

The Quarterbreed

An Indian Reservation Tale by ROBERT AMES BENNET

The three preceding installments described the rescue of a quarterbreed 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 Cleggner 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 head tribesmen. Redbear, the halfbreed interpreter, brings his pretty sister, Oinna, to the valley. The new agent learns that the Indians have been cheated and has reason to suspect Dupont and Vandervyn of crookedness. He plans to square matters with the tribesmen. How Captain Hardy is thwarted in his purpose, how his life is endangered, how Vandervyn shows his true character, is told in very absorbing style in this installment.

CHAPTER VI—Continued.

Unseen by his superior, Vandervyn nodded encouragingly to Redbear and smiled at the Indians. Hardy had not turned his steady gaze from Ti-owa-konza.

"The chief is not angry," he said. "We shall soon be friends. Tell him that I come in peace, with a good heart toward all the tribe. I do not blame the killing of Mr. Nogen on the tribe. If white men have done any wrong to the tribe, I shall stop the wrongdoing. If there are any members of the tribe who are doing wrong, the chiefs should help me make all do right."

This time Redbear did not hesitate. He faced the assembly and rolled out a flood of Lakotah with desperate rapidity. Almost immediately Ti-owa-konza rose to reply, his face ablaze with indignation, his voice impassioned. When he had spoken, he remained standing.

"He says he is angry," began Redbear.

"No," brusquely contradicted Hardy. "Look at his face. The others are angered. He is not. There is some misunderstanding. Be careful that you interpret correctly."

"He says he is angry," insisted Redbear, his sidelong glance looking past Hardy to Vandervyn, who was nodding reassuringly. "He says he is trying to keep it inside, but the others can't hold it inside. He says you have got to go away or there will be fighting."

Hardy straightened on his chair, and his look became severe. He spoke sharply: "Tell the chief it is useless to ask me to go away. I do not wish to send for the Longknives. But they will come and fight the tribe if there is any uprising."

Redbear's interpretation was followed by a hush more threatening than gestures or outcries. Vandervyn hastily beckoned to the policemen. They came along under the overhang of the warehouse until they were behind the white men. Hardy heard the soft shuffle of their moccasined feet in the dust. He looked around and frowned.

"How is this?" he demanded. "I particularly wished no demonstration of force," said Hardy.

"Well, since the police are here, hadn't you better let them stay? It will be close enough work if matters come to a scrap, and there's Marie out to see the fun."

Hardy turned around to look at the daring girl. She stood on a slight knoll midway between the assembled Indians and her father's cabin.

"Take her back to the house," he ordered.

"But would it be wise for me to leave you and Charlie just now? The police may not stay loyal!"

"Go!"

The command was peremptory. Vandervyn started off, yet contrived to ex-



Ti-owa-konza Rose to Reply, His Face Ablaze With Indignation.

change glances with Redbear. Hardy studied the semicircle of waiting Indians with a resolute gaze, and, as before, fixed his attention upon Ti-owa-konza.

"We must learn what is the cause of this ill feeling," he remarked to the halfbreed. "Ask them why they are opposed to their young men trading for Dupont's goods."

Redbear spoke slowly to the Indians, his manner not unlike that of a man who approaches a barrel of gunpowder with a lighted torch. There was no suspicion, but the old head chief flared with unmistakable anger. He replied with a fiery declamation that won grants of approval from his followers.

The halfbreed's voice was unsteady

as he interpreted: "He—he says there shall be no more barter of ore. He says all over again that this is the land of his tribe, and white men have no right here, and he hates all Longknives."

"Tell him that he is mistaken. The soldiers have always been the best friends of the Indians. I find that, after next spring, no more food and goods are to be issued to the tribe. Sooner or later, white men will come and take the ore if the Indians do not dig it themselves. Another thing, I believe the tribe should agree to the dividing up of their land, so that each head of a family can have his own farm and work it after the manner of the white men. Other tribes have done this, and they are no longer poor."

Redbear hesitated, stepped more aside from Hardy, and began to pour out a torrent of Lakotah. He had spoken only a few sentences when a wave of agitation passed over the semicircle of Indians. Blankets slipped down from copper-red shoulders; fierce eyes glared menacingly at Hardy. Several of the more excitable bucks leaped up with bow and rifle in hand. Hardy thrust out from among the police and raised his hands to Ti-owa-konza in the peace sign. The head chief called to his fellows and turned his back upon the agent with deliberate contempt. All the others faced about and followed him to the waiting ponies. The band mounted and rode off up the valley in morose silence.

CHAPTER VII.

The Common Law.

There was still more than a trace of red in Hardy's hollow cheeks when Marie, Vandervyn and Dupont came in upon him at the office. Dupont held out a congratulatory hand.

"By gar, Cap," he said, "you sure had a mighty close squeak of it that time. Guess old Ti got all-fired hot. Where's Charlie?"

"Redbear? I sent him to reassure his sister and the families of the police."

"That was very thoughtful of you, captain," said Marie.

"But it would be far more considerate if you would leave the reservation," added Vandervyn.

"How so?" queried Hardy.

"Of course, you'll fancy I am thinking of my promotion. But it's not that at all. Ask Jake."

"I got it from the p'leece," said Dupont. "The whole bunch was crazy to shoot you; they'd done it, too, only Charlie sings out to 'em that Mr. Van was going to be agent, and you'd go away."

"He said that?"

"Oh, captain, don't be angry at Charlie," interceded Marie. "He had to do it to save a fight."

"But why? I could not have been more friendly. Yet everything I said seemed to anger them."

"I told you they're an ornery bunch," replied Dupont. "It was for because you being an officer. The chiefs hate all soldiers like pizen. Most of the old ones was in the ghost-dance craze, and got jailed by the soldiers."

"They may cool down and be willing to listen to reason," argued Hardy.

"Cool down? They'll go back and sit and stew and stew till hell boils over. Next thing happens, they'll stir up the young bucks. Nom d'un chien! Just when I was getting enough ahead in my business to take care of my old age and give Marie a chance to be a lady—to stand to lose everything and her and my scalp to boot!"

"You are free to leave here with her whenever you wish."

"No, I ain't. I can't leave my store—all my property."

"There would be no danger if it were not for you," said Marie, her eyes flashing with indignation. "If only you had not come here! If there is an outbreak, it will be all your fault!"

"Mine?"

"Oh, I know you mean well. But if they've taken this violent dislike to you—Why ever did you come? You saw how they like Mr. Van. Had they thought you would insist on staying, nothing could have kept them from attacking you." But the promise that Mr. Van is to be their agent, that pacified them. Had you never come here, all this would not have happened. The chiefs would have come to talk with Mr. Van, and would have gone back satisfied."

Hardy swung around in his chair to scrutinize the guileless face of Vandervyn.

"What do you say to that, sir?" he interrogated.

"What can I say?" replied Vander-

vyn, twisting the tip of his blond mustache. "It is for you to decide to leave for the good of the tribe, or to stay and take the chance of an uprising."

"The way you put it—" considered Hardy. "Perhaps it might be better for all concerned if I should leave."

"You bet it would, Cap," eagerly broke in Dupont. "Tain't no joke. Them ornery cusses 'll git you like they done with Nogen, just as sure as shooting."

Vandervyn shot a furious glance at the blunderer. Marie was looking at Hardy. But she did not need to see the tightening of his lips to realize what her father had done.

"Oh, Pere!" she reproached. "Why did you say it? You should have known Captain Hardy could not leave after that."

"Quite right, Miss Dupont," said Hardy.

"You mean, you won't leave?" asked Dupont.

"How can he?" Vandervyn smoothly cut in. "You've put it up to him that it would be deserting his post under fire. He's an army officer—he wouldn't leave now even if he knew his staying here meant certain massacre for us all, followed by certain massacre of the tribe by the troops."

"I will remain until I have made at least one more effort to pacify the tribe," replied Hardy. "You are at liberty to resign whenever you please. Mr. Dupont has ample time to remove his goods and his daughter from the reservation."

"Not me," declared Marie; "I don't care what Pere and Reggie say; I know there is not one of the tribe who would harm me, even in an outbreak."

"Well, maybe not," admitted her father.

"I gather that I am the only person who seems to be endangered," remarked Hardy. "This being so, I will wait a few days for the excitement to subside, and will then call another council."

"They won't come ag'in to meet you," predicted Dupont.

"Then I shall go to them."

"Into the mountains, captain?" exclaimed Marie, her splendid eyes widening with concern. "Surely you will not venture among the camps."

"The tribe must learn that I mean friendship."

Dupont paused to scratch the side of his head. But Vandervyn spoke without an instant's hesitancy: "You have no right to throw your life away uselessly, captain. Suppose Charlie and I make a trip to the camps, to see if we cannot quiet the tribe and talk the chiefs into giving you another hearing? If you have no objection, we could tell them that you cannot leave just now, but that you will do so as soon as you have tried to benefit them."

"And that Mr. Van'll be next agent," added Dupont.

"Will you tell them that I am here to help them and to be their friend?" queried Hardy.

"Trust me to put it to them strong, captain," assured Vandervyn. "I know you'll play fair by resigning in my favor as soon as you have the tribe in hand."

"After I have done what I can do to improve conditions among them," qualified Hardy.

"I do so hope Mr. Van can persuade them to be friendly with you," said Marie. "I know he and Charlie will be perfectly safe. But it will be hard to talk them out of their strange dislike to you. When will you start, Reggie?"

"Early tomorrow morning, if the captain has no objections."

"The sooner the better," agreed Hardy.

"I'll go and remove my council costume," said Vandervyn, smiling at his irreproachable frock coat.

Marie and her father rose with him. Hardy bowed out the girl and returned to his desk. He was deep in the midst of a report on the tribe when, half an hour later, Vandervyn returned to the office in his riding togs.

"Charlie may not come back this afternoon," he remarked. "I thought I might ride down and tell him about the trip. I could fetch your mare for you."

"Very well. I shall be obliged," replied Hardy, and he returned to his study of the report.

Vandervyn rode down along the far side of the stream, keeping the thickets as much as possible between himself and the Dupont house. He did not recross the creek until he was opposite Redbear's home. He found the cabin door closed. But at a slight movement of the window curtains his hand went up to beckon with a lordly

gesture. There was a short pause. Then the door opened a scant inch.

"Hello!" he said. "Where's your brother?"

"He has—has gone to tell the police families."

"On the agent's mare," guessed Vandervyn.

"Please—he didn't mean any harm—please don't tell on him."

"That depends," replied Vandervyn. "Do you think I care to favor him when you act as if you hate me?"

"Hate? No, no!" The door opened several inches and as suddenly closed to a narrow crack.

But Vandervyn had caught a glimpse of the girl's blushing face. His voice dropped to a caressing tone: "You're not afraid of me, are you, just because I wanted a kiss? Come out here and talk. I won't bite you."

"You promise not to—kiss me?"

"Not unless you wish me to."

"But—but I do!" came back the naive confession.

Impulsively he started to swing off his pony. The cabin door shut with a bang. He straightened in the saddle, waited a long moment, frowned heavily, and started to ride away.

From the window came a plaintive cry: "Oh, please, please!"

He deliberately dismounted, flung the reins over his horse's head, and walked to the opened window. The eager, frightened face within blushed scarlet and shrank back. He stopped short.

"See here," he admonished, "if you're going to be silly, I shall go away for

good. You've got the door barred, and you know I shall not try to crawl in at a hole like this."

"I—I won't be," she faltered.

"That's better," he said, and he reached in to slip his arm around her trembling shoulders.

Shrinking yet yielding, with eyes timidly downcast and olive cheeks burning with blissful shame, the young girl allowed him to draw her closer. Her lips quivered, yet she raised them to meet his kiss.

"There!" he ralled. "Was it so dreadful?"

She did not answer; she could not. Her head drooped forward with the instinctive modesty of an innocent young girl. He put the forefinger of his free hand under her chin and raised her head to take a second kiss.

"One good turn deserves another, sweetheart," he said.

"You should not—not call me that," she whispered. "You are a gentleman white man; I am only a halfbreed—I'm yellow as a Chinaman."

"No—golden. You are my golden girl. Your cheeks are wild roses and honey gold. Your eyes are like a fawn's; your lips sweet as honey—Another kiss—There, that's more like it. You're learning how. Now look at me."

She raised her drooping lids with the sudden, desperate courage of one who is very shy, and gazed up at him, her tender eyes starlike with the soft glow of her love and adoration.

"You—you really like me?" she whispered.

"No, I hate you like poor Lo hates freewater. Give him a taste, and he wants it all. I want you."

"Charlie—he said I must marry a white man. I am joyed in my heart—You say you want me! But I am only a halfbreed girl, and you—"

"You're my honey-sweet girlie. Go and open the door."

She looked up at him again full and direct, and his gaze sank before the trust in her clear eyes.

"You want me to be your engaged girl?" she murmured. "When people are engaged, they are going to be married. Charlie said I must marry a white man, a good white man. You are kind to me. It is wonderful. I have read that even army officers have married halfbreed girls. But you are grander than any officer, and you are very good to think of marrying me."

Vandervyn forced a smile, and replied to her adulation without meeting her enraptured gaze:

"What else did you think I meant when I kissed you? Of course we shall be married. As we are here on the reservation, it will be according to the custom of the tribe."

"Married? Oh, my heart sings!" cried the girl. "I will be your wife—yours! I can't believe it—There comes Charlie. I must run and tell him."

Vandervyn hastily released her, and drew his arm out of the window as he looked around.

"Wait!" he commanded. "He's coming fast enough. Leave the door barred."

The halfbreed was racing Hardy's mare up the creek bank at a furious

gallop. He flung himself out of the saddle and advanced upon Vandervyn, his face dark with suspicion.

"What you saying to my sister?" he demanded.

The white man met his threatening look with a half-contemptuous, half-amused smile.

"I've been showing the girl what I think of her," he replied.

Redbear came to a sudden halt. The muscles of his face began to twitch.

"Oh, Charlie!" reproached Oinna. "What makes you look at him that way? Why don't you thank him?"

She unbarred the door and stepped outside.

"For what?" questioned her brother in a harsh, strained voice.

"Because he is going to be my man—going to take me for his wife."

"Marry you? Oinna—you?" The halfbreed could not believe his ears. Through his daze shot a flash of angry suspicion. "But you—you won't marry her!"

Vandervyn smiled in his careless manner.

"Oh, I guess yes."

"You'll marry her? You'll take her to town and marry her like white people?"

"I'll marry her as some white people marry. I'll not take her to town. Oinna and I have agreed to be married according to tribal custom."

Again Redbear's weak face darkened with suspicion and anger. "I won't have it. You're white, and Oinna is half white. White people don't marry Indian fashion."

"You know a lot about it, Charlie. Haven't you ever heard of common-law marriages? Lots of white people get married that way."

"What way?"

"You must know about it. Instead of going to a lot of fuss and bother over ministers and licenses, many people just take each other for husband and wife and go to housekeeping."

"Is—is that a real white people's marriage?" asked Oinna.

Vandervyn frowned. "You don't think I'm lying, do you? Why, you often see in the newspapers about common-law wives getting their share of their dead husbands' estates, just the same as if they had gone through all the fuss of weddings. Ask Hardy if that does not often happen."

"Well, if it's a real marriage—"

muttered Redbear.

"Of course it is, Charlie, if he says so!" cried Oinna rapturously.

Her brother's face glowed with sudden unconcealed excitement. He stammered almost incoherently: "Then you—Marie—you don't marry—don't marry Marie?"

"No," replied Vandervyn, and his voice rang clear. "I have no intention of marrying her."

"Maybe Marie'll like me now, when I tell her you are going to be my brother," sighed Redbear.

Vandervyn laid a brotherly hand on his shoulder. "Hold on, boy!" he said. "You let me manage things. You know that Marie thinks she likes me. But now Hardy is here, and he wants her. If she hears that I have thrown her over, she will run off with him."

"She don't like him."

"What if she doesn't! He's an army officer. He has money, and when he goes from here he will wear his uniform, all gilt and spangles. You know how the girls like that. No—I tell you there's not the ghost of a show for you until he is out of the way. Our little bluff didn't work. He says he is going to stay. So for a while you and Oinna must keep still about the marriage. Tomorrow morning you and I are going into the mountains to talk with the chiefs. Oinna will go with me. But it must be understood at the agency that you have sent her to—Who could you send her to?"

"Ti-owa-konza is our mother's father. Not even Mr. Dupont knows that," said Redbear. "Before he came here, she ran off with a bad white man. They went to the Blackfeet. After a time he got an arrow through his back. My mother came home. Ti-owa-konza would not see her face. She had to work for the agent till they made us go away to school. Then she died."

"Old Thunderbolt your grandfather?" remarked Vandervyn, seizing upon that one fact in the squalid tragedy. "Does he know it?"

"I told him so today. He said my face— But maybe he will come to like me. He said to bring Oinna for him to look at her."

"That's great! We'll tell it to everybody. But remember, not a word about the marriage until after we get rid of Hardy and I am agent. Then things will go all right for all of us. You savvy that, Charlie? While you rub down the mare I'll go in and say good-bye until tomorrow morning."

CHAPTER VIII.

Best-Laid Schemes.

Hardy had gone to the Duponts' for supper when Vandervyn returned to the agency. He made a hasty toilet and followed. Marie met him with marked coldness. This, however, melted before he had finished his report to Hardy. All agreed that the old chief probably would take a fancy to Oinna, and that, as a result, there would be a fair chance of pacifying the tribe.

When Hardy turned to the girl, he found her and Vandervyn exchanging glances and murmuring remarks. His habitual gravity softened to a smile of wistful sadness. At the first opportunity he excused himself. Midnight had passed before the light in the little cliffed parlor of the Dupont house was extinguished.

When, at sunrise, Hardy went for breakfast, Marie's eyes were very bright, and her look was pensive. She ate little, and her manner toward Hardy was cold and ungracious.

After the officer left, Dupont squinted across the table at her and began to scratch his head.

"You and Mr. Van burned a lot of coal oil last night. He didn't git far enough along to ask you to hitch up with him, did he?"

A red blush flamed in the girl's cheeks. Without looking up, she murmured a regretful "No."

"Guess he figures he'll wait and see if Hardy is going to bust us up. Like as not he'll skip back east if Hardy gits sore and chokes off our hold on the mine."

"What do you mean? He'd send Reggie away. The stiff, solemn old fogey—I hate him!"

"Easy, easy, girl!" soothed Dupont. "No use plunging when you're hitched to the snubbing post. Just now he's got us roped. He'll have us all hogged if we go to bucking. We've got to make him think we're gentled."

"What if we act toward him as we feel?"

"You don't savvy about that mine. Me and Nogen discovered it and paid honest for developing it, as you know. Well, we let Mr. Van in on it. Then Nogen up and gits killed. That makes it half and half between me and Mr. Van, according to all that's fair and square. But do you believe Hardy will look at it that way? Not by a—considerable. He'll talk about it being the tribe's, just because it's on the reservation."

"I see!" The girl's eyes flashed, and her nostrils dilated. "He will rob you and Reggie of a fortune—yet you wish me to be nice to him!"

"You bet I do! Can't you git the point? He ain't going to be bluffed into quitting. That means we got to make friends with him or lose the mine."

"Oh! So that is it?"

"Yep. Worst of it is he's one of them there fellows what stand so straight they lean backwards. We talked to him about how it would help the tribe if he joined us in opening the mine. He was mighty offish. Guess we'll have to give him Nogen's third to get him into our camp."

"What a shame! The mine is yours and Reggie's. He hasn't done a thing toward developing it."

"I know. But he's the agent. He's got us roped. He can rob us of our mine if we don't make friends with him. Now do you savvy?"

The girl's thick black eyebrows met in a frown of vexation. "If he is a man whose friendship must be bought, I do not wish to be pleasant to him."

"It's business, Marie. There ain't no two ways about it. Mr. Van's hanging fire, a-waiting to see if we lose the mine. If we do, he can't afford to marry no poor girl off a reservation."

"Very well. I shall make myself agreeable to Captain Hardy. But wait until I am free to pay him out for it!"

"Nom d'un chien!" muttered Dupont at sight of her straightened lips. "That's the Injun in you. Don't let him see you look that way till after we git the mine cinched."

"I am not a fool, mon pere."

Dupont shook his grizzled head dubiously.

But at midday, when Hardy came over for the noon dinner, Marie received his courteous greeting with a graciousness that soon lightened the pensive severity of his look. Before the end of the meal they were chatting in a manner that brought a twinkle into Dupont's cunning eyes.

The girl proposed a ride up the valley. Hardy was greatly pleased. He had already grasped the simple details of the agency business, and now, pending the absence of Vandervyn and Redbear, had nothing to do except instruct the police in his ideas of cleanliness and discipline.

Marie never looked more charming than when on a horse. She took her new friend for a long ride around one of the mountains. Every cliff and rock and piney slope was familiar to

her. She pointed out all the grandest and most beautiful views, and showed