

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 mate, 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 get 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."

"Steal our own ore?" bellowed Dupont. "You're plumb locoed!"

"Not so loud, if you please," quietly replied Hardy. "The ore is not yours."

"That's all you know about it," blustered the trader. "Ain't I one of the discoverers and locators of the lode?"

"The lode is not subject to location. It is on Indian land."

"What if it is? Ain't I a member of the tribe?"

"The tribal land has not yet been allotted in severalty. Every square foot of ground on the reservation belongs to the tribe as a whole. No one member can hold individual title to any of it."

"Well, what of it?" demanded Dupont, far from silenced. "If the tribe wants to work the mine, and they want me and Mr. Van to manage it for them and buy the ore, what in hell have you got to say about it?"

"Nothing at present," answered Hardy. "If the tribe consents, I shall make no objection. You will be able to cheat them of only a few thousand dollars before the new treaty is consummated and all this mineral land opened to location and entry under the mining laws."

The veins on Vandervyn's crimsoned forehead were swollen and pulsating with his furious anger. He spoke in



"The Whole Tribe Hates You—and I'm One of the Tribe."

a high, airy tone: "So you are going to pull wires to get our mine taken away from us?"

"I shall see that justice is done toward the tribe," said Hardy, and he fixed the younger man with a glance that compelled him to blink and look aside.

But now Marie's swift-mounting scorn and anger burst out in a storm of passion:

"You hypocrite! you self-righteous martinet! You would reprimand my father and Mr. Van, would you? And each a thousand times better man than you! Who has made all the trouble here since you came? The whole tribe hates you—and I'm one of the tribe! You straight-laced prig! You say Pere and Reggie are dishonest, when all they wish to do is to give the tribe good work and good pay. But you—"

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.

The girl turned her back upon him in open disdain. He raised his hat to her and started for the cabin, his face white, but his shoulders squared back and his head very erect.

CHAPTER XIII.

Another Card or Two.

A few minutes later Hardy came out of the cabin. Though grave, he was cool and alert. He at once walked up to Dupont, who sat pulling at his pipe on the top of the mine-dump.

"Redbear seems to be quiet," he said. "Where is your daughter?"

Dupont pointed vaguely down the mountain-side. "She went off with Mr. Van, to try to smooth down his fur."

You riled him considerable, Cap."

"I regret that it was necessary to reprimand you."

"All right, Cap. I don't bear no grudge. Mebbe now you'd like to take a look at the mine."

"Yes," crisply agreed Hardy.

Dupont rose and led him into the mouth of the tunnel. There he unlocked a heavy tool chest and took out two candles. These were needed, for though the tunnel ran into the mountain side less than three hundred feet, its twisting course along the ore-vein soon shut out the daylight. Dupont noticed his companion's dubious look at the soft ore-body that formed the roof and one wall of the tunnel.

"Walk quiet, and don't talk loud," he said. "We ain't done no timbering yet. Drove in this drift to the foot of the shaft fast as we could get the lazy cusses to work, so's we could figure what we had to count on."

Hardy made no reply until they came to the end of the tunnel and stepped out into the dim daylight of the shaft bottom. He looked up the big, square, timbered well, and remarked: "You sank this first, then drove in to meet it."

"Yep. Wanted to make sure the vein didn't pinch out nowhere. Nogen and Mr. Van both figured we got three hundred thousand dollars of ore as good as blocked out."

"Ah," said Hardy, and he signed to Dupont to lead the way back.

They had gone twenty-five or thirty paces when a little slither of ore fell on the floor of the tunnel in front of Dupont. Instantly he sprang forward, with a whispered cry: "Jump—quick!"

Hardy leaped after him, barely in time to clear the ton or more of ore that dropped from the roof in a mass. Without stopping to look behind them, the two men hastened stealthily down the slight slope of the tunnel, their candles upraised and eyes fixed on the soft, raw ore-body above them. At any moment the entire roof might cave in and bury them. The shock of the first fall loosened small quantities of ore all along the passage. Fragments dribbled down behind and in front of the fugitives and even on their heads. Panic-stricken, they broke into a run. It was none too soon. As they dashed around the turn that brought them to the outlet, the entire roof behind them came thudding down.

Safe outside, Dupont shook the fragments from his hat and clothes, and pulled out his bandanna to wipe off the sweat that was gathering in beads on his forehead.

"Ugh!" he grunted. "Don't never see me in there ag'in till it's timbered."

"Rather close call," remarked Hardy.

"You're a cool one," muttered the trader, and he scowled. "Nom d'un chien! Just my luck! If I hadn't sung out, you'd 'a' got smashed under that first drop."

"I shall not forget it, Dupont."

"Me, neither. 'Stend of being rid of you, here you are ready as ever to clean us out—and I done it!"

"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 '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 get 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 get my share in the mine, Mr. Van can't afford to take her; and you won't have no show. But you get 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 get 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 semi-official 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:

"He says they think you were very brave to follow the shooter into the broken mountain. They are very sorry that they could not again find the trail of the bad Indian after losing it on the bare rocks from which he must have shot Charlie."

"Tell them that is all right. The fellow thought I was the enemy of his tribe. He will soon learn better. Neither he nor any other will again attack me."

"Yes, you have talked Thunderbolt into believing you the tribe's dearest friend," ironically replied Marie.

"These silly fellows trailed you to the chief's camp, and have swallowed whole the account of the wonderful good things you are going to do for the tribe. All this gush and fuss was over that and your big heart."

Regardless of the mockery in the girl's eyes, Hardy turned to smile and nod at the policemen in acknowledgment of their kindly feeling.

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.

"What else can we do?" mildly asked Vandervyn. "The game is up."

"What if the government don't make it no rush, but has the entrymen draw lots?" objected Dupont. "I been fool enough to show Cap through the diggings and tell him what we got blocked out. If he ain't square enough to keep his head shut, we won't stand no chance at all of buying out the entryman what draws first choice in the lottery."

"You see, captain," said Vandervyn. "As we discovered and developed the lode, do you not think the honorable thing would be to make no mention of the mine in your report?"

"The tribe should receive a large payment for their mineral lands," replied Hardy.

"Quite true," agreed Vandervyn, his voice ringing clear and strong with sincerity. "There was talk of paying them fifteen millions. I think it should be fifteen or twenty. We have found indications of other lodes. I am sure you will see that it would be perfectly honorable to report that fact, but leave out all mention of our mine. That would protect us, and do no harm to the tribe. If you see it that way, I will pull all the wires I can to convince the government that this part of the reservation is rich in minerals. My uncle is chairman of the treaty commission. If his report favors a payment of fifteen or twenty millions to the tribe, congress will appropriate that amount."

"If there are indications of other lodes as rich as this one, fifteen millions is none too large a price," said Hardy. "You agree to help obtain fair compensation to the tribe?"

"Provided you do the fair and honorable thing by us," replied Vandervyn.

Hardy considered, and nodded. "Very well. As between you and the other entrymen, it seems to me right to withhold your secret. You found and developed this mine, and it is not the fault of yourself and Dupont that Nogen had the work done at the expense of the tribe."

"Pere and Mr. Van will pay them for all the work," proudly stated Marie.

Dupont gaped in blank amazement at this unwelcome prediction. Not so Vandervyn.

"Of course we shall pay them, captain," he confirmed. "I intend to list the claimants and the amount due them at the council tomorrow. Neither Jake nor I can afford to settle with them out of hand. But Jake will allow them part payment in trade goods, and we shall make other payments as fast as we get returns from our next ore shipments."

"Very good," agreed Hardy. "You are to understand, however, that the tribe must voluntarily bring the ore to the reservation boundary and there sell it to you. Have you considered the risk of the public surmising the existence of the mine from the ore shipments?"

"No chance of that," explained Dupont. "Nogen let it out that he got the ore from a prospect in the mountains clean back across the other boundary of the reservation, and he showed around a smelter report of a shipment of ore that we'd doctored with barren rock so's it just paid out expenses."

Hardy did not smile. He returned gravely to Marie. "In view of the general agreement, Miss Dupont, may I hope that you—"

"You may not, Captain Hardy," she ungraciously interrupted. "You insulted my father. He and I shall at once leave for home."

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."

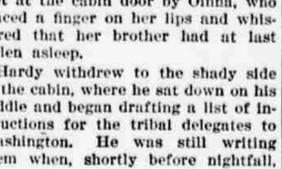
"Tell four of the police they are detailed to escort yourself and Miss Dupont back to the agency," ordered Hardy. He raised his hat to Marie. "Permit me to wish you a pleasant journey."

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,



"You Insulted My Father!"

Vandervyn came jogging back to the mine. He had had a delightful ride with Marie, and he complacently intimated the fact to Hardy.

In the midst of this subtle tormenting of his rival, Oinna came out to serve the supper that she had cooked in the cabin. Vandervyn abruptly changed the subject, and began to talk about the council next day. Hardy gave no sign that he observed this sudden break or the furtive, adoring glances that the girl bestowed on Vandervyn as she glided softly to and fro.

The night came on, clear and still. As they puffed at their after-supper pipes, Vandervyn suggested that, out of consideration for the young woman, they roll up in their blankets outside the cabin. To this Hardy made no objection. They picked out a soft spot matted with fallen pine needles, under a low-growing tree, and soon both were seemingly fast asleep.

After several minutes Vandervyn spoke to his companion in a low tone. Hardy did not answer. Vandervyn drew out his pipe and struck a match. He held the flame above Hardy's face. The eyes were closed, and the severe, half-melancholy expression of the harsh features was relaxed as if in heavy slumber.

Vandervyn extinguished the match, and slipped out of his blankets. Noiselessly he crept down to the cabin and around to the door. It was barred on the inside. He tapped on it.

There was a sliding sound within the cabin, and the heavy door began to swing inward. Vandervyn put his foot on the threshold to enter. At the same moment a sinewy hand gripped his shoulder and jerked him away. He cursed, and clapped his hand to his holster as he whirled about. It was empty. He bent forward to spring at the dark form in the half-open doorway.

"Stand back!" came the stern command. "I have your revolver. Oinna, close the door."

The door swung shut. In the tense silence the rattle of the bar as it shot back into its socket was distinct. Vandervyn's teeth ground together.

"You—straight-laced prig!" he choked out. "Get away from here! I'm going in."

"Suppose I do not choose to give it?" "Then I will protect her by ordering you to leave the reservation as fast as you can travel."

"I see," taunted Vandervyn. "You want to get rid of me, so you can have clear sailing with Marie. You're a great one to spout about honor! You'll go and blab to her about this."

"You know very well I cannot do that. Yet if you refuse to give me your word, I shall feel justified in telling Dupont my reason for ordering you off the reservation."

Vandervyn burst into a cynical laugh. "Do you think Jake's the sort to care."

"When the happiness of his daughter is at stake—"

"Precisely. He thinks I'm her one best chance."

"Very well," replied Hardy. "Since, like this poor girl's, her natural guardian is unfit, my position as acting agent requires me to take his place."

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 arm carefully bandaged and in a sling, brought out the breakfast that she cooked. He looked so weak and unsteady that Hardy at once assented 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 slunk 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 pad to write some letters. The captain handed them to him, and started up the mountainside above the tunnel 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 velvety 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.)