

Bob Hampton of Placer

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hanging down, coming to tuck me into bed at night. Someway that's how I always seem to see her."

The man drew a deep breath, and snapped shut the locket, yet still retained it in his hand. "Is—~~is~~ she dead?" he questioned, and his voice trembled in spite of his steel nerves.

"Yes, in St. Louis; dad took me there with him two years ago, and I saw her grave."

"Dad? Do you mean old Gillis?"

She nodded, beginning dimly to wonder why he should speak so fiercely and stare at her in that odd way. He seemed to choke twice before he could ask the next question.

"Did he—old Gillis, I mean—claim to be your father, or her husband?"

"No, I don't reckon he ever did, but he gave me that picture, and told me she was my mother. I always lived with him, and called him dad. I reckon he liked it, and he was mighty good to me. We were at Randolph a long time, and since then he's been a post-trader at Bethune. That's all I know about it, for dad never talked very much, and he used to get mad when I asked him questions."

Hampton dropped the locket from his grasp and arose to his feet. For several minutes he stood with his back toward her, apparently gazing down the valley, his jaw set, his dimmed eyes seeing nothing. Slowly the color came creeping into his face, and his hands unclenched. Then he wheeled about, and looked down upon her, completely restored to his old nature.

"Then it seems that it is just you and I, Kid, who have got to settle this little affair," he announced, firmly. "I'll have my say about it, and then you can uncork your feelings. I rather imagine I haven't very much legal right in the premises, but I've got a sort of moral grip on you by reason of having pulled you out alive from that canyon yonder, and I propose to play this game to the limit. You say your mother is dead, and the man who raised you is dead, and so far as either of us know, there isn't a soul anywhere on earth who possesses any claim over you, or any desire to have. Then, naturally, the whole jack-pot is up to me, provided I've got the cards. Now, Kid, waving your prejudice aside, I ain't just exactly the best man in this world to bring up a girl like you and make a lady out of her. I thought yesterday that maybe we might manage to hitch along together for awhile, but I've got a different think coming to-day. There's no use disfiguring the truth. I'm a gambler, something of a fighter on the side, and folks don't say anything too pleasing about my peaceful disposition around these settlements; I haven't any home, and mighty few friends, and the few I have got are nothing to boast about. I reckon there's a cause for it all. So, considering everything, I'm about the poorest proposition ever was heard of to start a young ladies' seminary. The Lord knows, old Gillis was bad enough, but I'm a damned sight worse. Now, some woman has got to take you in hand, and I reckon I've found the right one."

"Goin' to get married, Bob?"

"Not this year; it's hardly become so serious as that; but I'm going to find you a good home here, and I'm going to put up plenty of stuff, so that

they'll take care of you all right and proper."

The dark eyes never wavered as they looked steadily into the gray ones, but the chin quivered slightly.

"I reckon I'd rather try it alone," she announced stubbornly. "Maybe I might have stood it with you, Bob Hampton, but a woman is the limit."

"I expect it will go rather hard at first, Kid," he admitted craftily, "but I think you might try it a while just to sort of please me."

"Who—who is she?" doubtfully.

"Mrs. Herndon, wife of the superintendent of the 'Golden Rule' mine;" and he waved his hand toward the distant houses. "They tell me she's a mighty fine woman."

"Oh, they do? Then somebody's been stirring you up about me, have they? I thought that was about the way of it. Somebody wants to reform me, I reckon. Well, maybe I won't be reformed. Who was it, Bob?"

"The Presbyterian missionary," he confessed reluctantly, "a nery little chap named Wynkoop; he came in to see me last night while you were asleep." He faced her open scorn unshrinkingly, his mind fully decided, and clinging to one thought with all the tenacity of his nature.

"A preacher!" her voice vibrant with derision, "a preacher! Well, of all things, Bob Hampton! You led around by the nose in that way! Did he want you to bring me to Sunday school? A preacher! And I suppose the fellow expects to turn me over to one of his flock for religious instruction. He'll have you studying theology inside of a year. A preacher! Oh, Lord, and you agreed! Well, I won't go; so there!"

"As I understand the affair," Hampton continued, as she paused for breath, "it was Lieut. Brant who suggested the idea of his coming to me. Brant knew Gillis, and remembered you, and realizing your unpleasant situation, thought such an arrangement would be for your benefit."

"Brant!" she burst forth in renewed anger; "he did, did he! The patty-faced dandy! I used to see him at Bethune, and you can bet he never bothered his head about me then. No, and he didn't even know me out yonder, until after the sergeant spoke up. What business has that fellow got planning what I shall do?"

Hampton made no attempt to answer. It was better to let her indigna-



"Good Lord! I Haven't Been Begging to Stick with You, Have I?"

tion die out naturally, and so he asked a question. "What is this Brant doing at Bethune? There is no cavalry stationed there."

She glanced up quickly, interested by the sudden change in his voice. "I heard dad say he was kept there on some special detail. His regiment is stationed at Fort Lincoln, somewhere farther north. He used to come down and talk with dad evenings, because daddy saw service in the Seventh when it was first organized after the war."

"Did you—did you ever hear either of them say anything about Maj. Alfred Brant? He must have been this lad's father."

"No, I never heard auzh they said. Did you know him?"

"The father, yes, but that was years ago. Come, Kid, all this is only ancient history, and just as well forgotten. Now, you are a sensible girl, when your temper don't get away with you, and I am simply going to leave this matter to your better judgment. Will you go to Mrs. Herndon's, and find out how you like it? You needn't stop there an hour if she isn't good to you, but you ought not to want to remain with me, and grow up like a rough boy."

"You—you really want me to go, don't you?"

"Yes, I want you to go. It's a chance for you, Kid, and there isn't a bit of a show in the kind of a life I lead. I never have been in love with myself, and only took to it in the first place because the devil happened to drive me that way. The Lord knows I don't want to lead any one else through such a ruck. So it is a try?"

The look of defiance faded slowly out of her face as she stood gravely regarding him. The man was in deadly earnest, and she felt the quiet insistence of his manner.

"You bet, if you put it that way," she consented, simply, "but I reckon that Mrs. Herndon is likely to wish I hadn't."

Together, yet scarcely exchanging another word, the two retraced their steps slowly down the steep trail leading toward the little town in the valley.

CHAPTER VII.

"I've Come Here to Live."

Widely as these two companions differed in temperament and experience, it would be impossible to decide which felt the greater uneasiness at the prospect immediately before them. The girl openly rebellious, the man extremely doubtful, with reluctant steps they approached that tall, homely, yellow house—outwardly the most pretentious in Glencaid.

They were so completely opposite, these two, that more than one chance passer-by glanced curiously toward them as they picked their way onward through the red dust. Hampton, slender yet firmly knit, his body held erect as though trained to the profession of arms, his features finely chiselled, with threads of gray hair beginning to show conspicuously about the temples. His attire of fashionable cut black cloth, and his immaculate linen, while neat and unobtrusive, yet appeared extremely unusual in that careless land of clay-baked overalls and dingy woolens. Beside him, in vivid contrast, the girl trudged in her heavy shoes and bedraggled skirts; her sullen eyes fastened doggedly on the road, her hair showing ragged and disreputable in the brilliant sunshine. Hampton himself could not remain altogether indifferent to the contrast.

"You look a little rough, Kid, for a

society call," he said. "If there was any shebang in this mud-hole of a town that kept any women's things on sale fit to look at, I'd be tempted to fix you up a bit."

"Well, I'm glad of it," she responded, grimly. "I hope I look so blame tough that woman won't say a civil word to us. You can bet I ain't going to strain myself to please the likes of her."

"You certainly exhibit no symptoms of doing so," he admitted, frankly. "But you might, at least, have washed your face and fixed your hair."

She flashed one angry glance at him, stopping in the middle of the road, her head flung back as though ready for battle. Then, as if by some swift magic of emotion, her expression changed. "And so you're ashamed of me, are you?" she asked, her voice sharp but unsteady. "Ashamed to be seen walking with me? I know you are! But I tell you, Mr. Bob Hampton, you won't be the next time. And what's more, you just don't need to traipse along another step with me now. I don't want you. I reckon I ain't very much afraid of tackling this Presbyterian woman all alone."

She swung off fiercely, and the man chuckled softly as he followed, watchfully, through the circling, red dust cloud created by her hasty feet. The truth is, Mr. Hampton possessed troubles and scruples of his own in connection with this contemplated call. He had never met the lady, but he retained some memory of the husband as having been associated with a strenuous poker game at Placer, in which he also held a prominent place, and it would seem scarcely possible that the wife did not know whose bullet had turned her for some weeks into a sick nurse. A cordial reception could hardly be anticipated, and Hampton mentally braced himself for the worst.

It was a cheerless looking house, painted a garish yellow, having staring windows, and devoid of a front porch, or slightest attempt at shade to render its uncomely front less unattractive. Had the matter been left at that moment to his own decision, this glimpse of the house would have turned them both back, but the girl unhesitatingly pressed forward and turned defiantly in through the gateless opening. He followed in silence along the narrow foot-path bordered by weeds, and stood back while she stepped boldly up on the rude stone slab and rapped sharply against the warped and sagging door. A moment they stood thus waiting with no response from within. Once she glanced suspiciously around at him, only to wheel back instantly and once more apply her knuckles to the wood. Before he had conjured up something worth saying the door was partially opened, and a rounded dumpling of a woman, having rosy cheeks, her hair iron-gray, her blue eyes half smiling in uncertain welcome, looked out upon them questioningly.

(To be continued)

Woman's Right

Every housewife has a right to demand a telephone in her home. It eases the drudgery of housework.—It lessens the loneliness of a long, dreary day—It is a constant guardian and protector. Not a luxury for we have a rate for any purse. Chicago Telephone Company.