficient of the past to cause serious trouble. This effort by Slavin to hold personal communication with the girl was evidently made for some definite purpose. Hampton decided to have a face-to-face interview with the man himself; he was accustomed to fight his battles in the open, and to a finish. A faint hope, which had been growing dimmer and dimmer with every passing year, began to flicker once again within his heart. He desired to see this man Murphy, and to learn exactly what he knew.

He entered the almost deserted saloon opposite the hotel, across the threshold of which he had not stepped for two years, and the man behind the bar glanced up apprehensively.

"Red Slavin?" he said. "Well, now, see here, Hampton, we don't want no trouble in this shabang."

"I'm not here seeking a fight, Jim," returned the inquirer, genially. "I merely wish to ask 'Red' an unimportant question or two."

"He's there in the back room, I reckon, but he's damn liable to take a pot shot at you when you go in."

Hampton's genial smile only broadened, as he carelessly rolled an unlighted cigar between his lips.

He walked to the door, flung it swiftly and silently open, and stepping within, closed it behind him with his left hand. In the other glittered the steel-blue barrel of a drawn revolver.

"Slavin, sit down!"

The terse, imperative words seemed fairly to cut the air, and the red-bearded gambler, who had half risen to his feet, an oath upon his lips, sank back into his seat, staring at the apparition confronting him as if fascinated.

"Put your hands on the table, and keep them there!" he said. "Now, my dear friend, I have come here in peace, not war, and take these slight precautions merely because I have heard a rumor that you have indulged in a threat or two since we last parted, and I know something of your impetuous disposition. I regret the necessity, but trust you are resting comfortably."

"Oh, go to hell!"

"We will consider that proposition somewhat later," Hampton laid his hat with calm deliberation on the table. "No doubt, Mr. Slavin, if you move that hand again I'll fill your system with lead—you experience some very natural curiosity regarding the object of my unanticipated, yet I hope no less welcome visit."

Slavin's only reply was a curse, his bloodshot eyes roaming the room furiously.

"I suspected as much," Hampton went on, coolly. "Indeed, I should have felt hurt had you been indifferent upon such an occasion. It does me good to see you here."



"Where is Silent Murphy?"

credit to your heart, Slavin. Come now, keep your eyes on me! I was about to gratify your curiosity, and, in the first place, I came to inquire solitously regarding the state of your health during my absence, and incidentally to ask why you are exhibiting so great an interest in Miss Naida Gillis."

Slavin straightened up, his great hands clenching nervously, drops of perspiration appearing on his forehead. "I don't understand your damned fun."

Hampton's lips smiled unpleasantly. "Slavin, you greatly discourage me. The last time I was here you exhibited so fine a sense of humor that I was really quite proud of you. Yet, truly, I think you do understand this joke. Your memory can scarcely be failing at your age—Make another motion like that and you die right there! You know me—However, as you seem to shy over my first question, I'll honor you with a second—Where's Silent Murphy?"

"You devil!" Slavin roared, "what do you mean?"

With revolver hand resting on the table, the muzzle pointing at the giant's heart, Hampton leaned forward, utterly remorseless now, and keen as an Indian on the trail.

"Do you know who I am?"

The horror in Slavin's eyes had changed to sullenness, but he nodded silently.

"How do you know?"

There was no reply, although the thick lips appeared to move.

"Answer me, you red sneak! Do you think I am here to be played with? Answer!"

Slavin gulped down something which seemed threatening to choke him, but he durst not lift a hand to wipe the sweat from his face. "If—I didn't have this beard on you might guess. I thought you knew me all the time."

Hampton stared at him, still puzzled. "I have certainly seen you somewhere. I thought that from the first. Where was it?"

"I was in D Troop, Seventh cavalry."

"D Troop? Brant's troop?"

The big gambler nodded. "That's how I knew you, Captain," he said, speaking with greater ease, "but I never had no reason to say anything about it round here. You was allers decent 'nough ter me."

"Possibly"—and it was plainly evident from his quiet tone Hampton had steeled from his first surprise—"the boot was on the other leg, and you had some good reason not to say anything."

Slavin did not answer, but he wet his lips with his tongue, his eyes on the window.

"Who is the fellow Murphy?"

"He was corporal in that same troop, sir." The ex-cavalryman dropped insensibly into his old form of speech. "He knew you too, and we talked it over, and decided to keep still, because it was none of our affair anyhow."

"Where is he now?"

"He left last night with army dispatches for Cheyenne."

Hampton's eyes hardened perceptibly, and his fingers closed more tightly about the butt of his revolver. "You lie, Slavin! The last message did not reach here until this morning. That fellow is hiding somewhere in this camp, and the two of you have been trying to get at the girl. Now, damn you, what is your little game?"

The big gambler was thinking harder then, perhaps, than he had ever thought in his life before. He knew Hampton would kill him if he needed to do so, but he likewise realized that he was not likely to fire until he had gained the information he was seeking. If he only knew how much information the other possessed it would be easy enough. As he did not, he must wield his weapon blindly.

"You're makin' a devil of a fuss over little or nothin'," he growled, simulating a tone of disgust. "I ain't never had no quarrel with ye, except in fer the way ye managed ter skin me at the table 'bout two years ago. I don't give two sneeches in hell for who you are; an' besides, I reckon you ain't the only ex-convict a-rangin' Dakota either fer the matter o' that. No more does Murphy. We ain't no bloom'n' detectives, an' we ain't buckin' in no business o' yours; ye kin just bet your sweet life on that."

"Where is Murphy, then? I wish to see the fellow."

"I told you he'd gone. Maybe he didn't get away till this mornin', but he's gone now all right. What in thunder do ye want o' him? I reckon I kin tell ye all that Murphy knows."

For a breathless moment neither spoke, Hampton fingering his gun nervously, his eyes lingering on that brutal face.

"Slavin," he said at last, his voice hard, metallic. "I've figured it out, and I do know you now, you lying brute. You are the fellow who swore you saw me throw away the gun that did the shooting, and that afterwards you picked it up."

There was the spirit of murder in his eyes, and the gambler covered back before them, trembling like a child.

"I—I only swore to the last part, Captain," he muttered, his voice scarcely audible. "I—I never said I saw you throw—"

"And I swore," went on Hampton, "that I would kill you on sight. You lying whelp, are you ready to die?"

Slavin's face was drawn and gray, the perspiration standing in beads upon his forehead, but he could neither speak nor think, fascinated by those remorseless eyes, which seemed to burn their way down into his very soul.

"No? Well, then, I will give you, today, just one chance to live—one, you dog—one. Don't move an eyelash! Tell me honestly why you have been trying to get word with the girl, and you shall go out from here living. Lie to me about it, and I am going to kill you where you sit, as I would a mad dog. You know me, Slavin—now speak!"

So intensely still was it, Hampton could distinguish the faint ticking of the watch in his pocket, the hiss of the breath between the giant's clenched teeth. No wretch dragged shrieking to the scaffold could have formed a more pitiful sight, but there was no mercy in the eyes of the man watching him.

"Speak, you cringing hound!"

Slavin gripped his great hands together convulsively, his throat swelling beneath its red beard. He knew there was no way of escape. "I—I had to do it! My God, Captain, I had to do it!"

"I had to, I tell you. Oh, you devil, you fiend! I'm not the one you're after—it's Murphy!"

For a single moment Hampton stared at the cringing figure. Then suddenly he rose to his feet in decision. "Stand up! Lift up your hands first, you fool. Now unclasp your gunbelt with your left hand—your left, I said! Drop it on the floor."

There was an unusual sound behind, such as a rat might have made, and Hampton glanced aside apprehensively. In that single second Slavin was upon him, grasping his pistol-arm at the wrist, and striving with hairy hand to get a death-grip about his throat. Twice Hampton's left drove straight out into that red, glowing face, and then the giant's crushing weight bore him backward. He fought savagely, silently, his slender figure like steel, but Slavin got his grip at last, and with giant strength began to crunch his victim within his vise-like arms. There was a moment of superhuman strain, their breathing mere sobs of exhaustion. Then Slavin slipped, and Hampton succeeded in wriggling partially free from his death grip. It was scarcely an instant, yet it served; for as he bent aside, swinging his burly opponent with him, someone struck a vicious blow at his back; but the descending knife, missing its mark, sunk instead deep into Slavin's breast.

Hampton saw the flash of a blade, a portion of an arm, and then the clutching fingers of Slavin swept him down. He reached out blindly as he fell, his hand closing about the deserted knife-hilt. The two crashed down together upon the floor, the force of the fall driving the blade home to the gambler's heart.

CHAPTER XX. The Cohorts of Judge Lynch.

Hampton staggered blindly to his feet, looking down on the motionless body. For a moment the room appeared to swim before his eyes, and he clutched at the overturned table for support. Then, as his senses returned, he perceived the figures of a number of men jamming the narrow doorway, and became aware of their loud, excited voices. Back to his numbed brain there came with a rush the whole scene, the desperation of his present situation. He had been found alone with the dead man. Those men, when they came surging in attracted by the noise of strife, had found him lying on Slavin, his hand clutching the knife-hilt. He ran his eyes over their horrified faces, and knew instantly they held him the murderer.

The shock of this discovery steadied him. He realized the meaning, the dread, terrible meaning, for he knew the west, its fierce, implacable spirit of vengeance, its merciless code of Lynch-law. The vigilantes of the mining camps were to him an old story; more than once he had witnessed their work, been cognisant of their power. This was no time to parley or to hesitate. He grabbed the loaded

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The County Exchanges

Items of General Interest Selected from the Columns of Contemporaries

Louisville

From the Courier.

Born, to Mr. and Mrs. Fred Wegner, Friday, Feb. 7, a girl.

Louisville always keeps up with the times. We've a case of smallpox.

C. W. Spence was down from Havelock over Sunday visiting with his family.

Wm. Wade continues to load clay from his bank on the Noyes farm southwest of town.

Mrs. William Erickson and son Floyd are here from Atkinson, Neb., visiting with her sister, Mrs. Henry Ahl.

Richard Kraft and sister, Miss Martha, left Monday for Lincoln to take a course in the Cotner University.

Arthur and Jim Masters, the Misses Eller and Dora Eager constituted a theatre party who drove to Plattsmouth Monday evening to see the Land of Nod at the Parme theatre.

Chas. Ahl has purchased a farm in northwestern Kansas and loaded a car containing stock, implements and household goods and started for his new home this week. His family will follow in a few weeks, or as soon as Charley gets his house in readiness.

Suffering and Dollars Saved

E. S. Loper, of Marilla, N. Y., says: "I am a carpenter and have had many severe cuts healed by Bucklin's Arnica Salve. It has saved me suffering and dollars. It is by far the best healing salve I have ever found." Heals burning sores, ulcers, fever sores, eczema, and piles. 25c at F. C. Fricke & Co's drug-store.

Union

From the Platt.

Chas. Wilkens, the Plattsmouth cigar salesman and base ball enthusiast, was in town yesterday.

Fred Clark and wife have cause to rejoice, because a fine little boy baby registered at their home last Friday, Jan. 31.

Mrs. Lee Applegate arrived home Monday from Cedar Rapids, Neb., where she visited Red Baker and family a few weeks.

Jesse K. Pell and wife are happy on account of a recent addition to their family circle, a new daughter born Wednesday, Jan. 29.

John S. Buck of Colfax, Wash., who has been visiting his relatives and friends here, left yesterday for Hot Spring, S. D., where his wife has been taking treatment, and in a few days they will return to their home on the Pacific coast.

Agent L. R. Black was billed to "bad order shops" Sunday, having a severe cold that knocked him off duty for a day but Tuesday morning he bobbed up wearing his smile that won't rub off and cannot be duplicated by any other man.

G. N. LaRue and wife have sold to Mary Ella Davis for \$800 lots 8 and 9 in block 2, being the lots where the blacksmith shop stands on the north side of main street.

John Chalfant and son Dan departed Tuesday for the blue grass country down in "Old Kentucky," intending to spend about two weeks with relatives at Lexington and in other parts of the state.

Elmwood

From the Leader-Echo.

E. B. Lambert resigned his position as clerk with L. E. Langhorst Monday evening. He has not yet decided what he will do.

On Tuesday evening, Feb. 18th, Crescent lodge No. 91, Knights of Pythias, will celebrate the 45th anniversary of the order. All members and their wives are cordially invited.

A. Bickert has been quite sick the past week with la grippe. Mrs. Bickert, although improving, is still confined to her bed.

For a consideration of \$3800.00 L. F. Langhorst has purchased the former Dr. Hobbs property. The residence, barn and five lots were purchased by Mr. Langhorst.

Charlie Groves and family will move to Cambridge, Neb., next week where Charlie has purchased land and they will make their future home. Fred Manners will tend the farm they vacate.

Frank W. Lorenz, our new hardware man, has purchased the L. F. Langhorst residence property on West Hill, possession to be given March 1st. We understand the consideration was \$3200.00.

Miss Jennie Justice and Miss Sadie Justice, of Nebraska City, were here this week to assist in caring for their sister, Mrs. Owens. At present writing we are pleased to report Mrs. Owens some better.

Nehawka

From the Register.

David C. Tucker arrived Tuesday from his home near Alva, Oklahoma, for a visit to his relatives. He reports good times there, likes the county very much.

Professor De Bolt from Murdock, was here on Saturday attending the teachers meeting, and was so interested in the work of some of the teachers that he remained over Sunday.

Mrs. Rebecca Alford left on Friday of last week for Oskaloosa, Iowa, where she will enter the hospital for treatment by Dr. Wilcox. She was accompanied by her son Robert as far as Omaha.

John, Stuart, William and Alex Rough were passengers for Lincoln on Monday morning. The boys were all together at a reunion at the home of Stuart on Sunday and went up on a business trip together.

Zach Shrader returned from Furnas county Monday morning where he had been taking out a carload of feeder cattle. He reports a pretty rough piece of weather last Friday and Saturday.

L. C. Todd went to Omaha last Thursday to attend a sale of short horn cattle and purchased three pedigreed cows with calves. They arrived last Saturday, and they were what you would call "beauts."

Morris D. Pollard blew in Wednesday morning, coming from Vermont by the way of New Orleans. He expects to stop about three weeks. It looks natural to see "Cully" circumambulating the streets of Nehawka.