

BOB HAMPTON of PLACER

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



He started off as happy as ever I see him.

"How far will he have to ride?"

"Oh, 'bout 300 miles as the crow flies, a little west of north, and the better part of the distance, they tell me, it's almighty rough country for night work. But then Murphy, he knows the way all right. Sorry you didn't come along a little earlier," he said, genially. "Do you know Murphy?"

"I'm not quite certain. Did you happen to notice a peculiar black scar on the back of his right hand?"

"Sure; looks like the half of a pear. He said it was powder under the skin."

A new look of reviving determination swept into Hampton's gloomy eyes—beyond doubt this must be his man.

"How many horses did he have?"

"Two."

"Did you overhear him say anything definite about his plans for the trip?"

"What, him? He never talks, that fellow. He can't do nothing but sputter if he tries. But I wrote out his orders, and they give him to the 25th to make the Big Horn. You wasn't planning to strike out after him, was you?"

"I might risk it if I only thought I could overtake him within two days; my business is of some importance."

"Well, stranger, I should reckon you might do that with a doggone good outfit. Murphy's sure to take things pretty easy to-day, and he's almost certain to follow the old mining trail as far as the ford over the Belle Fourche, and that's plain enough to travel. Beyond that point the devil only knows where he will go, for then is when his hard ridin' begins."

The moment the operator mentioned that odd scar on Murphy's hand, every vestige of hesitation vanished. Beyond any possibility of doubt he was on the right scent this time. Murphy was riding north upon a mission as desperate as ever man was called upon to perform. The chance of his coming forth alive from that Indian-haunted land was, as the operator truthfully said, barely one out of a hundred. To the end, to the death if need were, he would follow!

The memory of his old plain craft would not permit any neglect of the few necessities for the trip. He bought without haggling over prices, but insisted on the best. So it was four in the afternoon when he finally struck into the trail leading northward. He rode a mettlesome, half-broken bronco, a wicked-eyed brute, which required to be conquered twice within the first hour of travel; a second and more quiet animal trailed behind at the end of a lariat, bearing the necessary equipment.

He had, by persistent questioning, acquired considerable information, during that busy hour spent in Cheyenne, regarding the untracked regions lying before him, as well as the character and disposition of the man he pursued. Both by instinct and training he was able to comprehend those brief hints that must prove of vast benefit in the pathless wilderness.

The night was already dark, but stars were gleaming brilliantly overhead, and the trail remained easily traceable. It became terribly lonely on that wilderness stretching away for unknown leagues in every direction, yet Hampton scarcely noted this, so watchful was he lest he miss the trail. To his judgment, Murphy would not be likely to ride during the night until after he had crossed the Fourche. There was no reason to suspect that there were any hostile Indians south of that stream, and probably therefore the old scout would endeavor to conserve his own strength and that of his horses, for the more perilous travel beyond.

About midnight, the trail becoming obscure, the rider made camp, confident he must have already gained heavily on the man he pursued. He lariat his horses and flinging himself down on some soft turf, almost immediately dropped asleep. He was up again before daylight, and, after a hasty meal, pressed on. The nature of the country had changed considerably, becoming more broken, the view circumscribed by towering cliffs and deep ravines.

Late in the afternoon he reined up his horse and gazed forward into a broad valley, bounded with precipitous bluffs. The trail led directly down toward where a considerable stream of water shone silvery in the sun, half concealed behind a fringe of willows. And yonder, close in against those distant willows, some black dots were moving. Hampton glued his anxious eyes to the glass. The leveled tubes clearly revealed a man on horseback, leading another horse. The animals were walking. There could be little doubt that this was Silent Murphy.

Hampton lariat his tired horses behind the bluff and returned to the summit, lying flat upon the ground, with the field-glass at his eyes. The distant figures passed slowly forward into the midst of the willows, and for half an hour the patient watcher scanned the surface of the stream be-

yond, but there was no sign of attempted passage. The sun sank lower and finally disappeared behind those desolate ridges to the westward. Hampton's knowledge of plaincraft rendered Murphy's actions sufficiently clear. This was the Fourche; beyond those waters lay the terrible peril of Indian raiders. Further advance must be made by swift, secret night riding, and never-ceasing vigilance. This was what Murphy had been saving himself and his horses for. Beyond conjecture, he was resting now within the shadows of those willows, studying the opposite shore and making ready for the dash northward. Hampton believed he would linger thus for some time after dark, to see if Indian fires would afford any guidance. Confident of this, he passed back to his horses, rubbed them down with grass, and then ate his lonely supper, not venturing to light a fire, certain that Murphy's eyes were scanning every inch of skyline.

Darkness came rapidly, while Hampton sat planning again the details of his night's work. Then, with the two animals trailing cautiously behind, he felt his slow way on foot down the steep bluff, into the denser blackness of the valley.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The Haunting of a Crime.

Murphy rested on his back in the midst of a thicket of willows, wide awake, yet not quite ready to ford the Fourche and plunge into the dense shadows shrouding the northern shore. Crouched behind a log, he had so far yielded unto temptation as to light his pipe.

Murphy had been amid just such unpleasant environments many times before, and the experience had grown somewhat prosaic. Even Indian-scouting degenerates into a commonplace at last. So Murphy puffed contentedly at his old pipe.

But suddenly there was the faint crackle of a branch to his left, and one hand instantly closed over his pipe bowl, the other grasping the heavy revolver at his hip. There came a plain, undisguised rustling in the grass—some prowling coyote, probably; then his tense muscles immediately relaxed, and he cursed himself for being so startled, yet he continued to grasp the "45" in his right hand, his eyes alert.

"Murphy!"

That single word, hurled thus unex-

pectedly out of the black night, startled him more than would a volley of rifles. He sprang half erect, then as swiftly crouched behind a willow, utterly unable to articulate. For the instant his very blood ran cold; he appeared to shrivel up.

"Oh, come, Murphy; speak up, man; I know you're in here."

That terror of the unknown instantly vanished. This was the familiar language of the world, and, however the fellow came to be there, it was assuredly a man who spoke.

"Who—the hell—are ye?" he blurted out.

The visitor laughed, the bushes rustling as he pushed toward the sound of the voice. "It's all right, old boy. Gave ye quite a scare, I reckon."

Murphy could now dimly perceive the other advancing through the intervening willows, and his Colt shot up to the level. "Stop!—ye take another—step an' I'll—let drive. Ye tell me—first—who ye be."

The invader paused, but he realized the nervous finger pressing the trigger and made haste to answer. "It's all right, I tell ye. I'm one o' Terry's scouts."

"Ye are? Jist the same—I've heard—yer voice—afore."

"Likely'nough. I saw service in the Seventh."

Murphy was still a trifle suspicious. "How'd ye git yere? How'd ye come ter know—whar I was?"

The man laughed again. "Sorter hurts yer professional feelins, don't it, old feller, to be dropped in on in this unceremonious way? But it was dead easy, old man. Ye see I happened thro' Cheyenne only a couple o' hours behind ye, with a bunch o' papers fer the Yellowstone. The trail's plain enough out this far, and I loped long at a pretty fair hickory, so that I was

up on the bluff yonder, and saw ye go into camp yere just afore dark. You was a-keepin' yer eyes skinned across the Fourche, and naturally didn't expect no callers from them hills behind. The rest was nuthin', an' here I am. It's a darn sight pleasanter ter hev company travellin', ter my notion. Now kin I cum on?"

Murphy reluctantly lowered his Colt, every movement betraying annoyance. "I reckon. But I'd—a damn sight—rather risk it—alone."

The stranger came forward without further hesitation. The night was far too dark to reveal features, but to Murphy's strained vision the newcomer appeared somewhat slender in build, and of good height.

"Whar'd—ye say ye—was bound?"

"Mouth o' the Powder. We kin ride together fer a night or two."

"Ye kin—do as ye—please, but—I ain't a huntin'—no company,—an' I'm a—goin'—cross now."

He advanced a few strides toward his horses. Then suddenly he gave vent to a smothered cry, so startling as to cause the stranger to spring hastily after him.

"Oh! My God! Oh! Look there!"

"What is it, man?"

"There! there! The picture! Don't you see?"

"Naw; I don't see nuthin'. Ye ain't gone cracked, hev ye? Whose picture?"

"It's there!—O Lord!—it's there! My God! can't ye see?—An' it's his face—all a-gleamin' with green flames—Holy Mary—an' I ain't seen it—afore in—15 year!"

He seemed suddenly to collapse, and the stranger permitted him to drop limp to the earth.

"Darn if I kin see anythin', old man, but I'll scout 'round that a bit, jest ter ease yer mind, an' see whar I kin skeer up."

He had hardly taken a half dozen steps before Murphy called after him: "Don't—don't go an' leave me—it's not there now—thet's queer!"

The other returned and stood gazing down upon his huddled figure. "You're a fine scout! afeard o' spooks. Do ye take these yere turns often? Fer if ye do, I reckon as how I'd sooner be ridin' alone."

Murphy struggled to his feet and gripped the other's arm. "Never hed nuthin' like it—afore. But—but it was thar—all creepin'—an' green—ain't seen thet face—in 15 year."

"Whar face?"

"A—fellow I knew—once. He—hed's dead."

The other grunted disdainfully. "Bad luck ter see them sort, he volunteered, solemnly. "Blame glad it warn't me ee see it, an' I don't know as I keer much right now 'bout keepin' company with ye fer very long. However, I reckon if either of us calculates on doin' much ridin' tonight, we better stop foolin' with ghosts, an' go ter saddlin' up."

They made rapid work of it, the newcomer proving somewhat loquacious, yet holding his voice to a judicious whisper. It was he who led the way down the bank, the four horses slowly splashing through the shallow water to the northern shore. Before them stretched a broad plain, the surface rocky and uneven, the northern stars obscured by ridges of higher land. Murphy promptly gave his horse the spur, never once glancing behind, while the other imitated his example, holding his animal well in check, being apparently the better mounted.

They rode silently. The way became more broken and rough as they advanced, causing them to exercise greater caution. Flying clouds obscured the stars, yet through the rifts they caught fleeting glimpses sufficient to hold them to their course. And the encroaching hills swept in closer upon either hand, leaving them groping their way between as in a pocket, yet ever advancing north.

Finally they attained to the steep bank of a considerable stream, found the water of sufficient depth to compel swimming, and crept up the opposite shore dripping and miserable, yet with ammunition dry. Murphy stood swearing disjointedly, wiping the blood from a wound in his forehead where the jagged edge of a rock had broken the skin, but suddenly stopped with a quick intake of breath that left him panting. The other man crept toward him, leading his horse.

"What is it now?" he asked, gruffly.

"Hev ye got 'em agin'?"

The dazed old scout stared, pointing directly across the other's shoulder, his arm shaking desperately. "It's thar!—an' it's his face! Oh, God!—I know it—15 year."

The man glanced backward into the pitch darkness, but without moving his body.

"There's nuthin' out there, less it's a firefly," he insisted, in a tone of contempt. "You're plum crazy, Murphy; the night's got on yer nerves. What is it ye think ye see?"

"His face, I tell ye! Don't I know? It's all green and ghasly, with snaky flames playin' about it! But I know; 15 years, an' I ain't fergot."

He sank down feebly—sank until he was on his knees, his head craned forward. The man watching touched the miserable, hunched-up figure compassionately, and it shook beneath his hand, endeavoring to shrink away.

"My God! was thet you? I thought it was him—a-reachin' fer me. Here, let me take yer hand. Oh, Lord! An' can't ye see? It's just there beyond them horses—all green, crawlin', devilish—but it's him."

"Who?"

"Brant! Brant—15 year!"

"Brant? Fifteen years? Do you mean Maj. Brant, the one Nolan killed over at Bethune?"

"He—hed didn't—"

The old man heaved forward, his head rocking from side to side; then suddenly he toppled over on his face, gasping for breath. His companion

caught him and ripped open the heavy flannel shirt. Then he strode savagely across in front of his shrinking horse, tore down the flaring picture, and hastily thrust it into his pocket, the light of the phosphorous with which it had been rubbed being reflected for a moment on his features.

"A dirty, miserable, low-down trick," he muttered. "Poor old devil! Yet I've got to do it for the little girl."

He stumbled back through the darkness, his hat filled with water, and dashed it into Murphy's face. "Come on, Murphy! There's one good thing 'bout spooks; they don't hang 'round fer long at a time. Likely es not this 'un is gone by now. Brace up, man, for you an' I have got ter get out o' here afore mornin'!"

Then Murphy grasped his arm and drew himself slowly to his feet.

"Don't see nuthin' now, do ye?"

"No. Where's my—horse?"

The other silently reached him the loose rein, marking as he did so the quick, nervous peering this way and that, the starting at the slightest sound.

"Did ye say, Murphy, as how it wasn't Nolan after all who plugged the major?"

"I'm damned—if I did. Who—else was it?"

"Why, I dunno. Sorter blamed odd though, that ghost should be a-hauntin' ye. Darn if it ain't creepy 'nough ter make a feller believe most anythin'."

Murphy drew himself up heavily into his saddle. Then all at once he shoved the muzzle of a "45" into the other's face. "Ye say nuther word—'bout thet, an' I'll make—a ghost outer ye—blame lively. Now, ye shet up—if ye ride with me."

They moved forward at a walk and reached a higher level, across which the night wind swept, bearing a touch of cold in its breath as though coming from the snow-capped mountains to the west. There was renewed life in this invigorating air and Murphy spurred forward, his companion pressing steadily after.

When the first signs of returning day appeared in the east, the two left their horses in a narrow canyon, and crept to the summit of a ridge. Below lay the broad valley of the Powder. Then Murphy turned his head and looked back into the other's face.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The Verge of Confession.

Murphy uttered one sputtering cry of surprise, flinging his hand instinctively to his hip, but attempted no more. Hampton's ready weapon was thrusting its muzzle into the astounded face, and the gray eyes gleaming along the polished barrel held the fellow motionless.

"Hands up! Not a move, Murphy! I have the drop!" The voice was low, but stern, and the old frontiersman obeyed mechanically, although his seamed face was fairly distorted with rage.

"You! Damn you!—I thought I knew—the voice."

"Yes, I am here all right. Rather odd place for us to meet, isn't it? But, you see, you've had the advantage all these years; you know whom you were running away from, while I was compelled to plod along in the dark. But I've caught up just the same, if it has been a long race."

"What do ye—want me fer?" The look in the face was cunning.

"Hold your hands quiet—higher, you fool! That's it. Now, don't play with me. I honestly didn't know for certain I did want you, Murphy, when I first started out on this trip. I merely suspected that I might, from some things I had been told. When somebody took the liberty of slashing at my back in a poker-room at Glencald, and drove the knife into Slavin by mistake, I chanced to catch a glimpse of the hand on the hilt, and there was a scar on it. About 15 years before, I was acting as officer of the guard one night at Bethune. It was a bright starlit night, you remember, and just as I turned the corner of the old powder-house there came a sudden flash, a report, a sharp cry, I sprang forward only to fall headlong over a dead body; but in that flash I had seen the hand grasping the revolver, and there was a scar on the back of it, a very peculiar scar. It chanced I had the evening previous slightly quarreled with the officer who was killed; I was the only person known to be near at the time he was shot; certain other circumstantial evidence was dug up, while Slavin and one other—no, it was not you—gave some damaging, manufactured testimony against me. As a result I was held guilty of murder in the second degree, dismissed from the army in disgrace, and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. So, you see, it was not exactly you I have been hunting, Murphy—it was a scar."

Murphy's face was distorted into a hideous grin.

"I notice you bear exactly that kind of a scar, my man, and you spoke last night as if you had some recollection of the case."

The mocking grin expanded; into the husky voice crept a snarl of defiance, for now Murphy's courage had come back—he was fronting flesh and blood. "Oh, stop preachin'—an' shoot—an' be damned ter ye!"

"You do me a grave injustice, Murphy. Your slashing at me down in Glencald hasn't left so much as a sting behind. It's completely blotted out, forgotten. I haven't the slightest desire to kill you, man; but I do want to clear my name of the stain of that crime. I want you to tell the whole truth about that night's work at Bethune, and when you have done so, you can go. I'll never lay a finger on you; you can go where ye please."

"Bah!—ye ain't got no proof—agin me—sides, the case is closed—it can't be opened agin—by law."

"You devil! I'd be perfectly justifi-

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The Farmer's Elevator Meeting

The members of the Farmers' Elevator Company met on Monday for the purpose of ratifying the articles of incorporation and the by-laws that were contrary to and violated the anti-trust law, and upon a vote they went eliminated and made to conform to the state law.

We are glad this was done and now that they are in business on an equal footing with others we hope they will all pull together and make it a success. It has been said that you could never get farmers together on anything—that there would always be a few that would kick out, but we hope that in this instance it will prove untrue.

The board of directors have contracted with Henry Heebner to manage the elevator, and from this you will know that it is in good hands, and that the farmers' business will be well cared for. They take the elevator, and assume active operation March 1st.—Nehawka Register.

George Sayles jr. Buying Corn

George Sayles jr. has accepted the position of manager of the Elevators at Plattsmouth, Oreapolis and Cullom, for the Duff Grain Company, and has an office in the Gund Building, where he can be found by the farmers, who may have grain to sell. Mr. Sayles is an exemplary young man and will always be found attentive to business. He tells us his father is rapidly improving and when the warm weather shall have returned he thinks he will be able to take charge of the business again himself, when it will be turned over to him.

Cut Out Day Telegraphing.

Beginning with tomorrow the Missouri Pacific will cut out the day telegraphing, and will only do such work from 7:00 p. m. until 7:00 a. m. This will include all railroad telegraphing, it will not be possible to ascertain when the trains will arrive except as per the published cards. When the trains arrive you will know it if you are at the station, otherwise you cannot find out. They are observing the nine hour law.

The Stock is Good.

Plattsmouth Telephone company stock has paid 10 per cent annual cash dividends for the past eight years.

Beginning with April 1, 1908, the company will pay the stockholders the dividends every three months on April 1, July 1, October 1, of each year.

Every dollar received from the sale of stock is invested right here in our own territory in the sight of our own stockholders.



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in any considerable amount is dangerous. Don't flatter yourself that your habit of doing so is unnoticed. Thieves make it their business to find out such things. Better be on the safe side and deposit your money in Bank of Cass County. The sooner you do so the better. An ounce of prevention is better than a pound of regret.

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While you are not very busy is a very good time to study at home. You now have the time—we have the books. Call and examine them. Here is the list. They are up-to-date and practical: Machine Shop Work, Tool Making, Gas Engines and Producers, Carpentry, Masonry Construction, Reinforced Concrete, Mechanical Drawing, The Electric Telegraph, Machine Design, Practical Lessons in Electricity, The Steam Engine, Estimating, Contracts and Specifications, Stair Building and Steel Square, Valve Gears and Indicators and Pattern Making

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