

BOB HAMPTON of PLACER

By **RAN. WALL PARRISH** AUTHOR OF
"WHEN WILDERNESS WAS KING" "MY LADY OF THE NORTH"
"HISTORIC ILLINOIS, ETC."



could I have ever been so blind? I thought Mr. Moffat and Mr. McNeil were such heroes, and yet now in this hour of desperate peril it is you who flew gallantly to my rescue! It is you who are the true western knight!"

CHAPTER XXV. The Parting Hour.

To Lieut. Brant these proved days of bitterness. He had called twice upon Hampton, both times finding the wounded man propped up in bed, very affable, properly grateful for services rendered, yet avoiding all reference to the one disturbing element between them.

Once he had accidentally met Naida, but their brief conversation left him more deeply mystified than ever, and later she seemed to avoid him altogether. One day he deemed her but an idle coquette; the next, a warm-hearted woman, doing her duty bravely. Yet through it all her power over him never slackened.

The end of this nervous strain came in the form of an urgent dispatch recalling N troop to Fort Abraham Lincoln by forced marches. The commander felt no doubt as to the full meaning of this message, and the soldier in him made prompt and joyful response. Brant had learned of the consolidation of the hostile savages, incited by Sitting Bull, into the fastness of the Big Horn range; he was aware that Gen. Cook was already advancing northward from the Nebraska line. Now he realized that he was to be a part of this chosen fighting force and his heart responded to the summons as to a bugle call in battle.

Instantly the little camp was astir, the men feeling the enthusiasm of their officers. With preparations well in hand, Brant's thoughts veered once again toward Naida. He rode down to the Herndon house with grave face and sober thought. He recalled long the plainly furnished room into which Mrs. Herndon ushered him to await the girl's appearance—the formal look of the old-fashioned hair-cloth furniture, the prim striped paper on the walls, the green shades at the windows, the clean rag carpet on the floor. The very stiffness chilled him, left him ill at ease. Then he heard the rustle of Naida's skirt and turned to meet her. She was pale from her weeks of nursing, and agitated for fear of what this unexpected call might portend. Yet to his thought she appeared calm, her manner restrained. Nor could anything be kinder than her first greeting, the frankly extended hand, the words expressive of welcome.

"Mr. Wynkoop informed me a few minutes ago that you had at last received your orders for the north," she said, her lips slightly trembling. "I wondered if you would leave without a word of farewell."

He bowed low. "I do not understand how you could doubt, for I have shown my deep interest in you even from the first. If I have lately seemed to avoid you, it has only been because I believed you wished it so."

There was an embarrassing pause, as though neither knew how to get through the interview.

"No doubt you are rejoiced to be sent on active service again," she said, at last.

"Yes, both as a soldier and as a man, Miss Naida. I am glad to get into the field again with my regiment, to do my duty under the flag, and I am equally rejoiced to have something occur which will tend to divert my thoughts. I had not intended to say anything of this kind, but now that I am with you I simply cannot restrain the words. This past month has been, I believe, the hardest I have ever been compelled to live through. You simply mystify me so that I alternately hope and despair. Your methods are cruel."

"Mine?" and she gazed at him with parted lips. "Lieut. Brant, what can you mean? What is it I have done?"

"It may have been only play to you and so easily forgotten," he went on, bitterly. "But that is a dangerous game, very certain to hurt some one. Miss Naida, your face, your eyes, even your lips almost continually tell me one thing; your words another. I know not which to trust. I never meet you except to go away baffled and bewildered."

"You wish to know the truth?"

"Ay, and for all time! Are you false or true? Coquette or woman? Do you simply play with hearts for idle amusement or is there some true purpose ruling your actions?"

She looked directly at him, her hands clasped, her breath almost sobbing between the parted lips. At first she could not speak. "Oh, you hurt me so," she faltered at last. "I did not suppose you could ever think that. I—I did not mean it; oh, truly I did not mean it! You forget how young I am; how very little I know of the world and its ways. Perhaps I have not even realized how deeply in earnest you were, have deceived myself into believing you were merely

amusing yourself with me. Why, indeed, should I think otherwise?"

"I love you," he said, with simple honesty. "I seek you for my wife."

She started at these frankly spoken words, her hands partially concealing her face, her form trembling. "Oh, I wish you hadn't said that! It is not because I doubt you any longer; not that I fail to appreciate all you offer me. But it is so hard to appear ungrateful, to give nothing in return for so vast a gift."

"Then it is true that you do not love me?"

The blood flamed suddenly up into her face, but there was no lowering of the eyes, no shrinking back. She was too honest to play the coward before him.

"I shall not attempt to deceive you," she said, with a slow impressiveness instantly carrying conviction. "This has already progressed so far that I now owe you complete frankness. Donald Brant, now and always, living or dead, married or single, wherever life may take us, I shall love you."

Their eyes were meeting, but she held up her hand to restrain him from the one step forward.

"No, no; I have confessed the truth; I have opened freely to you the great secret of my heart. With it you must be content to leave me. There is nothing more that I can give you, absolutely nothing. I can never be your wife; I hope, for your sake and mine, that we never meet again."

Brant stood like a statue, his face grown white. He did not in the least doubt her full meaning of renunciation.

"You will, at least, tell me why?" It was all that would come to his dry lips.

She sank back upon the sofa as though the strength had suddenly deserted her body, her eyes shaded by an uplifted hand.

"I cannot tell you. I have no words, no courage. You will learn some day from others, and be thankful that I loved you well enough to resist temptation. But the reason cannot come to you from my lips."

He leaned forward, half kneeling at her feet, and she permitted him to clasp her hands within both his own. "Tell me, at least, this—is it some one else? Is it Hampton?"

She smiled at him through a mist of tears, a smile the sad sweetness of which he would never forget. "In the sense you mean, no. No living man stands between us, not even Bob Hampton."

"Does he know why this cannot be?"

"He does know, but I doubt if he will ever reveal his knowledge; certainly not to you. He has not told me all, even in the hour when he thought himself dying. I am convinced of that. It is not because he dislikes you, Lieut. Brant, but because he knew his partial revelation of the truth was a duty he owed us both."

"You leave me so completely in the dark," he said; "is there no possibility that this mysterious obstacle can ever be removed?"

"None. It is beyond earthly power—there lies between us the shadow of a dead man."

He stared at her as if doubting her sanity.

"A dead man! Not Gillis?"

"No, it is not Gillis. I have told you this much so that you might comprehend how impossible it is for us to change our fate. It is irrevocably fixed. Please do not question me any more. I cannot bear it!"

Brant rose to his feet and stood looking down upon her bowed head, her slender figure shaken by sobs.

"Naida, as you have asked it, I will go; but I go better, stronger, because I have heard your lips say you love me. I am going now, my sweetheart, but if I live I shall come again. I know nothing of what you mean about a dead man being between us, but I shall know when I come back, for dead or alive, no man shall remain between me and the girl I love."

"This—is this different," she sobbed, "different; it is beyond your power."

"I shall never believe so until I have faced it for myself, nor will I even say good-by, for, under God, I am coming back to you."

He turned slowly and walked away. As his hand touched the latch of the door he paused and looked longingly back.

"Naida."

She glanced up at him.

"You kissed me once; will you again?"

She rose silently and crossed over to him, her hands held out, her eyes uplifted to his own. Neither spoke as he drew her gently to him and their lips met.

"Say it once more, sweetheart?"

"Donald, I love you."

A moment they stood thus face to face, reading the great lesson of eternity within the depths of each other's eyes. Then slowly, gently, she released herself from the clasp of his strong arms.

"You believe in me now? You do not go away blaming me?" she questioned, with quivering lips.

"There is no blame, for you are do-

ing what you think right. But I am coming back, Naida, little woman; coming back to love and you."

An hour later N troop trotted across the rude bridge and circled the bluff on its way toward the wide plains.

CHAPTER XXVI. Mr. Hampton Resolves.

Mr. Bob Hampton stood in the bright sunshine on the steps of the hotel, his appreciative gaze wandering up the long, dusty, unoccupied street, and finally rising to the sweet face of the young girl who occupied the step above. As their eyes met both smiled as if they understood each other.

"There is nothing quite equal to feeling well, little girl," he said, gently, patting her hand where it rested on the railing, "and I really believe I am in as fine fettle now as I ever have been. Do you know, I believe I'm perfectly fit to undertake that little detective operation casually mentioned to you a few days ago. It's got to be done, and the sooner I get at it the easier I'll feel. Fact is, I put in a large portion of the night thinking out my plans."

"I wish you would give it up all together, Bob," she said, anxiously. "I shall be so dull and lonely here while you are gone."

"I reckon you will, for a fact, but, Naida, it isn't likely this little affair will require very long, and things are lots happier between us since my late shooting scrape. When fall comes I mean to take you east and put you in some good finishing school. Don't care quite as much about it as you did, do you?"

"Yes, I think I do, Bob." She strove bravely to express enthusiasm. "The trouble is, I am so worried over your going off alone hunting after that man."

He laughed, his eyes searching her face for the truth. "Well, little girl, he won't exactly be the first I've had to go after. Besides, this is a particular case, and appeals to me in a sort of personal way. If you only knew it, you're about as deeply concerned in the result as I am, and as for me, I can never rest easy again until the matter is over with."

"It's that awful Murphy, isn't it?"

"He's the one I'm starting after first and one sight at his right hand will decide whether he is to be the last as well."

"I never supposed you would seek revenge, like a savage," she remarked, quietly. "You never used to be that way."

"Good Lord, Naida, do you think I'm low down enough to go out hunting that poor cuss merely to get even with him for trying to stick me with a knife? Why, there are 20 others who have done as much, and we have been the best of friends afterwards. Oh, no, lassie, it means more than that, and harks back many a long year. I told you I saw a mark on his hand I would never forget—but I saw that mark first 15 years ago. This is a duty I owe a friend, a dead friend, to run to earth this murderer. Do you understand now? The fellow who did that shooting up at Bethune 15 years ago had the same sort of a mark on his right hand as this one who killed Slavin. That's why I'm after him and when I catch up he'll either squeal or die."

"But how do you know?"

"I never told you the whole story and I don't mean to now until I come back and can make everything perfectly clear. It wouldn't do you any good the way things stand now, and would only make you uneasy. But if you do any praying over it, my girl, pray good and hard that I may discover some means for making that fellow squeal."

She made no response but stood gazing thoughtfully past him.

"Have you heard anything lately, Bob, about the Seventh?" she asked finally. "Since—since N troop left here?"

He answered with well-simulated carelessness. "No; but it is most likely they are well into the game by this time. Crook's column, I have just heard, was overwhelmingly attacked on the Rosebud, and forced to fall back. That leaves the Seventh to take the brunt of it, and there is going to be hell up north presently, or I've forgotten all I ever knew about Indians. But come, little girl, as I said, I'm quite likely to be off before night, provided I am fortunate enough to strike a fresh trail. Under such conditions you won't mind my kissing you out here, will you?"

She held up her lips and he touched them softly with his own. Her eyes were tear-dimmed. "Oh, Bob, I hate so to let you go," she sobbed, clinging to him.

"Don't, I Love You."

ing to him. "No one could have been more to me than you have been, and you are all I have left in the world. Everything I care for goes away from me. Life is so hard, so hard!"

"Yes, little girl, I know," and the man stroked her hair tenderly, his own voice faltering. "It's all hard; I learned that sad lesson long ago, but

I've tried to make it a little bit easier for you since we first came together. Still, I don't see how I can possibly help this. I've been hunting after that fellow a long while now, a matter of 15 years over a mighty dim trail, and it would be a mortal sin to permit him to get away scot-free. Besides, if this affair only manages to turn out right, I can promise to make you the happiest girl in America. But, Naida, dear, don't cling to me so; it is not at all like you to break down in this fashion," and he gently unclasped her hands, holding her away from him

while he continued to gaze hungrily into her troubled face.

"Sometimes I feel just like a coward, Bob. It's the woman of it; yet truly I wish to do whatever you believe to be best. But, Bob, I need you so much, and you will come back, won't you? I shall be so lonely here, for—you are truly all I have in the world."

With one quick, impulsive motion he pressed her to him, passionately kissing the tears from her lowered lashes, unable longer to conceal the tremor that shook his own voice. "Never, never doubt it, lassie. It will not take me long, and if I live I come straight back."

He watched her slender, white-robed figure as it passed slowly down the deserted street. Once only she paused and waved back to him and he returned instant response, although scarcely realizing the act.

"Poor little lonely girl! Perhaps I ought to have told her the whole infernal story, but I simply haven't got the nerve, the way it reads now. If I can only get it straightened out, it'll be different."

Mechanically he thrust an unlighted cigar between his teeth and descended the steps, to all outward appearance the same reckless, audacious Hampton as of old.

The military telegraph occupied one-half of the small tent next the Miners' Retreat, and the youthful operator instantly recognized his debonaire visitor.

"Well, Billy," was Hampton's friendly greeting, "are they keeping you fairly busy with wars and rumors of wars' these days?"

"Nuthin' doin' just now," was the cheerful reply. "Everythin' goin' ter Cheyenne. The Injuns are gittin' themselves bottled up in the Big Horn country."

"Oh, that's it? Then maybe you might manage to rush a message through for me to Fort A. Lincoln without discommoding Uncle Sam?" and Hampton placed a coin upon the rough table.

"Sure; write it out."

"Here it is; now get it off early, my lad, and bring the answer to me over at the hotel. There'll be another yellow boy waiting when you come."

The reply arrived some two hours later.

Fort A. Lincoln, June 17, 1876. Hampton, Glencold.

Seventh gone west; probably Yellowstone. Grant with them. Murphy, government scout, at Cheyenne waiting orders. BITTON, Commanding.

He crushed the paper in his hand, thinking—thinking of the past, the present, the future. He had borne much in these last years, much misrepresentation, much loneliness of soul. To run this Murphy to cover remained his final hope for retrieving those dead, dark years. Ay, and there was Naida! Her future, scarcely less than his own, hung trembling in the balance. The sudden flashing of that name into his brain was like an electric shock. He cursed his inactivity. Great! had he become a child again, to tremble before imagined evil, a mere hobgoblin of the mind? He had already wasted time enough; now he must wring from the lips of that misshapen savage the last vestige of his secret.

He dressed for the road, for hard, exacting service, buckling his loaded cartridge belt outside his rough coat and testing his revolvers with unusual care. He spoke a few parting words of instruction to Mrs. Guffy and went quietly out. Ten minutes later he was in the saddle, galloping down the dusty stage road toward Cheyenne.

CHAPTER XXVII.
The Trail of Silent Murphy.

The young infantryman who had been detailed for the important service of telegraph operator sat in the Cheyenne office, his feet on the rude table, his face buried behind a newspaper.

"Could you inform me where I might find Silent Murphy, a government scout?"

The voice had the unmistakable ring of military authority, and the soldier operator instinctively dropped his feet to the floor.

"Well, my lad, you are not dumb, are you?"

The telegrapher's momentary hesitation vanished; his ambition to become a martyr to the strict laws of service secrecy was not sufficiently strong to cause him to take the doubtful chances of a lie. "He was here, but has gone."

"Where?"

"The devil knows. He rode north, carrying dispatches for Custer."

"When?"

"Oh, three or four hours ago."

Hampton swore softly but fervently, behind his clinched teeth.

"Where is Custer?"

"Don't know exactly. Supposed to be with Terry and Gibbons, somewhere near the mouth of the Powder, although he may have left there by this time, moving down the Yellowstone. Murphy's orders were to intercept his column somewhere between the Rosebud and the Big Horn. No other scout along this border would take such a detail. But that old devil of a Murphy just enjoys such a trip.



ROYAL Baking Powder

The only Baking Powder made with Royal Grape Cream of Tartar—made from grapes—

Insures healthful and delicious food for every home—every day

Safeguards your food against alum and phosphorus



The County Exchanges

Items of General Interest Selected from the Columns of Contemporaries

Louisville

From the Courier.

Isaac Reichart is still quite low with erysipelas and stomach trouble.

Miss Bertha Geohry has returned from her home at Murdock and reopened her millinery store here.

Mrs. W. F. Krecklow is reported improving slowly and is now considered on a fair road to recovery.

Station Agent Starkey, of the Burlington, was called to Seward the forepart of the week on company business.

Prof. Games delivered a lecture at the Y. M. C. A., in Omaha, Sunday afternoon, returning home Monday morning by way of Ashland.

Mr. and Mrs. M. E. Williams returned from Oklahoma Thursday. During their absence, where they went to visit their son, Mrs. Williams was taken seriously ill. Her old time friends in Cass county will be pleased to learn of her recovery.

In just three days after the accident in which John H. Thomas had his wagon mashed up by a Burlington train, the company sent a claim agent to call on Mr. Thomas and settle the damage. Mr. Thomas received a check for \$66, the amount he asked for.

What to Do When Bilious

The right thing to do when you feel bilious is to take a dose of Chamberlain's Stomach and Liver Tablets. They will cleanse the stomach and regulate the liver and bowels. Try it. Price 25c. Samples free at F. G. Fricke & Co's drugstore.

Elmwood

From the Leader-Echo.

Henry Bischoff's oldest boy is seriously ill with pneumonia.

Marjorie Stark has been a sufferer from rheumatism the past week.

Isaac Mairs is slowly recovering from a very severe attack of the grippe.

The ten year old son of John Van-Akern is quite sick with pneumonia.

Walter Branson, who has been seriously ill for several days with typhoid fever, is improving.

Miss Mary Foster, county superintendent was an Elmwood visitor Monday and Tuesday.

Mrs. Sarah DelesDernier, who has been seriously ill with pneumonia, is considerable better.

Mrs. Sarah Stanford was taken very sick with pneumonia Wednesday night becoming unconscious soon after, in which condition she still remains. At time of going to press she was very low and but slight hopes are entertained for her recovery.

Our old friend H. D. Wall suffered a severe stroke of paralysis at an early hour Wednesday morning, his entire left side being affected. Mr. Wall is 79 years of age and up to this time has been very active. His physician says he will recover if he does not receive any more strokes.

Earl Cassel and Miss Jessie Waldron were married Wednesday at Waterloo, Neb. The Leader-Echo joins with their many friends in this community in extending hearty congratulations. It is understood that the groom will engage in the grocery and confectionary business in some northern Nebraska town.

Nehawka

From the Register.

Earl and Roy Davis came in on the Wednesday morning train from Vivian, S. D., to attend the funeral of their sister, Mrs. Joyce Lyman.

Robert Lyle and children returned from their trip to Canada Wednesday morning. He reports the east is experiencing plenty of bad weather and floods too.

Mrs. Charles Bates was called to My-nard last Friday by the death of her Uncle, Charles Morgan, who died at that place from blood poison, and whose funeral took place Saturday.

Professor DeBolt, the man who bosses the Murdock schools was an over Sunday visitor in this village last week. We understand that he came down on business.

Last Sunday afternoon, Mrs. Joyce Davis-Lyman passed away. She was buried yesterday at Mt. Pleasant cemetery, the funeral having been deferred until her brothers could arrive from S. Dakota. At the request of the family, the obituary will not be published until next week.

John Lloyd and family stayed Monday night at the home of Geo. McReynolds and took the early train for Beatrice, where they will try city life for a while. Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd have lived on their farm northeast of here for a number of years and leave many warm friends who regret their departure.

W. F. Case and wife came down Saturday evening for a farewell visit with H. F. Kropp, before going to their new home at Holbrook. They will start next week. While here Mr. Case informed us that a few days before he had received the sad intelligence that his brother, Melvin, who is known to many old settlers, had passed away at his home, White Salmon, in Washington.

Skin Disease of Twenty Years Standing Cured

I want you to know how much Chamberlain's Salve has done for me. It has cured my face of a skin disease of almost twenty years' standing. I have been treated by several as smart physicians as we have in this country and they did me no good, but two boxes of this salve has cured me.—Mrs. Fannie Griffin, Troy, Ala. Chamberlain's Salve is for sale by F. G. Fricke & Co.

In Honor of Their Friend.

The little friends of Miss Hulda Julian of Omaha took advantage of her visit in the city last evening and gave her a surprise, at which they had a merry time. The affair occurred at the home of her grand parents, Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Barwick. Games which please the young folks were popular at this gathering and delicate refreshments were served which were enjoyed by all. Those to enjoy the occasion were Hilda Julian of Omaha, Leona Toogood, Ethel Alix, George Toman, Mirza Lee Alstrand, Ruth Moffit, Carl Moffit Russell Phebus and Geo. Alix.

Land for Sale

Anyone wanting to locate in Lincoln county can secure some good bargains by seeing me. CHAS. PIPER.