BOB HAMPTON of PLACER

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

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It is no more than simple justice to the fair Phoebe to state that she was, as her aunt expressed it, "in a dreadful state of mind." Between these two picturesque and typical knights of plain and mountain she vibrated, unable to make deliberate choice. While laboring in this state of indecision late one Wednesday night Moffat tramped heavily into the Miners' Retreat and called Long Pete Lumley over into a deserted corner of the barroom.

"Well, Jack," the latter began expectantly, "hev ye railly got the cinch on that cowboy at last, hey?"

"Dern it all, Pete, I'm blamed if I know; leastwise, I ain't got no sure prove-up. I tell ye thet girl's just about the toughest piece o' rock I ever had any special call to assay. Ye see it's this way. She's got some durn down east notion that she's got ter be rescued, an' borne away in the arms of her hero like they do in them pesky novels the Kid's allers readin', and so I reckon I've got ter rescue her!"

"Rescue her from whut, Jack?"

"Well, ye see, Pete, maybe I'm partly to blame. I've sorter been entertainin' her nights with some stories regardin' road agents an' things o' thet sort, while, so fur, as I kin larn, thet blame chump of a McNeil hes been fillin' her up scandalous with Injuns, until she's plum got 'em on the brain. And now, I reckon as how it's got ter be Injuns."

"Whut's got ter be Injuns?"

"Why thet outfit whut runs off with her, of course. I reckon you fellers will stand in all right ter help pull me out o' this hole?"

Long Pete nodded.

"Well, Pete, this is 'bout whut's got ter be done, as near es I kin figger it out. You pick out maybe half a dozen good fellers who kin keep their mouths shet an' make injuns out of 'em. Then you lay fer her, say 'bout next Wednesday, out in them Carter woods, when she's comin' home from school. I'll kinder naturally happen 'long by accident 'bout the head o' the gulch, an' jump in an' rescue her. Sabe?"

Lumley gazed at his companion with eyes expressive of admiration. "By thunder, if you haven't got a cocoanut on ye, Jack! Lord, but thet ought to get her a fryin'! Any shootin'?"

"Sure!" Moffat's face exhibited a faint smile at these words of praise. "It wouldn't be no great shucks of a rescue without, an' this hes got ter be the real thing. Only, I reckon, ye better shoot high, so thar' won't be no hurt done."

When the two gentlemen parted a few moments later the conspiracy was fully hatched, all preliminaries perfected and the gallant rescue of Miss Spencer assured. Indeed, there is some reason now to believe that this

"Miss Spencer—Phoebe—It Is Only I, "Miss Spencer—Phoebe—It Is Only I Mr. Wynkoop."

desirable result was rendered doubly certain, for as Moffat moved slowly past the Occidental on his way home a person attired in chaps and sombrero, and greatly resembling McNeil, was in the back room, breathing some final instructions to a few bosom friends.

"Now don't—eh—any o' you fellers—eh—go an' forget the place. Jump in—eh—lively, just afore she—eh—gits ter thet thick bunch—eh—underbrush, whar' the trail sorter—eh—drops down inter the ravine. An' you chumps wanter—eh—git—yerselves up so she can't pipe any of ye off—eh—in this yere—eh—road-agent act. I tell ye, after what thet—eh—Moffat's bin a-pumpin' inter her, she's just got ter be—eh—rescued, an' in blame good style, er—eh—it ain't no go."

"Oh, you rest easy 'bout all thet, Bill," chimed in Sandy Winn, his black eyes dancing in anticipation of coming fun. "We'll git up the ornariest outfit whut ever hit the pike."

The long shadows of the late afternoon were already falling across the gloomy Carter woods, while the red sun sank lower behind old Bull mountain. Rev. Howard Wynkoop, who for more than an hour past had been vainly dangling a fishing line above the dancing waters of Clear creeks, now reclined dreamily on the soft turf of the high bank, his eyes fixed upon the distant sky line. His thoughts were on the flossy hair and animated face of the fair Miss Spencer, who he momentarily expected would round the edge of the hill, and so deeply did he become sunk in blissful reflection as to be totally oblivious to everything but her approach.

Just above his secret resting place, where the great woods deepen, and the gloomy shadows lie darkly all through the long afternoons, a small party of hideously painted savages skulked silently in ambush. Suddenly to their strained ears was borne the sound of horses' hoofs; and then, all at once, a woman's voice rang out in a single shrill, startled cry.

"Whut is up?" questioned the leading savage, hoarsely. "Is he a-doin' this little job all by hisself?"

"Dunno," answered the fellow next him, flipping his quirt uneasily; "but I reckon as how it's her as squealed, an' we'd better be gitting in ter hev our share o' the fun."

The "chief," with an oath of disgust, dashed forward and his band surged after. Just below them, and scarcely 50 feet away, a half-score of roughly clad, heavily bearded men were clustered in the center of the trail, two of their number lifting the unconscious form of a fainting woman upon a horse.

"Cervera's gang, by gosh!" panted the leading savage. "How did they git yere?"

"You bet! She's up agin the real thing," ejaculated a voice beside him. "Let's ride 'em off the earth! Whoop!"

With wild yells to awaken fresh courage the whole band plunged headlong down the sharp decline, striking the surprised "road agents" with a force and suddenness which sent half of them sprawling. Revolvers flashed, oaths and shouts rang out fiercely, men clinched each other, striking savage blows. Lumley grasped the leader of the other party by the hair, and endeavored to beat him over the head with his revolver butt. Even as he uplifted his hand to strike the man's beard fell off and the two fierce combatants paused as though thunderstruck.

"Hold on yere, boy!" yelled Lumley. "This yere is some blame joke. These fellers is Bill McNeil's gang."

"By thunder! If it ain't Pete Lumley," ejaculated the other. "Whut did ye hit me fer, ye long-legged minin' jackass?"

The explanation was never uttered. Out from the surrounding gloom of underbrush a hatless, disheveled individual on foot suddenly dashed into the center of that hesitating ring of horsemen. With skillful twist of hit foot he sent a dismounted road agent spinning over backward and managed to wrench a revolver from his hand. There was a blaze of red flame, a cloud of smoke, six sharp reports, and a wild stampede of frantic horsemen.

Then Rev. Howard Wynkoop flung the empty gun disdainfully down into the dirt, stepped directly across the motionless outstretched body, and knelt humbly beside a slender, white-robed figure lying close against the fringe of bushes. Tenderly he lifted the fair head to his throbbing bosom and gazed directly down into the white, unconscious face. Even as he looked her eyes unclosed, her body trembling within his arms.

"Have no fear," he implored, reading terror in the expression of her face. "Miss Spencer—Phoebe—it is only I, Mr. Wynkoop.

"Oh, Howard—Mr. Wynkoop—it is all so strange, so bewildering; my nerves are so shattered! But it has taught me a great, great lesson. How 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 was you who flew gallantly to my rescue! It is you who are the true western knight!"

And Mr. Wynkoop gazed down into those grateful eyes and modestly confessed it true.

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 realised 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 revealment 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.

(To be Continued.)

THE STAGE

GOSSIP OF THE STAGE.

"The Prince Chap" has been well received in Chicago.

Edward M. Favor has joined the cast of "Fascinating Flora."

De Wolf Hopper's new opera is called "What Happened Then?"

Elsie Janis is to appear in a musical play called "The Hoyden."

Grace George began her tour in "Divorcons" at Ashbury Park this week.

An entirely new production is to be made of "The Highwayman," with H. W. Tredenick in the part of Foxy Quiller.

Hattie Williams is to be the star of a musical comedy woven around "Fluffy Ruffles." Charles Frohman will present the piece.

Ruth St. Denis is to make a tour of the largest cities of the country in a series of special matinees, giving her East Indian dances.

A new sociological play, by Edwin Milton Royle, entitled "The Struggle Everlasting," is to be presented in Boston about the last of September.

"When Knighthood Was in Flower" seems to have perennial possibilities. Two companies will go out in it again this season, headed by Anna Day and Grace Merritt.

It is rumored that Frederick Thompson may build a Luna Park on the Seine river, near Paris, and that in this enterprise he will have the backing of French capital.

Ethel Jackson, who left the stage on her marriage to J. Fred Zimmerman, Jr., is to return to it in the leading role of "The Merry Widow," under the management of Henry W. Savage.

It is said that Viola Allen will return to the management of the Liebler Company, whom she made famous and who made her rich. Her contract with Nixon & Zimmerman has expired.

In the spring Margaret Anglin will make a tour of Australia, in which she will appear in a new version of "Joan of Arc." She will also present several other new plays in this tour in which roles she will subsequently be seen in this country.

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MUCH IN LITTLE.

The world's gold production in 1905 has been figured at $376,289,200.

In France the bill of a physician or druggist cannot be collected if more than two years old.

Three hundred girls are employed in the harness trade in New York, and Kentucky has a girl jockey.

A Louisiana woman supports herself by raising mint, and a Jersey City woman makes a living by painting signs.

The largest caravan of pilgrims for Mecca starts from Constantinople and generally comprises about 40,000 persons.

The Japanese lover, instead of an engagement ring, may give his future bride a piece of beautiful silk to be worn as a sash.

Quick-growing vegetation is a great trouble to railway companies in South Australia. Some $80,000 a year is paid for removing weeds from the roadway.

Nesting under the shadow of a small volcano at Penon, Mexico, is perhaps the smallest church in the world. This edifice is about 10 feet high and 12 feet wide.

Gulls are being trained for postal service in place of carrier pigeons by the maritime station of biological department of the University of Lyons, at Toulon, on the Mediterranean.

A staircase has been invented which plays tunes as it is walked up and down upon. A series of pins is pressed by the feet and plays songs and drums while others are connected with collapsible chambers, which blow various instruments.

A Parisian couple, M. Lebon and his wife, who are being divorced and are dividing their effects, have spent $15,000 at law in a wrangle over the possession of a collection of postage stamps. An expert is to be engaged to divide the collection equitably.

The revision of the great Korean cyclopedia called Munhon Pigo, which was ordered by the government some months ago, is now completed, and it consists of an edition of 29 volumes, which will be published at an expense of 47,500 yen.—Korean Daily News.

An Atherton (English) sweep named Joshua Folland was sweeping the chimney of a home which had been unoccupied for some little time at Highr Beckington, when, to his great surprise, he swept down several full-grown live wild rabbits, which he bagged.

When bell signals are sent under water to a vessel, Lord Rayleigh has found that the microphone receiver will indicate whether the sound is from the right or the left, but that it cannot be determined with certainty whether the signal is from a point ahead or one behind.

A novel file made by a London firm has semicircular teeth, which have the convex side toward the point of the file, and are cut very deep. The file is adapted for hard and soft metals, wood and marble, and is claimed to do three times the work of the ordinary file, while keeping its edge longer, being self-clearing and cutting without slipping.

Dedicate New Church.

PRUNTYTOWN, W. Va., Aug. 17.—The handsome new Methodist church which has just been completed at Pruntytown, will be dedicated on next Sunday, and elaborate arrangements for the affair are being made by the congregation. There will be a number of prominent Methodist ministers present from this city and other places, and all day services will be held. There will be a big dinner held at the church, and it is expected there will be several hundred people attend the dedicatory services.

Free, for Catarrh, just to prove merit, a trial size box of Dr. Shoop's Catarrh Remedy. Let me send it now. It is a snow white, creamy, healing antiseptic balm. Containing such healing ingredients as Oil Eucaliptus, Thymol, Menthol, etc., it gives instant and lasting relief to Catarrh of the nose and throat. Make the free test and see for your self what this preparation can and will accomplish. Address Dr. Shoop, Racine, Wis. Large glass jar, 50 cents. Sold by E. A. Billingslea & Co.

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THE END OF A POET.

From the New York Sun.

He had the fever right hard, he did,
He hankered to be a bard, he did,
But got decidedly jarred, he did,
In hunting a rhyme for month.

He swore he would swim or sink, he did,
So got his paper and ink, he did,
And then he began to think, he did,
To hunt up a rhyme for month.

He balked at calling it June, he did,
Declared it was out of tune, he did,
Said nothing would fit his rune, he did,
Excepting a rhyme for month.

He knew he could make his name, he did,
He felt he was meant for fame, he did,
Declared it a beastly shame, he did,
The scareness of rhymes for month.

He melted a heart of stone, he did,
Gave up the job with a groan, he did,
Left Shakespeare to twinkle alone, he did,
For lack of a rhyme for month.

McLANDBURG WILSON.

LOST.

The hours go fast and the years run by,
And life is a grief or spree,
But the time I lost in foolish sports
Will never come back to me.

The stars come up and the stars go down,
And the waves roll over the sea,
But the loved and lost of long ago
Will never come back to me.

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