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Continued from Page Four

offection of Silent Murphy, and his strange, unguarded remark. What could the fellow have meant? Was there indeed some secret in the life history of this young girl?-some story of shame, perhaps? If so, did

Hampton know about it? Already daylight rested white and solemn over the silent valley, and only a short distance away lay the spot where the crippled scout had made his solitary camp. Almost without volition the young officer turned that way, crossed the stream by means of the log, and clambered up the bank. But it was clear at a glance that Murphy had deserted the spot. Convinced of this. Brant retraced his steps toward the camp of his own troop, now already astir with the duties of early morning. Just in front of his tent he encountered his first sergeant.

"Watson," he questioned, as the lat-ter saluted and stood at attention, "do you know a man called Silent Murphy?"

"The scout? Tes, sir; knew him as long ago as when he was corporal in your father's troop. He was reduced to the ranks for striking an officer." Brant wheeled in astonishment. "Was he ever a soldier in the Seventh?"

"He was that, for two enlistments. and a mighty tough one; but he was always quick enough for a fight in field or garrison." "Has he shown himself here at the camp?"

"No. sir: didn't know he was anywhere around. He and I were never very good friends, sir."

The lieutenant remained silent for several moments, endeavoring to perfect some feasible plan. "Dispatch an order to the telegraph

TO OUR FRIENDS

office," he finally commanded, "to inquire if this man Murphy receives any messages there, and if they know where he is stopping. Send an intelligent man and have him discover all the facts he can. When he returns bring him in to me."

He had enjoyed a bath and a shave, and was yet lingering over his coffee, when the two soldiers entered with their report. The sergeant stepped aside, and the orderly, a tall, boyish looking fellow with a pugnacious chin, saluted stiffly.

"Well, Bane," and the officer eved his trim appearance with manifest approval, "what did you succeed in learn-

"The operator said this yere Murphy had never bin thar himself, sir, but there was several messages come fer him. One got here this mornin'." "What becomes of them?"

"They're called fer by another fel-

"Oh, they are! Who?" "Red Slavin was the name he giv me of thet other buck." When the two had disappeared

Brant sat back thinking rapidly. There was a mystery here, and such actions must have a cause. Something either in or about Glencaid was compelling Murphy to keep out of sight -but what? Who? Brane was unable to get it out of his head that all this secrecy centered around Naida. Perhaps Hampton knew; at least he might possess some additional scrap of information which would help to

solve the problem. . He looked at his watch, and ordered his horse to be It did not seem quite so simple now, this projected interview with Hampton, as it had appeared the night before. In the clear light of day, he began to realize the weakness of his

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not the smallest right to speak on bedie was cast, and perhaps, provided an open quarrel could be avoided, the meeting might result in good to all

tant but marked courtesy, having evideatly thought out his own imme diate plan of action, and schooled himself accordingly. Standing there, the bright light streaming over them from the open windows, they presented two widely contrasting personalities, yet each exhibited in figure and face the evidences of hard training and iron discipline. Hampton was clothed in black, standing straight as an arrow, his shoulders squared, his head held proudly erect, while his cool gray-eyes studied the face of the other as he had been accustomed to survey his opponents at the card table. Brant oked the picture of a soldier on duty, trim, well built, erect, his resolute blue eyes never finching from the steady gase bent upon him, his broased young face grave from the seriousness of his mission. In both minds the same thought lingeredthe vague wonder how much the other knew. The elder man, however, retained a better self-control and was first to break the silence.

"Miss Gillis informed me of your kindness to her last evening," he said, quietly, "and in her behalf I sincerely thank you. Permit me to offer you a chair."

Brant accepted it and sat down feeling the calm tone of proprietorship in the words of the other as if they had been a blow. His face flushed yet he spoke firmly. "Possibly I misconstrue your meaning," he said, with some bluntness, determined to reach the gist of the matter at once. "Did Miss Gillis authorise you to thank me for these courtesies?"

Hampton smiled with provoking almness, holding an unlighted eigar between his fingers. "Why, really, as to that I do not remember. merely mentioned it as expressing the natural gratitude of us both."

"You speak as if you possessed full authority to express her mind as well se your own."

The other bowed gravely, his face impassive. "My words quite naturally bear some such construction."

The officer hesitated, feeling more doubtful than ever regarding his own position. Chagrined, disarmed, he felt like a prisoner standing bound before his mocking captor. "Then I fear my mission here is useless."

"Entirely so, if you come for the purpose I suspect," said Hampton, sitting erect in his chair, and speaking with more rapid utterance. "To lecture me on morality, and demand my yielding up all influence over this girl such a mission is assuredly a failure. I have listened with some de gree of calmness in this room already to one such address, and surrendered to its reasoning. But permit me to say quite plainly, Lieut. Brant, that you are not the person from whom will quietly listen to another."

"I had very little expectation that you would."

"You should have had still less, and remained away entirely. However, low that you are here, and the subject broached, it becomes my turn to say something, and to say it clearly. It seems to me you would exhibit far better taste and discrimination if from now on you would cease forcing your attentions upon Miss Gil-

Brant leaped to his feet, but the other never deigned to alter his posi-"Forcing my attentions!" exclaimed

the officer. "God's mercy, man! do you realise what you are saying? I have forced no attentions upon Miss

"My reference was rather to future possibilities. Young blood is proverbially hot, and I thought it wise to warn you in time."

Brant stared into that imperturbed face, and somehow the very sight of its calm, inflexible resolve served to clear his own brain. He felt that this cool, self-controlled man was speaking with authority.

"Walt just a moment." he said at last. "I wish this made perfectly clear, and for all time. I met Miss Gillis first through pure accident. She impressed me strongly then, and I conless I have since grown more deeply interested in her personality. I have reasons to suppose my presence not altogether distasteful to her, and she has certainly shown that she reposes confidence in me. Not until late last night did I ever suspect she was the same girl whom we picked up with you out on the desert. It came to me from her own lips and was a total surprise. She revealed her identity in order to justify her proposed clandestine meeting with you."

"And hence you request this pleas ant conference," broke in Hampton coolly, "to inform me, from your calm eminence of respectability, that I was no fit companion for such a young and innocent person, and to warn me that you were prepared to act as her pro-

Brant slightly inclined his head. "I may have had something of that sature in my mind."

"Well Lieut. Brant," and the older men rose to his feet, his eyes still ling, "some might be impolite enough to say that it was the conception of a cad, but whatever it was, the tables have unexpectedly turned. Without further reference to my own personal interests in the young lady, which are, however, considerable, there remain other weighty reasons which make it simply impossible for you to sustain any relationship to Miss Gillis other than that of ordinary

"You-you claim the right-" "I distinctly claim the right, for the reason that I possess the rght, and no one has ever yet known me to relinquish a hold once fairly gained. Lieut. Brant, if I am any judge of faces, you are a fighting man by na-ture as well as profession, but there is no opportunity for your doing anyfighting here. This matter is irre-vocably settled. Naida Gillis is not

social friendship."

Brant was breathing hard. "Do you mean to instructs that there is an understanding, an engagement between you?" he faltered, scarcely knowing w best to resent such utterance.

"You may place your own construc-tion upon what I have said," was the quiet answer. "The special relations existing between Miss Gillis and my-self chance to be no business of yours. However, I will consent to say this— I do enjoy a relationship to her that gives me complete authority to say what I have said to you. I regret having been obliged by your persistence to speak with such plataness, but this konwisdge should prove sufficient to control the notions of a gentleman."

For a moment the soldier did not answer, his emotions far too strong to permit of calm utterance, his lips tightly shut. He felt utterly defeated. "Your language is sufficiently ex-



ask pardon for my unwarranted intru-

At the door he paused and glanced back toward that motionless figure yet standing with one hand grasping the back of the chair.

Before I go, permit me to ask a single question," he said, frankly. "I was a friend of old Ben Gillis, and he was a friend of my father before me. Have you any reason to suspect that he was not Naida Gillis' father?" Hampton took one hasty step forward. "What do you mean?" he exclaimed flercely, his eyes two coals of

Brant felt that the other's display of irritation gave him an unexpected ad-

"Nothing that need awaken anger, am sure. Something caused me to harbor the suspicion, and I naturally supposed you would know about it. Indeed, I wondered if some such knowledge might not account for your deep interest in keeping her so entirely to yourself."

Hampton's fingers twitched in a nervousness altogether unusual to the man, yet when he spoke his voice was like steel. "Your suspicions are highly interesting, and your cowardly insinuations base. However, if, as I suppose, your purpose is to provoke a quarrel, you will find me quite ready to accommodate you."

An instant they stood thus, eye to eye. Suddenly Brant's memory veered to the girl whose name would be smirched by any blow struck between them, and he forced back the hasty retort burning upon his lips.

"You may be, Mr. Hampton," he said, standing like a statue, his back to the door, "but I am not. As you say, fighting is my trade, yet I have never sought a personal quarrel. Nor is there any cause here, as my only purpose in asking the question was to forewarn you, and her through you, that such a suggestion had been openly made in my hearing. I presume it was a lie, and wished to be able to brand it so."

"By whom?" "A fellow known as Silent Murphy, government scout." "I have heard of him. Where is

"He claimed to be here waiting orders from Custer. He had camp up the creek two days ago, but is keeping well out of sight for some reason. Telegrams have been received for him at the office, but another man has called for them." "Who?"

"Red Slavin." "The cur!" said Hampton. "I reckon 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 mean

ing, but the fellow became suspiclous 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

He held out his hand, and scarcely



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knowing why he did so, Brant placed his own within its grasp, and as the

CHAPTER XVIIL

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

Yet Brant was far from being satisfied. Hampton had not even advance ed 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 masterplece of defense, puzzling, irritating, seen ingly impassable. From the consid eration of it all, Brant emerged with but one thought clearly defined—who ever she might prove to be, whatever was her present connection with Hampton, he loved this dark-eyed, anburn-haired waif. 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 dazzline vision of fluffy lace and flossy half beside him in the dimly lighted hall. "Oh, Lieutenant Brant!" and the rision clung to his arm tenderly.

is such a relief to find that you as unhurt. Did-did you kill him?" Brant stared. "I-I fear I scarcel compehend. Miss Spencer. I-have certainly taken no one's life. What can you mean?"

"Oh, I am so glad; and Naida wil be, too. I must go right back and tell the poor girl, for she is nearly dis tracted. Oh. Lieutenant, isn't it the most romantic situation that ever was? And he is such a mysterious Neither spoke, and Miss Spencer, nevcharacter!"

"To whom do you refer? Really, I am quite in the dark." "Why. Mr. Hampton, of course.

know all about it. Naida feit so bad ly 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'

eves began to exhibit amusement: "I deed, we parted quite friendly." "I told Naida I thought you would People don't take such things so seri ously nowadays, do they? But Naida is such a child and so full of romantie 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." "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 pre sent 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. 1

knocked upon the door he had just speech, her unque closed, and, in response to the voice within, opened it. Hampton sat upon the chair by the window, but as his of his thoughts. eyes caught a glimpse of the returned roldier with a woman standing beside him, he instantly rose to his feet. "Mr. Hampton," said Brant, "I trust

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 most with you over since I' first read your name in Aust Lydia's

about you. She is such a dear, sweet eyes of the two men met, there was a over your meeting with Lieut. Brant, consciousness of sympathy between fearing you might quarrel! It was He entered to such a relief to find him unhurt, but I felt that I must see you also, so to relieve Maida's mind entirely." "I most certainly appreciate your

> frankly expressed interest, Miss Spen cer," he said, standing with her hand still retained in his, "and am exceed ingly 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 at tractions 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. Bythe bye, only this very morning a man stopped me on the street, actually mistaking me for Naida." "What sort of a looking man. Miss

"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 med but Brant was unable to decipher the meaning hidden within the gray eyes. er realizing what her chatter meant, rattled merrily on.

"You see there are so many who speak to me now, because of my publie position here. So I thought noth ing 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 stair way. "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 what might be the result, Brant belong the Spencer's call. Her speech, her unquestioned beauty, had had their effect upon him, changing for the time being the gloomy trend

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 explated crime, to do evil to this girl Naida. Two men, at least, knew sufficient of the past to cause serious trouble. This effort by Slayin to hold personal communication with the girl was svidently made for some definite purpose. Hampton decided to have a face-to-face interview with the man letters—Mrs. Herndon is my sunt, you had with those Indians. You see I am Naida Gillis's most particular A faint hope, which had been growing the sunt particular and the sunt particular in the open, and to a finish. A faint hope, which had been growing the sunty page. friend, and the tells me, so much dismor and dismor with every page

ing year, began to flicker once alain within his heart. He desired to see this man Murphy, and to learn exactly

loon opposite the hotel, across the threshold of which he had not stormed 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 shebang." "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 dama liable to take a pot shot at you when you go in."

Hampton's genial smile only bee ened, as he carelessly rolled an unlight cigar between his lips. He walked to the door, fung to swiftly and silently open, and step-ping within, closed it behind him with his left hand. In the other glittered the steel-blue barrel of a drawn revol-

"Slavin, sit down!"

The terse, imperative words seemed fairly to cut the air, and the redbearded gambler, who had half rises to his feet, an oath upon his lips, mak back into his seat, staring at the apparition confronting him as if fac

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