

THE QUARTERBREED

A Tale of Adventures on
An Indian Reservation

By
Robert Ames Bennet

ON HIS way to take the agency at Lakotah Indian reservation following the murder of Agent Nogen, Capt. Floyd Hardy, U. S. A., rescues a quarterbreed girl and two men from attacking Indians. They are Jacques Dupont, post-trader, his daughter Marie, and Reginald Vandervyn, agency clerk and nephew of Senator Clemmer. Hardy learns Vandervyn had been promised the agency by his politician uncle, discovers the Indians are disaffected because they have been cheated in a tribal mine which Dupont and Vandervyn are illegally working, is puzzled when his friendly speech to tribesmen, interpreted by Vandervyn's halfbreed tool, angers the Indians, and he determines to find out what's wrong all around and right it. He proposes marriage to Marie, whom Vandervyn also is courting, and is held off, but nursed tenderly by her when shot and wounded from ambush. Lost in the mountains after a second ambush attempt on his life, Hardy wanders into the Indian camp, learns they have misunderstood his motives through misinterpretation, makes friends with them and accuses Dupont and Vandervyn of rascality to their faces. Out of this situation springs a much more serious dilemma for the army officer, attacking both his affections and his honor—as you will see in this installment.

CHAPTER XII—Continued.

"You add to my regret. Yet, as acting agent, it is my duty to censure your father and Mr. Vandervyn for deceiving me. Had they told me about Nogen's malfeasance—his blocking of the new treaty and compelling the Indians to work the mine without pay—" "He did that?" Marie questioned her father.

"Well, me and Mr. Van done all we could to git him to pay 'em," mumbled Dupont.

"Of course! But he—I did not think him so mean!" The girl's eyes blazed and her nostrils dilated. "So that was why he was shot? I don't blame the man who did it—I could have done it myself! The thief!—Reggie, if only you had let the killer escape!"

"Couldn't," tersely replied Vandervyn. "He was blood-mad—would have got Charlie and me, too, if we hadn't got him."

"That was self-defense," said Hardy. "It has been greed and dishonesty, though, that have prompted you to conceal from me the facts that led up to the killing. Aside from the danger to me, you have permitted the tribe to verge upon an uprising that would have compelled their pacification by the war department. All this that you might steal the ore of this mine."

you want to take away the mine from the tribe and from us too?"

Hardy winced under the scornful reproaches, yet did not yield a hair. "I have done my duty, Miss Dupont. I shall continue to do it. I have no intention of robbing anyone of what is rightfully his."

"Yet when the reservation is thrown open for entry, someone else who never saw the mine may slip in ahead of us and jump it," said Vandervyn. "That is something I cannot prevent," said Hardy.

"You can!" contradicted Marie. "The chiefs will not insist on the new treaty—they will do what Pere thinks best for them and us, if you leave the matter to him and Reggie."

"I must do my duty as acting agent," insisted Hardy.

"You do not regret saving my life," asserted Hardy.

"Well, mebbe not. Just the same, it's mighty hard luck on us. Here we went and blocked out all that there ore—three hundred thousand dollars as good as in our pockets—not to speak of all that's down under and t'other side the shaft. For all we know, it runs clean through the mountain and down to China!"

"That does not alter the situation," said Hardy.

"Mebbe it don't, and then ag'in—" Dupont began to scratch his head. "Yes, mebbe it don't, and then, ag'in, mebbe it does. Just you take a look at it this way, Cap. Suppose that new treaty goes through, the tribe don't git nothing out of this mine, and we don't, neither. Just some lucky bum beats us to it, and the government says it's hisn. Is that fair and square?"

"You have acted outside the law," said Hardy. "You must take your chances with other locators."

"How about the tribe?" queried Dupont. "Don't you care nothing about their interests? Just supposing you and me and Mr. Van took hold of this here proposition for the tribe and split even with them on the proceeds, I call that a square deal to them and us, too—and I know Marie would think the same. She likes you, Cap. Just show her you want to do what's best for all concerned, and I'm dead sure she—"

"Stop!" commanded Hardy. "Leave your daughter out of this."

"You've got to tell me how I'm going to do it," replied Dupont in an injured tone. "If I don't git my share in the mine, Mr. Van can't afford to take her; and you won't have no show. But you git in right with Marie, and she'd work her hands to the bone for you. She ain't no common breed girl, neither. You know that. She'd be a real lady, if she had money—only you ain't going to give her no chance."

"She knows that I wish to marry her," said Hardy.

"Think she believes that when you're going to rob me and her of a fortune?"

Hardy looked directly at the tempter, his eyes clear and resolute, though his face was white and drawn. "It is of no use, Dupont. I shall do what I consider my duty."

Dupont's face darkened. "So that's what I git for saving your life. You ain't got a particle of gratitude, and you don't care a hang about her."

"I must beg to differ with you," said Hardy. "But I cannot expect you to understand my position."

Dupont drew out his pipe and returned to his seat on the mine-dump, to brood on his wrongs in morose silence. Hardy thoughtfully walked back to the cabin, drew out a writing pad from one of his saddlebags and began to draft a semiofficial letter to the most influential of his few acquaintances in Washington.

He soon became so intent that he did not notice the half-dozen figures in dark blue uniform that came swinging down the precipitous mountain-side above the terrace. When at last he finished the letter and looked up, he saw all the members of the police escort drawn up in line before him, their swarthy faces alight with respectful friendliness. Their sergeant uttered a guttural word of salutation, and began making signs.

Hardy smiled, shook his head, and looked around for an interpreter. Dupont still sat sulking on the mine dump, but Marie and Vandervyn were coming back up the mountain-side. They appeared only a few yards away, as Hardy glanced about. His lips drew tense when he perceived the girl's happy blushes and the look with which Vandervyn was regarding her half-averted face.

At sight of Hardy she straightened with proud disdain, and would have immediately gone around into the cabin had he not spoken.

"Pardon me, Miss Dupont. These men wish to report to me. May I ask you to interpret for them?"

The girl turned coldly to the sergeant, who at once poured out an impassioned declamation, emphasized with swift-formed signs. He was still talking, when Dupont sullenly shuffled over from the mine-dump. His disconcerted face darkened still more when he came within hearing of the speakers.

At last the sergeant finished his impromptu oration. Without looking at Hardy, Marie gave the substance of the speech with contemptuous curt-ness:

Dupont looked to Vandervyn, and received a sign to acquiesce.

"Don't want to leave you in the lurch, Cap," he said, "but if Marie's set on going, guess I'll have to."

"Tell four of the police they are detailed to escort yourself and Miss Dupont back to the agency," ordered Hardy. He raised his hat to Marie. "Permit me to wish you a pleasant journey."

The girl turned away without replying. Hardy stood for a moment cool and still under Vandervyn's exultant smile; then faced about and steadily walked off along the mountain terrace.

He did not return to the cabin until the greater number of the saddle and pack ponies had been brought up from the valley and the returning party had mounted and ridden away on the back trail. Vandervyn started off with them, and Hardy's keen, hazel eyes dimmed as, leaning against a gnarled pine on the slope above, he watched the lovers ride away, side by side.

Angered at himself for his momentary weakness, he sprang down the ledges to the terrace, and hastened back to talk with Redbear. He was met at the cabin door by Oinna, who placed a finger on her lips and whispered that her brother had at last fallen asleep.

Hardy withdrew to the shady side of the cabin, where he sat down on his saddle and began drafting a list of instructions for the tribal delegates to Washington. He was still writing them when, shortly before nightfall,

Dupont muttered a curse, and ventured an ill-humored remark loud enough to reach Hardy's ears: "The whole bunch'd sing a different tune if I told them how he turned down the chance to give the tribe half what's in our mine."

"Chuck it, Jake!" interposed Vandervyn, with a good-humored smile that surprised Hardy no less than the trader. "It's up to us to take our medicine. We know it will not be to the best interests of the tribe. The responsibility, however, is his."

"You ain't going to throw down, are you?" exclaimed Dupont.

My appeal to you as a gentleman having failed, I must conclude that you are not a gentleman. I shall be compelled to disclose this incident to Miss Dupont. You shall be escorted off the reservation under arrest."

"You'll order me—" cried Vandervyn, and again he bent forward as if to leap at his rival. Hardy stood cold and motionless in the dim starlight. The younger man checked himself. His voice shook with suppressed anger: "You've got the drop on me now. Wait till we hear from Washington."

"Until I am relieved from my present detail, I shall consider myself the guardian of everyone and everything belonging to the tribe," stated Hardy.

There followed a silence of several moments' duration, in which Vandervyn must have found time to reflect. He drew back a step or two, lit his pipe, and at last remarked in a somewhat forced tone of conciliation: "I see you're like an army mule—no using trying to budge you when you balk. I give you my word to act as a gentleman in this affair."

"Very well," replied Hardy.

Vandervyn started off, sucking at his pipe. Hardy turned about, and locked the door on the outside with the heavy padlock that hung loose in the jamb staple. He put the key in his pocket, and walked around the cabin to make certain that there were no other openings larger than the narrow crevices of the loopholes.

When he returned to the tree, he found Vandervyn already outstretched. He picked up his blankets and moved down the slope, to spend the night in the more congenial company of the two remaining Indian policemen.



"You Insulted My Father!"

CHAPTER XIV.

In White and Black.

In the morning Oinna did not show herself outside the cabin, though Hardy called a kindly good morning to her. Her brother, with one eye carefully bandaged and in a state of unsteady that Hardy at once perceived when he mumbled that he wished to go back to bed and rest until the council.

"You must have your wits about you this time," added Hardy. "Whatever the cause of the misunderstanding at the first council, it must not recur. You are too careless in your interpretations. Inform your sister that she is to be present. I shall require her to check you."

"Would you make a girl as shy as she is stand up in a tribal council and interpret?" remonstrated Vandervyn, as Redbear strolled around the end of the cabin.

"The presence of her grandfather will give her courage," replied Hardy. "It is necessary that she should be present. I do not trust either the ability or the honesty of her brother."

Vandervyn shrugged, and said no more. Half an hour or so later he asked permission to use Hardy's pen and paper to write some letters. The captain handed them to him, and started up the mountain-side above the terrace mouth. A steep path led up to the top of the spur ridge from which the shaft had been sunk from the apex of the outcrop of the vein.

As soon as he had gone beyond earshot, Vandervyn rose to stretch himself and call softly through the nearest loophole. He then seated himself on his saddle and began to write. A listener would have had need to be near at hand to have heard the low murmur of Redbear's and Oinna's voices through the loophole above Vandervyn's head.

When Hardy returned from his examination of the upper works of the mine, Vandervyn sealed in his presence the two letters that he had written. They appeared decidedly thin, in view of the time that Vandervyn had spent in his writing and the number of sheets of paper gone from the pad. But Hardy did not observe this. His attention had been diverted by a large party of Indians that had appeared on the velvet green meadows of the valley bottom.

The tribal council had begun to assemble. This time the chiefs and headmen did not come alone. From far camps as well as near, the men of the tribe were bringing their families to see the Longknife chief whom they had first hated but now believed to be their friend and father. By noon their numbers had grown from scores to hundreds.

Shortly after the midday meal one of the Indian policemen brought word up to the cabin that the head chief had arrived and the council was ready to talk with the agent. Hardy at once gave command to mount. As soon as Hardy and Vandervyn started to ride down the slope, Oinna slipped out, and held her brother's pony for him. She then mounted her own, and rode after him.

At the foot of the slope the riders came out through a grove of young, quaking aspens into sudden view of the picturesque and imposing tribal council. Fully half the tribe had gathered together for the occasion. All up and down the valley the meadows were dotted with their ponies. The Indians were assembled in a dense crowd—the men in a deep band around the chiefs, the women and children outside.

Do you believe that Vandervyn can persuade Oinna to do so or scare her into misinterpreting Captain Hardy's statements to the tribesmen? Will Hardy catch Vandervyn at his dirty work this time and punish him for it?

(TO BE CONTINUED)