

# BOB HAMPTON of PLACER

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



## SYNOPSIS.

**CHAPTER I.**—A detachment of the Eighteenth Infantry from Fort. Bethune trapped by Indians in a narrow gorge. Among them is a stranger who introduces himself by the name of Hampton, also Gillis, the post trader, and his daughter. Gillis and a majority of the soldiers are killed during a three days' siege.

**CHAPTER II.**—Hampton offers assistance to the girl, and is at first spurned because he is known as a gambler.

**CHAPTER III.**—Hampton and the girl only escape from the Indians. They fall exhausted on the plains.

**CHAPTER IV.**—A company of the Seventh Cavalry, Lieut. Brant in command, find Hampton and the girl on the plains, and restore them to consciousness. Hampton announces that he proposes to care for the girl.

**CHAPTER V.**—Hampton and the girl stop at the Miner's Home in Glencald. Mrs. Duffy, proprietress. Rev. Howard Wynkoop proposes that Hampton place Miss Gillis in care of Mrs. Herndon. He consents to think it over.

**CHAPTER VI.**—Hampton talks the future over with Miss Gillis—the Kid. She shows him her mother's picture and tells him what she can of her parentage and life. They decide she shall live with Mrs. Herndon.

**CHAPTER VII.**—The Kid takes up her residence with Mrs. Herndon.

**CHAPTER VIII.**—Naida, the Kid—runs away from Mrs. Herndon's and returns Hampton. He induces her to go back, and to have nothing more to do with him.

**CHAPTER IX.**—Hampton plays his last game of cards. He announces to Red Slavin that he has quit, and then leaves Glencald.

**CHAPTER X.**—Miss Phoebe Spencer arrives in Glencald to teach its first school.

**CHAPTER XI.**—Miss Spencer meets Naida, Rev. Wynkoop, etc. She boards at Mrs. Herndon's.

**CHAPTER XII.**—Naida and Lieut. Brant again meet without his knowing who she is. She informs him of the coming Bachelor Club ball in honor of Miss Spencer.

**CHAPTER XIII.**—Lieut. Brant meets Silent Murphy, Custer's scout. He reports trouble brewing among the Sioux.

**CHAPTER XIV.**—Social difficulties arise at the Bachelor Club ball among the admirers of Miss Spencer. Lieut. Brant meets Miss Spencer but she is not his acquaintance of the day before. She tells him of Naida, and he accidentally meets her again as he is returning to the ballroom with a fan for Miss Spencer.

**CHAPTER XV.**—He fails to discover her identity.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### Silent Murphy.

Brant sprang forward, all doubt regarding this young woman instantly dissipated by those final words of mischievous mockery. She had been playing with him as unconcernedly as if he were a mere toy sent for her amusement and his pride was stung. But pursuit proved useless. Like a phantom she had slipped away amid the underbrush, leaving him to flounder blindly in the labyrinth. His incautious foot slipped along the steep edge of the shelving bank, and he went down, half stumbling, half sliding, until he came to a sudden pause on the brink of the little stream. The chase was ended, and he sat up, confused for the moment, and half questioning the evidence of his own eyes. A small tent, dirty and patched, stood with its back against the slope



"It's—None of—Your Damn—Business. I'm—Not Under—Your Orders."

of earth down which he had plunged. Its flap hung aside revealed within a pile of disarranged blankets, together with some scattered articles of wearing apparel, while just before the opening, his back pressed against the supporting pole, an inverted pipe between his yellow, irregular teeth, sat a hideous looking man. He was a withered, dried-up fellow, whose age was not to be guessed, having a skin as yellow as parchment, drawn in tight to the bones like that of a mummy, his eyes deep sunken like wells, and his head totally devoid of hair, although about his lean throat there was a copious fringe of iron-gray beard, untrimmed and scraggy. Down the entire side of one cheek ran a livid scar, while his nose was turned awry.

He sat staring at the newcomer, unwinking, his facial expression devoid of interest, but his fingers opening and closing in apparent nervousness. Twice his lips opened, but nothing except a peculiar gurgle sound issued from the throat, and Brant, who by this time had attained his feet and his self-possession, ventured to ad-

dress him. "Nice quiet spot for a camp," he remarked, pleasantly, "but a bad place for a tumble." The sunken eyes expressed nothing, but the throat gurgled again painfully and finally the parted lips dropped a detached word or two. "Blame—pretty girl—that."

The lieutenant wondered how much of their conversation this old mummy had overheard, but he hesitated to question him. One inquiry, however, sprang to his surprised lips. "Do you know her?"

"Damn sight—better—than any one around here—know her—real name." Brant stared incredulously. "Do you mean to insinuate that that young woman is living in this community under an assumed one? Why, she is scarcely more than a child! What do you mean, man?"

The soldier's hat still rested on the grass where it had fallen, its military insignia hidden. "I guess—I know—what I—know," the fellow muttered. "What's—your—regiment?"

"Seventh Cavalry."

The man stiffened up as if an electric shock had swept through his limp frame. "The hell!—and—did—she—call you—Brant?"

The young officer's face exhibited his disgust. Beyond doubt that sequestered nook was a favorite lounging spot for the girl, and this disreputable creature had been watching her for some sinister purpose.

"So you have been eavesdropping, have you?" said Brant, gravely. "And now you want to try a turn at defaming a woman? Well, you have come to a poor market for the sale of such goods. I am half inclined to throw you bodily into the creek. I believe you are nothing but a common liar, but I'll give you one chance—what say you to know her real name. What is it?"

The eyes of the mummy had become spiteful. "It's—none of—your damn—business. I'm—not under—your orders."

"Under my orders! Of course not; but what do you mean by that? Who and what are you?"

The fellow stood up, slightly hump-backed but broad of shoulder, his arms long, his legs short and somewhat bowed, his chin protruding impudently, and Brant noticed an oddly shaped black scar, as if burned there by powder, on the back of his right hand.

"Who—am I?" he said, angrily. "I'm—Silent—Murphy."

An expression of bewilderment swept across the lieutenant's face. "Silent Murphy! Do you claim to be Custer's scout?"

The fellow nodded. "Heard—of me—maybe?"

Brant stood staring at him, his mind occupied with vague garrison rumors connected with this odd personality. The name had long been a familiar one, and he had often had the man pictured out before him. There could remain no reasonable doubt of his identity, but what was he doing there?

"Yes, I've heard of you," and his crisp tone instinctively became that of terse military command, "although we have never met, for I have been upon detached service ever since my assignment to the regiment. I have a troop in camp below," he pointed down the stream, "and am in command here."

The scout nodded carelessly. "Why did you not come down there and report your presence in this neighborhood to me?"

Murphy grinned unpleasantly. "Rather be—alone—no report—been over—Black Range—telegraphed—wait orders."

"Do you mean you are in direct communication with headquarters, with Custer?"

The man answered, with a wide sweep of his long arm toward the northwest. "Goin' to—be hell—out there—damn soon."

"How? Are things developing into a truly serious affair—a real campaign?"

"Every buck—in the—Sioux nation—is makin'—fer the—bad lands," and he laughed noiselessly, his nervous fingers gesticulating. "—guess that—means—business."

Brant hesitated. Should he attempt to learn more about the young girl? Instinctively he appreciated the futility of endeavoring to extract information from Murphy, and he experienced a degree of shame at thus seeking to penetrate her secret. He glanced about, seeking some way of recrossing the stream.

"If you require any new equipment," he said tersely, "we can probably supply you at the camp. How do you manage to get across here?"

Murphy, walking stiffly, led the way down the steep slope, and silently pointed out a log bridging the narrow stream. He stood watching while the officer picked his steps across, but made no responsive motion when the other waved his hand from the opposite shore, his sallow face looking grim and unpleasant.

The young officer marched down the road, his mind busied with the

peculiar happenings of the morning, and that prospect for early active service hinted at in the brief utterances of the old scout. Brant was a thorough soldier, born into the service and deeply enamored of its dangers; yet beyond this he remained a man, a young man, swayed by those emotions which when at full tide sweep aside all else appertaining to life.

His had been a lonely life since leaving West Point and joining his regiment—a life passed largely among rough men and upon the desolate plains. For months at a time he had known nothing of refinement, nor enjoyed social intercourse with the opposite sex. Yet, beneath his mask of impassibility, the heart continued to beat with fierce desire, biding the time when it should enjoy its own sweet way. Perhaps that hour had already dawned; certainly something new, something inspiring, had now come to awaken an interest unfeigned before, and leave him idly dreaming of shadowed eyes and flushed, rounded cheeks.

He was in this mood when he overtook the Rev. Howard Wynkoop and marked the thoughtful look upon his pale face.

"I called at your camp," explained Wynkoop, after the first words of greeting had been exchanged, "as soon as I learned you were here in command, but only to discover your absence. The sergeant, however, was very courteous, and assured me there would be no difficulty in arranging a religious service for the men, unless sudden orders should arrive. No doubt I may rely on your cooperation."

"Most certainly," was the cordial response, "and I shall also permit those desiring to attend your regular Sunday services so long as we are stationed here. How is your work prospering?"

"There is much to encourage me, but spiritual progress is slow, and there are times when my faith falters and I feel unworthy of the service in which I am engaged."

"A mining camp is so intensely material seven days of the week that it must present a difficult field for the awakening of any religious sentiment," confessed Brant sympathetically. "I have often wondered how you consented to bury your talents in such a place."

The other smiled, but with a trace of sadness in his eyes. "I firmly believe that every minister should devote a portion of his life to the doing of such a work as this. It is both a religious and a patriotic duty, and there is a rare joy connected with it."

"Yet it was surely not joy I saw pictured within your face when we met; you were certainly troubled over some problem."

Wynkoop glanced up quickly, a slight flush rising in his pale cheeks. "Perplexing questions which must be decided off-hand are constantly arising. And just now I scarcely know what action to take regarding certain applications for church membership."

Brant laughed. "I hardly consider myself a competent adviser in matters of church policy," he admitted, "yet I have always been informed that all so desiring are to be made welcome in religious fellowship."

"Theoretically, yes," and the minister stopped still in the road, facing his companion. "But this special case presents certain peculiarities. The applicants, as I learn from others, are not leading lives above reproach. So far as I know, they have never even attended church service until last Sunday, and I have some reason to suspect an ulterior motive. I am anxious to put nothing in the way of any honestly seeking soul, yet I confess that in these cases I hesitate."

"But your elders? Do not they share the responsibility of passing upon such applications?"

The flush on Mr. Wynkoop's cheeks deepened, and his eyes fell. "Ordinarily, yes; but in this case I fear they may prove unduly harsh. I—I feel—that these applications came through the special intercession of a certain young lady, and I am anxious not to hurt her feelings in any way, or to discourage her enthusiasm."

"Oh, I see! Would you mind telling me the names of the two gentlemen?"

"Mr. John Moffat and Mr. William McNeil. Unfortunately, I know neither personally."

"And the young lady?"

"A Miss Phoebe Spencer; she has but lately arrived from the east to take charge of our new school—a most interesting and charming young woman, and she is proving of great assistance to me in church work."

The lieutenant cleared his throat and emitted a sigh of suddenly awakened memory. "I fear I can offer you no advice, for if, as I begin to suspect, though she sought most bravely to avoid the issue and dispatch me upon a false trail,—she prove to be that same fascinating young person I met this morning, my entire sympathies are with the gentlemen concerned. I might even be strongly tempted to do likewise at her solicitation."

"You? Why, you arrived only this morning, and do you mean to say you have met already?"

"I at least suspect as much, for there can scarcely exist two in this town who will fill the description. My memory holds the vision of a fair young face, vivacious, ever changing in its expression, yet constantly both piquant and innocent; a perfect wealth of hair, a pair of serious eyes hiding mysteries within their depths, and lips which seem made to kiss. Tell me, is not this a fairly drawn portrait of your Miss Spencer?"

The minister gripped his hands nervously together. "Your description is not unjust; indeed, it is quite accurate from a mere outer point of view, yet beneath her vivacious manner I have found her thoughtful, and possessed of deep spiritual yearnings. In the east she was a communicant of the Episco-

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pal church." Brant did not answer him at once. He was studying the minister's downcast face; but when the latter finally turned to depart, he inquired, "Do you expect to attend the reception to-morrow evening?"

Wynkoop stammered slightly. "I—I could hardly refuse under the circumstances; the committee sent me an especially urgent invitation, and I understand there is to be no dancing until late. One cannot be too straight-laced out here."

"Oh, never mind apologizing. I see no reason why you need hesitate to attend. I merely wondered if you could procure me an invitation."

"Did she tell you about it?"

"Well, she delicately hinted at it, and, you know, things are pretty slow here in a social way. She merely suggested that I might possibly meet her again there."

"Of course; it is given in her honor."

"So I understood, although she sought to deceive me into the belief that she was not the lady. We met purely by accident, you understand, and I am desirous of a more formal presentation."

The minister drew in his breath sharply, but the clasp of his extended hand was not devoid of warmth. "I will have a card of invitation sent you at the camp. The committee will be very glad of your presence; only I warn you frankly regarding the lady, that competition will be strong."

"Oh, so far as that is concerned I have not yet entered the running," laughed Brant, in affected carelessness, "although I must confess my sporting proclivities are somewhat aroused."

He watched the minister walking rapidly away, a short, erect figure, appearing slender in his severely cut black cloth. "Poor little chap," he muttered, regretfully. "He's hard hit. Still, they say all's fair in love and war."

### To be Continued.

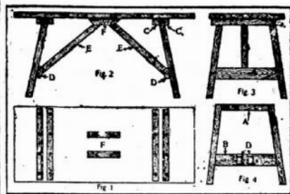
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The Table and Its Parts.

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