

The Quarterbreed

BY ROBERT AMES BENNET



CHAPTER XXIV—Continued.

He, in turn, was so intent upon maneuvering to have himself spoken by that most genial of hosts, the president, that he failed to see Marie until she spoke to him.

"Only a very few minutes," she soothed the disappointed lover.

"Do you know that you are by far the most beautiful woman here?" Marie long lashes drooped and rose again to disclose the same inscrutable look.

"I am saving all the reports of your social triumphs," he said. "They have made me very happy."

Marie arched her black eyebrows. "Is it not true that he will get through a much larger appropriation than otherwise would have been made?"

"The lands are fully worth the amount agreed upon," stated Hardy. "The tribe should receive all the appropriation. Honest lobbying would carry the bill through at a cost of a few hundred dollars. These supposed friends of the tribe want millions."

"Do you wish to deprive me of the share that I would receive through him?"

"Yes—of every dishonest dollar," said Hardy, his mouth stern, though his eyes besought her to forgive his harshness.

"Very good of you to offer. However, I believe I have enough left to last me through. And in any event, I could not impose on your generosity. The money would be used against him—which, you see, would hardly do."

"Then you refuse any loan?"

"It was most kind of you to make the offer."

"On Quixote de la Mancha!" she murmured.

"Tilting at machine windmills!" he replied.

Though there was no trace of bitterness or satire in his wit, her chin lifted to the angle of offended pride.

"That is sufficient, Captain Hardy. May I ask you to take me back to him?"

Vandervyn was waiting for her near the president. As they approached him, she gave Hardy a look of half-resentment.

"You must understand, Captain, that I must do as my heart dictates, though I confess that lobbying is far from agreeable to me. I have already met his excellency, and he has been so kind as to promise me a hearing."

Interview with the president. It was refused. He went to his lodgings and spent the remainder of the day and half the night drafting and redrafting a concise statement of his argument against Vandervyn's contract.

The president addressed Vandervyn: "Captain Hardy has declined to ask for clemency. I have decided to sustain the findings of the court-martial."

Vandervyn nodded: "Captain Hardy is too skilled a strategist not to realize that the best way to shield himself is to raise the cry of 'stop thief!' against others."

"Your excellency evidently has not seen the contract," said Vandervyn. "It is duly witnessed by Charlie Redbear, the official interpreter, and by his sister."

"Ah, the interpreter, you say? This matter may be rumored in the house and even in the senate. It will be well for you to send for the man."

Vandervyn shrugged. "Can't do it, even to oblige you, Mr. President. The fellow has gone to the place where cold storage is unknown."

Hardy stepped into the room, and the door was closed behind him. The aide and the doorkeeper had remained outside. Hardy looked around with a frown of perplexity.

"The man turned in his swivel chair and abruptly made a beckoning gesture. Hardy's hand went up in salute as he stepped forward."

Hardy saluted. "Permit me, sir, to first present for your consideration a matter relating to the interests of the tribe which—"

"Stop!" ordered the president. "Others are waiting for interviews. I can give you only ten minutes. If you expend them on this other matter, you will have no further opportunity to state your own case."

Marie and Hardy. At sight of Hardy the young man stopped short, but, meeting the president's cordial smile, came forward with easy assurance.

"The signatures are genuine. They were obtained by fraud," bluntly charged Hardy.

"My word is as good or perhaps somewhat better than that of a cashiered officer," rejoined Vandervyn.

"You deny the charge," the president stated rather than inquired.

"Most emphatically," pleasantly agreed Vandervyn. He looked significantly from Hardy to Marie.

"Your friend Redbear seems to have enjoyed shooting at agents," remarked the president. "He also confessed to having made the two attempts on the life of Captain Hardy."

"I shall explain to the court," replied Hardy. "If not delayed, I shall be only a few—"

"You will come with me," interrupted the aide, still more severely.

"Your conduct has been brought to the attention of the president. It is to be seen, sir, whether you will continue to refuse to answer the inquiries of your superiors."

Hardy went white, but his jaw set firm with grim resolution. He stepped out beside the aide, and crossed the sidewalk to the waiting motor.

but was checked to perceive the change in her expression. "Accquited— honorably— on all charges!" he murmured.

"I'm pleased to hear you say that," replied the president. He turned to Vandervyn. "I understand this witness is prepared to testify that the signatures to your contract were obtained on the false representation that it was a second copy of the minutes of the tribal council."

"We can send for the Indian witnesses, if necessary. Another matter—at the request you testified under oath that a certain Indian killed Agent Nogen, and that you and Redbear then killed the murderer."

"Your friend Redbear seems to have enjoyed shooting at agents," remarked the president. "He also confessed to having made the two attempts on the life of Captain Hardy."

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CHAPTER XXV.

Condemned. The court-martial began its session at nine in the morning, and the trial of Hardy was over before three in the afternoon.

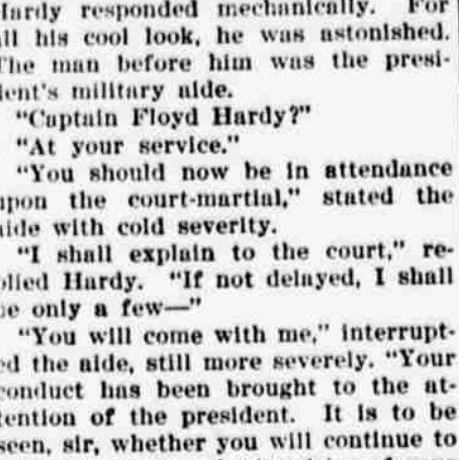
Hardy's statements in explanation of his actions were as brief as they were cold and dry.

"The other charges were far more serious, and he opposed them with vigor. He denied emphatically any intention to desert or to remain permanently absent from his proper duties without leave, and showed the tele-

gram from a high official in the war department that led him to believe his resignation and application for leave of absence would be at once favorably acted upon by his commanding officer at Vancouver barracks.

"My resignation has not been withdrawn, and I am engaged in a private enterprise. I cannot draw pay as an officer in the service," explained Hardy.

"Few would be so quixotic," she argued. "Most would make the excuse that an attempt to frustrate what they considered a wrong to others is not to be considered a private enterprise."



"My Word's as Good or Better Than a Cashiered Officer's."



"I Could Not Impose on Your Generosity."

"That does not follow. You must know I did love him. But to find that I had for rival another 'breed girl'—one not half so beautiful as I—I could not endure the thought. You have seen the proof that there is a good deal of my mother's red grandfather in my blood."

"Another!" echoed Hardy.

"He railed. 'I congratulate him. After what has happened, I feel confident that you must have chosen someone more worthy of you.'

"He is!" declared the girl, her glorious eyes melting with tenderness.

"I regret that I cannot accept it," he replied. "A captain's pay is quite sufficient for a—bache'or."

"Really now, Captain Hardy, you do not expect me to believe you will long remain unmarried?"

"It is not fair for me to bet on a certainty; but if you insist, I agree to the wager," said Hardy.

"Then be prepared to take the mine a week from today," she bantered.

"Pity! For you?" she cried. "Do you think I could dare pity you?—a man like you! I could not have been so presumptuous even had those treacherous conspirators succeeded in crushing you."

"I know how very unworthy of you I am. Yet I hope I am not so unworthy as that first day at the coulee, when I scorned you, and you, with your skill and courage and moderation, saved us without harming those whose attack he had wantonly brought upon us."

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Sentence.

In the anteroom the doorkeeper waved Hardy to a door on the right. It led him into a stenographers' room. He saw the flounce of a woman's skirt behind a revolving bookcase near the far end of the room, and paused.

He turned and faced the president's aide with the clear, unflinching gaze of a brave man about to be shot.

"Are you afraid to read your sentence?" she taunted. "Had it not been for you, he would have had the mine and a million from his contract and me. The president conferred with Senator Clemmer an hour ago. The treaty appropriation bill will be passed with a clause that no commission is to be paid for the services of any tribal agent or representative. He has lost everything. And now—I am waiting to see you read that paper."

"You took her by tribal custom, and you told her by your own act and her legal authority according to the common law."

"I should not expect you to believe you will long remain unmarried?"

"Then be prepared to take the mine a week from today," she bantered.

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