

## Bob Hampton of Placer

(Continued from page 2)

finally rising to the sweet face of the young girl who occupied the step above. As their eyes met both smiled as if they understood each other.

"There is nothing quite equal to feeling well, little girl," he said, genially, patting her hand where it rested on the railing, "and I really believe I am in as fine fettle now as I ever have been. Do you know, I believe I'm perfectly fit to undertake that little detective operation casually mentioned to you a few days ago. It's got to be done, and the sooner I get at it the easier I'll feel. Fact is, I put in a large portion of the night thinking out my plans."

"I wish you would give it up all together, Bob," she said, anxiously. "I shall be so dull and lonely here while you are gone."

"I reckon you will, for a fact, but, Naida, it isn't likely this little affair will require very long, and things are lots happier between us since my late shooting scrape. When fall comes I mean to take you east and put you in some good finishing school. Don't care quite as much about it as you did, do you?"

"Yes, I think I do, Bob." She strove bravely to express enthusiasm. "The trouble is, I am so worried over your going off alone hunting after that man."

He laughed, his eyes searching her face for the truth. "Well, little girl, he won't exactly be the first I've had call to go after. Besides, this is a particular case, and appeals to me in a sort of personal way. If you only knew it, you're about as deeply concerned in the result as I am, and as for me, I can never rest easy again until the matter is over with."

"It's that awful Murphy, isn't it?"

"He's the one I'm starting after first and one sight at his right hand will decide whether he is to be the last as well."

"I never supposed you would seek revenge, like a savage," she remarked, quietly. "You never used to be that way."

"Good Lord, Naida, do you think I'm low down enough to go out hunting that poor cuss merely to get even with him for trying to stick me with a knife? Why, there are 20 others who have done as much, and we have been the best of friends afterwards. Oh, no, lassie, it means more than that, and harks back many a long year. I told you I saw a mark on his hand I would never forget—but I saw that mark first 15 years ago. This is a duty I owe a friend, a dead friend, to run to earth this murderer. Do you understand now? The fellow who did that shooting up at Bethune 15 years ago had the same sort of a mark on his right hand as this one who killed Slavin. That's why I'm after him and when I catch up he'll either squeal or die."

"But how do you know?"

"I never told you the whole story and I don't mean to now until I come back and can make everything perfectly clear. It wouldn't do you any good the way things stand now, and would only make you uneasy. But if you do any praying over it, my girl, pray good and hard that I may discover some means for making that fellow squeal."

She made no response but stood gazing thoughtfully past him.

"Have you heard anything lately,

Bob, about the Seventh?" she asked finally. "Since—since N troop left here?"

He answered with well-simulated carelessness. "No; but it is most likely they are well into the game by this time. Crook's column, I have just heard, was overwhelmingly attacked on the Rosebud, and forced to fall back. That leaves the Seventh to take the brunt of it, and there is going to be hell up north presently, or I've forgotten all I ever knew about Indians. But come, little girl, as I said, I'm quite likely to be off before night, provided I am fortunate enough to strike a fresh trail. Under such conditions you won't mind my kissing you out here, will you?"

She held up her lips and he touched them softly with his own. Her eyes were tear-dimmed. "Oh, Bob, I hate so to let you go," she sobbed, cling-



"Donald, I Love You."

ing to him. "No one could have been more to me than you have been, and you are all I have left in the world. Everything I care for goes away from me. Life is so hard, so hard!"

"Yes, little girl, I know," and the man stroked her hair tenderly, his own voice faltering. "It's all hard; I learned that sad lesson long ago, but I've tried to make it a little bit easier for you since we first came together. Still, I don't see how I can possibly help this. I've been hunting after that fellow a long while now, a matter of 15 years over a mighty dim trail, and it would be a mortal sin to permit him to get away scot-free. Besides, if this affair only manages to turn out right, I can promise to make you the happiest girl in America. But, Naida, dear, don't cling to me so; it is not at all like you to break down in this fashion," and he gently unclasped her hands, holding her away from him while he continued to gaze hungrily into her troubled face.

"Sometimes I feel just like a coward, Bob. It's the woman of it; yet truly I wish to do whatever you believe to be best. But, Bob, I need you so much, and you will come back, won't you? I shall be so lonely here, for—for you are truly all I have in the world."

With one quick, impulsive motion he pressed her to him, passionately kissing the tears from her lowered lashes, unable longer to conceal the tremor that shook his own voice. "Never, never doubt it, lassie. It will not take me long, and if I live I come straight back."

He watched her slender, white-robed figure as it passed slowly down the deserted street. Once only she paused and waved back to him and he

returned instant response, although scarcely realizing the act.

"Poor little lonely girl! Perhaps I ought to have told her the whole infernal story, but I simply haven't got the nerve, the way it reads now. If I can only get it straightened out, it'll be different."

Mechanically he thrust an unlighted cigar between his teeth and descended the steps, to all outward appearance the same reckless, audacious Hampton as of old.

The military telegraph occupied one-half of the small tent next the Miners' Retreat, and the youthful operator instantly recognized his debonaire visitor.

"Well, Billy," was Hampton's friendly greeting, "are they keeping you fairly busy with wars and rumors of wars these days?"

"Nuthin' doin' it now," was the cheerful reply. "Everything goin' ter Cheyenne. The Injuns are gittin' themselves bottled up in the Big Horn country."

"Oh, that's it? Then maybe you might manage to rush a message through for me to Fort A. Lincoln without discommoding Uncle Sam?" and Hampton placed a coin upon the rough table.

"Sure; write it out."

"Here it is; now get it off early, my lad, and bring the answer to me over at the hotel. There'll be another yellow boy waiting when you come."

The reply arrived some two hours later.

Fort A. Lincoln, June 17, 1876.  
Hampton, Glencald:  
Seventh gone west; probably Yellowstone. Brant with them. Murphy, government scout, at Cheyenne waiting orders.  
BITTON, Commanding.

He crushed the paper in his hand, thinking—thinking of the past, the present, the future. He had borne much in these last years, much misrepresentation, much loneliness of soul. To run this Murphy to cover remained his final hope for retrieving those dead, dark years. Ay, and there was Naida! Her future, scarcely less than his own, hung trembling in the balance. The sudden flashing of that name into his brain was like an electric shock. He cursed his inactivity. Great God! had he become a child again, to tremble before imagined evil, a mere hobgoblin of the mind? He had already wasted time enough; now he must wring from the lips of that misshapen savage the last vestige of his secret.

He dressed for the road, for hard, exacting service, buckling his loaded cartridge belt outside his rough coat and testing his revolvers with unusual care. He spoke a few parting words of instruction to Mrs. Guffy and went quietly out. Ten minutes later he was in the saddle, galloping down the dusty stage road toward Cheyenne.

### CHAPTER XXVII.

#### The Trail of Silent Murphy.

The young infantryman who had been detailed for the important service of telegraph operator sat in the Cheyenne office, his feet on the rude table, his face buried behind a newspaper.

"Could you inform me where I might find Silent Murphy, a government scout?"

The voice had the unmistakable ring of military authority, and the soldier operator instinctively dropped his feet to the floor.

"Well, my lad, you are not dumb, are you?"

The telegrapher's momentary hesi-

ation vanished; his ambition to become a martyr to the strict laws of service secrecy was not sufficiently strong to cause him to take the doubtful chances of a lie. "He was here, but has gone."

"Where?"

"The devil knows. He rode north, carrying dispatches for Custer."

"When?"

"Oh, three or four hours ago."

Hampton swore softly but fervently, behind his clinched teeth.

"Where is Custer?"

"Don't know exactly. Supposed to be with Terry and Gibbons, somewhere near the mouth of the Powder, although he may have left there by this time, moving down the Yellowstone. Murphy's orders were to intercept his column somewhere between the Rosebud and the Big Horn. No other scout along this border would take such a detail. But that old devil of a Murphy just enjoys such a trip. He started off as happy as ever I see him."

"How far will he have to ride?"

"Oh, 'bout 300 miles as the crow flies, a little west of north, and the better part of the distance, they tell me, it's almighty rough country for night work. But then Murphy, he knows the way all right. Sorry you didn't come along a little earlier," he said, genially. "Do you know Murphy?"

"I'm not quite certain. Did you happen to notice a peculiar black scar on the back of his right hand?"

(To be continued)

### Father Does the Trading.

In a lovely little hamlet near Pittsfield, Massachusetts, are two grocery stores between which there is little or no choice as to attractiveness. The writer waited in one of those stores on a summer afternoon until called for by a farmer landlord. During a two-hour wait not a single woman entered that store. Farmers galore drove up to its portals, deposited an order slip with one of the untidy clerks, and then stalked away on other errands. Perhaps a plow was to be mended at the blacksmith shop, or mail was to be picked up at the post-office, or an express package was waiting at the depot. Sometimes a man would hand in the order with this warning. "Ma says she don't want any more of that there—coffee. The last was no good at all. And if you're giving away premiums today with any brand of tea, she'd like to try a pound and get a new vinegar cruet."

The farmer landlord deposited an order, and hurried away. When he came back the order had been packed into a soap box and was ready for storing in the rear of the spring wagon. Further acquaintance with the farmer landlord's wife proved her to be a wonderfully capable housekeeper, who scrubbed her kitchen floor daily, scolded her help for spilling a few drops of cider apple sauce on the pantry shelf, and personally scalded her milk tins every day; yet she said she did not have time to get acquainted with her grocer.

To be sure she did not express it just that way. What she did say was: "Father does most of the trading. I never go to town except to church. There's nothing to see at the stores in ———."—Woman's Home Companion.