

THE QUARTERBREED

A Tale of Adventures on An Indian Reservation

By Robert Ames Bennet

The two preceding installments described the rescue of a quarter-breed girl and two men from an Indian attack at the edge of Lakotah Indian reservation, by Capt. Floyd Hardy, U. S. A., the new Indian agent. The rescued ones are Reginald Vandervyn, nephew of United States Senator Clemmer and agency clerk, Jacques Dupont, post trader, and his daughter, Marie. Vandervyn tells Hardy of disaffection among the Indians, of the murder of Nogen, the last agent, and of his having been promised the agency. Hardy calls a council of chiefs at the agency. Redbear, the halfbreed interpreter, brings his sister, Oinna, to the valley. Captain Hardy accepts a dinner invitation from the Duponts and learns something which amazes him and causes all sorts of trouble.

CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

The hostess signed her Indian boy to take the box into the parlor, together with the ice bucket, in which was still left a bottle of champagne. As he obeyed, she bowed her dismissal of the guests from the table. "I shall now permit myself to be fatigued," she said. "Good evening, Mr. Vandervyn. Good evening, Captain Hardy." Vandervyn nodded, and followed Dupont with a nonchalant bearing that drew attention from the slight uncertainty of his step. Hardy lingered for a word of appreciation: "This has been a most enjoyable evening, Miss Dupont."

Hardy did not smile. "Explain," he ordered. "Oh—you mean Jake's pipe dream that this low-grade stuff may some time turn into a streak of solid gold. But of course you wouldn't stand for the three of us dividing up the proceeds, even if it did turn out a bonanza?" "Certainly not." "Your idea would be to give all the profits to the tribe, even if we had bought the ore and taken the risk of its turning out worthless?" "I am the acting agent, not a trader." "Nom'chlen," muttered Dupont. "That ain't no way to treat a white man, Cap. Won't you let 'em trade me no more ore?" "I shall investigate before I decide," said Hardy, and he rose to leave. "Good evening, good evening, Mr. Vandervyn." He went out. Dupont gaped after him, and grunted incredulously: "Fifty thousand—made it fifty thousand, and he didn't jump at it!" "Told you so," snapped Vandervyn. "But we'll fix him yet—two more cards up our sleeve. If one falls to take the trick, we'll play the other. We're not going to be bluffed out at this stage of the game."

CHAPTER V.

By-Play.

"Shellp'y—ben in ice," he explained with solemn emphasis. He threw back his head and burst into an uproarious laugh. "Shellp'y—like that gobe-mouche Redbear. Him trying to smooth me down—sif that'd give him a show with M'rie! An' me the square trader in the U. S.! Why, lash time I got goods on credit, they s'ent me a skehule to list my w'ilities, 'n' I jush took my pen in han' 'n' wrote 'cross thin' shere lish, 'I don't owe no man nushin'." He again drew back his head and let out a hoarse laugh. "Poor grammar, but rich rhetoric, Jake," remarked Vandervyn as he filled the champagne glasses. "You told me they gave you the credit you asked for."

Sunrise found Vandervyn riding down the valley on his nimble-footed pinto. He left the road and cantered across into the bend where Redbear had pointed out his new house to Hardy. When Vandervyn rode up, Redbear was shoveling clay upon the uncovered brush that at one corner of the roof. The halfbreed did not stop work until his visitor drew rein almost within arm's reach. Vandervyn met his civil greeting with a cynical smile. "So you've bullded you a home, Charlie. How's your sister Winna? That's the name, isn't it?" "No, we say it O-ee-nah. The school people made her get up at four. I told her to sleep all day, if she liked."



"It's Up to Us to Bluff Him or Thrown Down."

"How about a new treaty, to partition the reservation and give land in severality to each head of a family?" suggested Hardy. "That would take a long time to bring about, and meantime the young bucks should be taught to work. Why wouldn't it be a good idea for us to take charge of the mine—pay all who want to work at fair wages, and take the risk of getting our money back out of the ore shipments?" As Vandervyn made the suggestion, he smiled ingeniously, and his handsome, flushed face shone with philanthropic enthusiasm. Hardy's face lighted with a responsive glow. He smiled into the boyish blue eyes. "The proposal does you credit," he responded. "You may count on me to contribute my share."

to deal with him, and you know what that means. Next thing, he'll have it all out of the chiefs—the mine—everything."

It's bad enough. As soon as he finds out about the mine, he will kick the whole bunch of us off the reservation. That's the kind of fool he is."

"Yes, and Jake is a member by marriage. Lots of good that will do you both—in the guardhouse."

Redbear cringed at the word. "But my sister— He won't put me in."

"Wait and see when he finds out how things have been going here. Let him find out anything against you, and it's Charlie in the jug, with his job gone glimmering."

The halfbreed looked up, his eyes desperate, his face set in the grin of a cornered rat. He muttered a curse. "That's it, boy!" encouraged Vandervyn. "Don't lay down. We're with you. But remember, we've got to make a bluff. It's up to us to bluff him off, or throw down."

"I don't understand you, Mr. Van."

"Here it is, then. He doesn't know a word of Lakotah. The tribe doesn't know English. You are the interpreter. Get that?"

Redbear shook his head. "No, I don't."

parents. The blend of types apparent in her face was far from displeasing. She kept her soft, brown eyes shyly downcast. Yet she must have watched him covertly through her long lashes. The tea was hot. He sipped it slowly and gloated on the girl's confusion. Unable longer to endure the strain, Oinna at last faltered in timid desperation: "You—you are Mr. Van. Charlie—he said you and he are partners."

"Partners?" repeated Vandervyn with a quick frown. "He said that?"

The girl shrank back. "Please, sir, he didn't mean anything wrong."

"What more did he say?"

"Nothing—only that. Please, it's only his way of talking."

"That's all right. Don't be afraid," Vandervyn reassured her with a quick change to smiling friendliness. "I am Charlie's best friend."

"Oh, thank you, thank you! He is my only brother. We have nobody else; only ourselves."

In her gratitude the girl forgot her self-consciousness. She raised her soft eyes and looked full at Vandervyn. He smiled and bent nearer. Though she blushed scarlet, she was unable to turn her gaze away from his ardent blue eyes.

Under that prolonged scrutiny the scarlet of the girl's anger changed to rose, and her eyes sank as coyly as had Oinna's. He smiled. The girl was good to look upon.

Mid-morning was past when they walked their ponies up the slope of the terrace. The bare level, back of the warehouse, was dotted with groups of stolid, half-naked Indians.

"Look!" exclaimed the girl. "What is it?" he asked.

"Don't you see? There is not a woman or child among them. Let us go and find out what Pere thinks of it."

CHAPTER VI. Thunderbolt. But Dupont was not at home. When they failed to find him either in the store or the living rooms, Marie stepped to the door for another look at the Indians, and then calmly went in to prepare a noon dinner.

Vandervyn sauntered over to the office. On the way back he observed Redbear, out back of the warehouse, drifting unobtrusively from one group of Indians to another. Hardy was at his desk in the office, intent on the government treaty with the tribe.

At noon, as the head chief of the tribe had not yet arrived, Hardy and Vandervyn started to go for their midday meal. As they rounded Hardy's cabin, they were overtaken by Dupont, who came from the direction of the stable. His face was as stolid as the faces of the chiefs and headmen among whom he had passed.

"Well, Jake, what's the good word?" inquired Vandervyn. "Ain't none, Mr. Van. No women, no children, no old men—just bucks. No trading—no I-ben over to the p'leece camp. Ponies all in; tepees down. They're getting ready to slip down creek."

"Do you mean they expect trouble?" asked Hardy. "Well, it kind of looks that way," answered Dupont.

"Explain," ordered Hardy. "You remember I told you there was a lot of bad blood stirred up. It all turns on whether Thunderbolt feels the same—that old Ti-owa-konza, the head chief. If he's feeling bad, we'd better look out."

"I am confident there will be no trouble," said Hardy. "We have only to find out the cause of the ill feeling and remove it."

"If it can be removed," qualified Vandervyn. "Better figure on letting the warehouse go and piling into my place, Cap. If they start to k'ly," suggested Dupont. "I'll show you how I got it all loop-holed. Water inside and a lot of grub and ammunition—we can hold it ag'in the whole tribe, if the p'leece don't go back on us."

"They will not, nor will there be any outbreak," insisted Hardy. "Do not needlessly alarm your daughter."

"Can't scare her," grunted Dupont. They were now almost at the house porch. Marie appeared in the doorway, aglow with animation.

"Good day, Captain Hardy. I fear we had breakfast too early for you. Here, you look sober as an awl. You can't be afraid of an outbreak. What if they do turn loose? I have everything ready—all the loopholes opened and the meat brought in from the ice-house. It will keep in the cellar."

Hardy followed the others into the parlor, and looked at the slots cut through the wallpaper to expose the loopholes, from which the chinks had been removed. "Miss Dupont," he said, "you are a very brave young lady."

How long do you think it will take Hardy to find out that he is being double-crossed by Vandervyn and Redbear? Will Marie help him—or do you think she is crooked too?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)