

THE QUARTERBREED

The Story of an Army Officer on an Indian Reservation
By ROBERT AMES BENNET

COMING 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 that Vandervyn had been promised the agency by his politician uncle, discovers that the Indians are disaffected because they have been cheated in a tribal mine which Dupont and Vandervyn are working illegally, is puzzled when his friendly speech to tribesmen, interpreted by Vandervyn's tool, angers the Indians, and he determines to find out what's wrong all around and right it. He becomes smitten with Marie, whom Vandervyn is courting, and proposes to her. She holds him off but nurses him tenderly when he is shot and wounded from ambush. Recovered, Captain Hardy, accompanied by the Duponts, Vandervyn, an interpreter and a few Indian policemen, starts to the mines in the mountains. What occurs on that trip makes mighty good reading in this installment.

CHAPTER X—Continued.

When Hardy saw the couple ride ahead, he would have ordered them back had not Dupont again assured him that the girl would not be in the slightest danger at any time during the trip.

"You were not so certain of the friendliness of the Indians toward her the other day," remarked Hardy.

Dupont scratched his head. "Well, no, I wasn't, Cap; that's no lie. That there, though, was different. I'm going now by what Mr. Van says about the feeling in the camps. Wish I felt as sure about you."

"Never mind about me. If your daughter is safe, that is quite sufficient. You say this mine is centrally located with relation to the various camps. We will go to it first and endeavor to get the tribe to meet us there in council."

"At the mine?" mumbled Dupont. "We'll, you're the boss."

The party now entered Sioux Creek canyon and followed the narrow path alongside the torrent until they came to the first small Indian camp. The Indians met Marie and Vandervyn with friendly greetings, but looked at Hardy with a stolid concealment of ill feeling that, according to Dupont, boded ill for the new agent's reception in the larger camps. Hardy set his jaw, and ordered the party to start on into the mountains.

Noon found the party over twenty miles from the agency by trail, though less than half that distance in an air line. They had come upon no more Indian camps and had seen no more Indians. Late afternoon found them far in among the mountains, with snowy peaks on every side. Yet they were still a long ten miles by trail from their destination. Upon learning from Dupont that there was no desirable camp-site nearer than the mine, Hardy asked his companion to ride forward and urge all to a faster pace.

The rest of the party had rounded a heap of rock that towered up like a ruined castle at the ridge summit, and Vandervyn was about to follow them out of sight, when the thoroughbred came to a full stop, thirty yards down the trail, at the foot of the steepest part of the cliff. Considerate of the fact that his tall mount was at a disadvantage in such a situation as compared with the lower-set ponies, Hardy did not urge the mare to carry him up the ascent.

He paused a moment, waiting to see if she would make the attempt voluntarily. She stood motionless. He patted her neck and dropped down, out of the saddle. The suddenness of the movement alone saved him from the bullet that pinged down the mountainside and passed above the saddle precisely where, an instant before, had been his midbody.

The report of the rifle had yet to reach Hardy's ear when he peered over the mare's withers in search of the



Though He Saw No Smoke, He Did Not Look in Vain.

smoke of the shot. But though he saw no smoke, he did not look in vain. Above a boulder, high up in a cleft, he perceived a devilish painted face, surrounded by a war bonnet. He glanced sideways up the ridge slope at Vandervyn. The young man had halted his pony on the ridge crest and was staring back down at Hardy.

heads of the leaping, yelling pack he saw the Indian women and children scurry to the tepees and the bucks spring up with their bows and guns.

CHAPTER XI.

Light in the Darkness.

Soon Hardy had approached into the circle of the firelight. Some of the Indians started to aim their weapons at him. He held up his right hand, palm forward. A deep voice called out



He Faced Them as Coolly and Quietly as If They Were His Own Party.

a guttural order. The threatening bucks drew apart to right and left and a naked boy ran forward with a blazing stick to drive off the dogs.

Hardy calmly advanced to the fire between the grim and stolid bucks. There was not one among them who was not itching to drive a bullet or an arrow through his body, and he knew it. Yet he faced them as coolly and quietly as if they were his own party.

The bucks looked toward the far side of the fire, as if for the signal to strike down the audacious intruder. Hardy followed their glances and perceived a blanket-wrapped Indian who sat in the midst of the volcanic hush seemingly as placid and immobile as a Buddha. His face was down-bent, and so muffled in the blanket that Hardy could not make out the features. It was, however, easy to divine that the man was the chief of the band.

Hardy walked around the fire with his most dignified bearing, sat down beside the chief and laid his rifle on the ground between them. He then folded his arms and waited, his eyes fixed on the fire in a calm, unwavering gaze. There followed a silence of a full minute's duration. He knew that it might end at any moment in an attack. His hand gripped the hilt of his pistol on his breast under the edge of his coat. The bucks stealthily shifted their positions until they had completely surrounded the unwelcome visitor. Hardy sat motionless and gave no sign that he observed them.

At last, when the suspense had become almost unendurable, the chief muttered a word to the nearest buck. The man glided back toward the largest tepee. The chief pushed the blanket from his head. Hardy slowly looked aside at him and perceived the powerful profile of Ti-owa-konza, the Thunderbolt. He was to deal with the head chief of the tribe.

There followed another silence. It was broken by the tread of light feet, and a girl appeared beside the chief. Hardy caught a glimpse of a gingham skirt, and glanced quickly up at the face of the girl. He was met by the frightened gaze of Onna Redbear. "Oh!" she murmured. "It is bad! You oughtn't to've come here, sir. They don't like you. Mr. Van said he was going to tell you—"

A grunt of disapproval from Ti-owa-konza cut short the hurried statement. After a dignified silence the chief spoke to the girl. She clasped her hands and interpreted in an anxious murmur:

"He says I must be only the tongue between you and him. He says, why did you lie? Why have you not gone away, as you said you would?"

Hardy turned and looked direct into the haughty face of the chief. "Tell him I did not lie. I did not say I would go away. I wished to stay and prove myself the friend of the tribe. Your brother told the lie to keep the chiefs from destroying the tribe by attacking me."

Onna's interpretation brought guttural exclamations from the surrounding bucks. Hardy was equally unmoved by their ferocious glances and the contemptuous rejoinder of Ti-owa-konza:

"Does the chief of the Longknives think to destroy a tribe single-handed?"

"No, nor do I wish others to destroy the tribe," answered Hardy. "I do not wish the Longknives to come and make war on the tribe. Yet that is what they will do if I am harmed."

Again Onna interpreted in her flute-like tones. This time the chief considered before speaking. Onna's gold-tinted skin turned a sallow gray.

"He—he says he will fight if you do not promise to go away!" she gasped.

Hardy smiled. "Have no fear, Onna. He is too great a chief to kill a guest in his camp. Tell him I came to the reservation to be a friend to the tribe. Though I am a chief of the Longknives, my heart is good toward his people. It would be foolish of him to kill or drive away the friend of his people."

This time Ti-owa-konza gave the intruder an open stare of contempt. The surrounding bucks glared more ferociously than ever.

"He says you are fork-tongued," Onna translated the reply. "He says, if you are a friend, why did you say at the council that you would punish all the tribe for the killing of Nogen?"

"That is a mistake. I did not say I would punish the tribe."

Onna interpreted the answer and the grim old chief's rejoinder: "The Longknife's mouth was big at the agency. Here he is alone in my camp and his mouth is small."

"I talk as I talked at the agency. What Ti-owa-konza claims I said about punishing the tribe is not the truth. There must have been a mistake in the interpretation, or the chiefs did not hear aright. I had only peace and friendship in my heart. I said that I did not blame the killing of Mr. Nogen on the tribe."

This statement failed to break Thunderbolt's mask of stolidity, though some of the other Indians slightly relaxed their menacing attitude. Hardy took off his hat to show the red scar above his temple, and spoke again:

"I do not blame the killing of Mr. Nogen on the tribe; nor do I blame the tribe for the wrongdoing of the bad-hearted Indian who shot me in the head five days ago. The same man, or another man with a bad heart, tried to shoot me, after sundown today, as I came up the trail over on the other side of the broken-topped mountain."

Onna's interpretation was met by a guttural "Ugh!" of surprise even from the chief. He asked shrewdly: "If the Longknife does not lie, is he not afraid to be in my camp? It is the nearest to the trail."

Hardy smiled and held out his open palm to the chief. "I trust Ti-owa-konza and his people. There is only one bad Indian, and even he may come to feel good in his heart toward me when he learns that I am the friend of the tribe."

Still the old chief's face remained inscrutably immobile. He pondered, and at last made another sharp query: "The Longknife claims that he is a friend. Why, then, did he say at the council that he will do the way Nogen did and make my people dig stones and dirt from the big holes, without giving them any trade goods for their work?"

Hardy's clear eyes dimmed for a moment, and then sparkled with comprehension. He answered with an earnest sincerity of tone that compelled belief:

"I now see that at the council Redbear mistook much of what I told him to say, or else, in their anger, Ti-owa-konza and his subchiefs failed to understand aright the interpretation. The place where stones are dug is on Indian ground. It belongs to the tribe. No white man has any right to make your people dig stones. If they are willing to dig, they must be given trade goods for their work."

The response to this statement was unmistakable. The moment that Onna had interpreted it the last trace of menace disappeared from the bearing of the Indians, and even the chief began to relax. Yet he had still another query:

"Did the Longknife say he would stop the issue to the tribe of all government goods and that he would take away from the tribe all their lands and give them to the white men?"

At last the real cause of the failure of the council was disclosed. Either intentionally or through stupid blundering, Redbear had made the chiefs furious by a twisted interpretation that had given the exact reverse of what had been intended. With the key to the situation in his hands, Hardy at once began to make clear what he had tried to tell at the council. He explained why the issues of goods would cease the following spring, and what was meant by an allotting of tribal land in severalty. He added that if there was gold on any of the reservation land it would be well for the tribe to sell that part of what they owned; otherwise bad white men would, sooner or later, come in and steal it.

More than half convinced of Hardy's sincerity, though with still a lingering suspicion, Ti-owa-konza explained in turn that the tribe was not only willing to allot the farming land of the reservation and sell the mineral land, but a treaty to that effect had been agreed upon by the tribe, the previous year. All that remained to

be done was for the white chiefs at Washington to agree on the price to be paid for the mineral land and for a delegation of tribal chiefs to go to Washington and put their marks on the treaty paper.

A question or two from Hardy brought out the angry complaint that when Nogen began to dig stones he told the chiefs there would be no treaty, and that the tribe must dig the stones for him, or they would receive no more issue goods. Chief Van and Big-mouth (Dupont) had tried to get Nogen to give trade goods to the young men and women who had dug holes. But Nogen would not allow it. Then a bad Indian had shot Nogen, and Van had shot the killer. The tribe did not blame Chief Van. But they had felt bad toward Nogen and they had felt bad toward the new agent because they thought he would do as Nogen had done. Now they would like the new agent. No Indian would wish to kill him when it became known what he intended to do for the tribe.

After the old chief finished this explanation, Hardy found himself a welcome and honored guest in the camp. At his suggestion Ti-owa-konza readily agreed to send out runners in the morning to call a council at the mine the day after. Hardy, in turn, promised to draw up papers to make smooth the way of the delegation of chiefs in Washington.

At a sign from her grandfather, Onna now brought food to the guest. While he ate he talked with her about her experience in the camp. She told him joyously that her mother's father and all his family and band had been very kind to her and had been hospitable, though not so kind, to her brother.

But when Hardy casually inquired whether Redbear had left the camp at the same time as Vandervyn, the girl's flow of conversation came to an abrupt stop. She blushed and stammered and became so painfully shy and confused that Hardy considerably feigned drowsiness.

CHAPTER XII.

His Duty.

At dawn Hardy was roused by Ti-owa-konza with a greeting as friendly as it was dignified, though Hardy had to surmise its meaning from the chief's expression. Onna was already outside, helping with breakfast. While she served her grandfather and the guest, Hardy suggested that she go with him to the mine, where they probably would find Marie and the rest of the party. Reluctant as was Ti-owa-konza to part with his half-white granddaughter, he ordered her pony brought in and saddled. When she explained to Hardy that the mine was only a mile away across the mountain, he declined the offer of a saddleless mount, took ceremonious leave of the old chief and set out up the mountainside with the girl and a young Indian guide.

Hardy noted the bearings and distances of all prominent points around him with the eye of one well trained in the art of topography. A quarter-hour brought the little party to the top of the low mountain. Before them the far side of the mountain pitched down a steep and rocky incline into a narrow valley. The silent Indian guide pointed to a terrace midway down the descent. From amidst the pines was rising a cloud of blue-black smoke.

Soon Onna pointed out a cabin among the pines. They were within fifty yards of it when Vandervyn and Dupont came out of a hole in the cliff-end of a spur-ridge near the cabin, and stood staring at the newcomers in undisguised astonishment. Hardy swerved and hastened toward them, his eyes bright and cold. The two men glanced at one another and advanced to meet him halfway.

Dupont was the first to speak: "By Gar, Cap, we sure are mighty glad to see you ag'in all safe and sound! Thought you'd gone and lost yourself on that cussed mountain. The pleece are back there now, looking for you."

"And you two are here, I see," dryly rejoined Hardy.

"I beg your pardon, Captain Hardy," replied Vandervyn, his eyes flashing with quick anger. "You told me to go ahead and guard Marie."

"I added for you to send the police around to flank the assassin."

Vandervyn drew himself up stiffly. "You have my word, sir, that I heard nothing of that."

"In common decency, you might have returned to see what had become of me," returned Hardy.

Dupont hastened to interpose: "Mr. Van got the idea you meant us to rush Marie through here to the mine, where she'd be safe. So we lit out fast as we could. The pleece found your mare, but lost your trail up in the rocks. First thing this morning we sent the whole bunch back to trail you."

"Just the same, we would've, Cap, you can bet your life on it—only on account of Marie and—" The trader turned a dubious glance on Onna, and remarked: "I see you stumbled onto old Thunderbolt's camp."

"I did," said Hardy, and he smiled. "Thanks to Miss Onna, I was able to make myself better understood than when her brother acted as interpreter. I have reason to believe that he willfully misstated what I said to the chiefs."

"By Gar!" swore Dupont. "That old Thunderbolt is a deep one. Just like him to try to throw you off the track by laying it all on Charlie."

"I'm not so sure of that, Jake," broke in Vandervyn. "You remember, Charlie was scared stiff. He may have become muddled."

"We'll, mebbe that had part to do with it. Just the same, you can't tell me the whole tribe ain't sore. Look at the way they've twice tried to git Cap—and potting Charlie last night."

"Charlie?" gasped Onna. "You say—"

"Oh, Mr. Dupont, he's not—not—" "No—buck up," brusquely replied Vandervyn. "He was only nipped through the arm. He will be all right in a few days."

"All right? O-o-oh, thank you!" sighed the girl.

In the stress of the moment she forgot that they were not alone. She held out her arms to him and looked up into his face, her soft eyes beaming with love and adoration.

He frowned, and his voice grated with harshness: "Don't be a fool! He's in the cabin. Miss Dupont is taking care of him. Go and thank her, not me."

Tears gushed into the girl's eyes. She drooped her head and slunk away as if Vandervyn had struck her. Hardy's face became like iron.

"Mr. Vandervyn," he admonished, "do not let me again hear you speak to any woman in that tone."

Vandervyn shrugged. "The chivalrous chevalier! Have it your own way. Now I suppose you'll go in and worry her and rag Charlie into a fever about bailing up his interpretation at the council."

"As for that—" began Hardy. He stopped short and raised his hat.

Marie had come out of the cabin, and was hastening forward to greet him, her beautiful face radiant.

"Captain!" she called. "You're here—really here, safe and unharmed!" "Thanks to Miss Redbear," replied Hardy.

"But how could Onna—surely she did not help you escape the murderer?"

"No. It was easy enough to dislodge the fellow. The difficulty was to track him among those rocks. Soon lost him and myself also."

"And he escaped to shoot Charlie—the wolf! The poor boy was tracking a deer over on the ridge half a mile or so this way."

"All's well that ends well," Hardy assured her. "I'm here, unharmed, as you see."



"In Common Decency You Might Have Returned to See What Had Become of Me."

you see; Redbear, I understand, has only a slight wound; and the old chief now knows that I am a friend of the tribe. He will call a council to meet us here tomorrow."

"A council—here?" queried Vandervyn.

"Why not?" demanded Hardy, fixing him with his keen glance. "Could there be a more suitable place for a tribal council than at the mine which has been the source of all the recent trouble on this reservation?"

"Nom d'un chien!" muttered Dupont. "What's that breed girl gone and blabbed?"

"Nothing," rejoined Hardy. "She has done no more than interpret between the head chief and myself. I have learned all about Nogen's dishonesty and his harshness to the tribe. It is well that you and Mr. Vandervyn tried to induce him to be more just, else I should order you both off the reservation for lying to me."

"Lying? What d'you mean by that?" blustered Dupont.

"The word is explicit," said Hardy. "Mr. Vandervyn, take your hand from your holster. Miss Dupont, I regret the necessity of making this reprimand in your presence."

The girl's eyes were ablaze with indignant anger. "Regret is a mild excuse for insulting my father, sir!"

Do you believe that Vandervyn had anything to do with the attempt to ambush Captain Hardy on the way to the mine—and what about the story of Redbear's wound?

(TO BE CONTINUED)