

BOB HAMPTON of PLACER

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



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CHAPTER XIII.—Continued

of church policy. He admitted, "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 Episcopal 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."

CHAPTER XIV.

In Honor of Miss Spencer.

Mr. Jack Moffat, president of the Bachelor Miners' Pleasure club, had embraced the idea of a reception for Miss Spencer with unbounded enthusiasm. Indeed, the earliest conception of such an event found birth within his fertile brain, and from the first he

determined upon making it the most notable social function ever known in that portion of the territory.

The large space above the Occidental was secured for the occasion, the obstructing subdivisions knocked away, an entrance constructed with an outside stairway leading up from a vacant lot, and the passage connecting the saloon boarded up. Incidentally, Mr. Moffat took occasion to announce that if "any snoozer got drunk and came up them stairs" he would be thrown bodily out of a window. Mr. McNeil, who was observing the preliminary proceedings with deep interest from a pile of lumber opposite, sarcastically intimated that under such circumstances the attendance of club members would be necessarily limited. Mr. Moffat's reply it is manifestly impossible to quote literally. Mrs. Guffy was employed to provide the requisite refreshments in the palatial dining-hall of the hotel, while Buck Mason, the vigilant town marshal, popularly supposed to know intimately the face of every "rounder" in the territory, agreed to collect the cards of invitation at the door, and bar out obnoxious visitors.

The invited guests arrived from the sparsely settled regions round about, not a few riding for a hundred miles over the hard trails. The majority came early, arrayed in whatsoever apparel their limited wardrobes could supply, but ready for any wild frolic. The men outnumbered the gentler sex five to one, but every feminine representative within a radius of about 50 miles, whose respectability could possibly pass muster before the investigations of a not too critical invitation committee, was present.

Lieut. Brant was somewhat delayed in reaching the scene. Certain military requirements were largely responsible for this delay, and he had patiently wrestled with an unsatisfactory toilet, mentally exhorting a service which would not permit the transportation of dress uniforms while on scouting detail.

The dance was already in full swing when he finally pushed his way through the idle loungers gathered about the door, and gained entrance to the hall. Many glanced curiously at him, attracted by the glitter of his uniform, but he recognized none among them, and therefore passed steadily

The scene was one of color and action. He watched the speeding figures, striving to distinguish the particular one whose charms had lured him thither. But among them all he was unable to distinguish the wood-nymph whose girlish frankness and grace had left so deep an impression on his memory. Yet surely she must be present, for, to his understanding, this whole gay festival was in her honor. Directly across the room he caught sight of Rev. Mr. Wynkoop conversing with a lady of somewhat rounded charms, and picked his way in their direction.

The missionary, who, in truth, had been hiding an agonized heart behind a smiling face, was only too delighted at any excuse which would enable him to approach Miss Spencer, and press aside those cavaliers who were monopolizing her attention. The handicap of not being able to dance he felt to be heavy, and he greeted the lieutenant with unusual heartiness of manner.

"Why, most assuredly, my dear sir, most assuredly," he said. "Mrs. Herndon, permit me to make you acquainted with Lieut. Brant of the Seventh Cavalry."

The two, thus introduced, bowed and exchanged a few words, while Mr. Wynkoop busied himself in peering about the room, making a great pretense at searching out the lady guest, who, in very truth, had scarcely been absent from his sight during the entire evening.

"Ah!" he ejaculated, "at last I locate her, and, fortunately, at this moment she is not upon the floor, although positively hidden by the men clustering about her chair. You will excuse us, Mrs. Herndon, but I have promised Lieut. Brant a presentation to your niece."

They slipped past the musicians' stand, and the missionary pressed in through the ring of admirers.

"Why, Mr. Wynkoop!" and she extended both hands impulsively. "And only to think, you have never once been near me all this evening! You don't know how much I have missed you. I was just saying to Mr. Moffat—or it might have been Mr. McNeil—that I was completely tired out and wished you were here to sit out this dance with me."

Wynkoop blushed and forgot the errand which had brought him there, but she remained sufficiently cool and observant. She touched him gently with her hand.

"Who is that fine-looking young officer?" she questioned softly, yet without venturing to remove her glance from his face.

Mr. Wynkoop started. "Oh, exactly; I had forgotten my mission. He has requested an introduction." He drew the lieutenant forward. "Lieut. Brant, Miss Spencer."

The officer bowed, a slight shadow of disappointment in his eyes. The lady was unquestionably attractive, her face animated, her reception most cordial, yet she was not the maiden of the dark, fathomless eyes and the wealth of auburn hair.

"Such a pleasure to meet you," exclaimed Miss Spencer. "Do you know, lieutenant, that actually I have never before had the privilege of meeting an officer of the army. Your appearance supplies the one touch of color that was lacking to make the picture complete. Mr. Moffat has done so



"Miss Spencer, May I Inquire if You Possess Such a Phenomenon as a 'Star' Pupil?"

toward the musicians' stand, where there appeared to be a few unoccupied chairs.

(Continued on page 11)